SUN, SAND, SEA… *SELF-LOATHING?*

A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Women's Beach Body Experiences from
A Sociocultural Body Image Perspective

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Strathclyde

Final version submitted on 28 February 2023

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Date 28.02.2023

Declaration of interest: No declarations to make.

Acknowledgements

When I was in puberty, my older brothers used to make jokes during our summer holidays that by next year, I would probably sit on the beach fully dressed with long sleeves and black long trousers trying to hide my body. That never happened. I loved being at the beach. I loved the sand below my feet and the sun stroking my body. The sound of waves, seagulls and wind sounded like music to me. But still, there was a downside. I did worry a lot about how I would look in bathers. Every single year I would routinely, but unsuccessfully, try and transform my body before summer and every year, I ended up feeling like a failure, making plans for how to do better next year. Thankfully, these times are long gone. However, I could not have wished for a greater motivator to conduct research about women and their beach body experiences.

The years of my PhD thesis have been the most formative years of my life. I have grown and developed like I never have before, and this would not have been possible without the support of some amazing people.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors (or "doctoral mothers", as we, very fittingly, call them in Germany) Dr Petya Eckler and Dr Andrea Tonner for their continuous support, patience, understanding and encouragement during this intense period of my life. I am so grateful for everything you taught me, for the fruitful conversations we had and for the projects we did (including having four babies within 6 years!).

I also appreciate the additional support I received from Dr Sallyanne Duncan during our annual reviews and would like to thank the external examiners, Dr Heidi Williamson and Dr Chamil Rathnayake for accompanying me along the final steps of this path.

My gratitude extends to John and Anne Benson for their generous research award and to my focus group and survey participants, without whom this would have not been possible. Thank you so much for sharing your valuable views about such a sensitive topic.

I am sending special love to my focus group participants, the incoming students of my 2017 Consumer Behaviour and Body Image class at the University of Cologne. My special thoughts are dedicated to my former Ukrainian student. I hope you and your beloved ones are safe.

Now to my greatest sources of strength.

Sebastian, you have accompanied me all the way from when I first learnt about body image research back in Aberystwyth in 2011 until today. You have always encouraged me to pursue my dream, even if your own plans and dreams came short in return. You have been there in good times and challenging storms as my husband, my partner in crime, my best friend, my mentor, my emotional and financial supporter, and as the best Dad our kids could wish for. Words cannot express my gratitude for all that you have done for me. I love you.

Benjamin, God knows how much we both look forward to the time, when we will be able to play and have fun again without Mummy having her head in the clouds of her PhD thesis.

Thank you so much for your patience, for your hugs, your kisses, and your unconditional love during the past 5 years. Your words and gestures touch my heart in a way that is hard to describe. You are such a wonderful soul, and I am so proud of you as I know you will change this world! Never stop believing in yourself! I love you to bits!

Elias, you were born right into the final yards of my PhD journey and probably will not remember much of it. But this is to say thank you for being such an easy-going baby who allowed me to work for a few hours every day and for making my heart burst of love with your gigantic smiles, your cute first words, and best baby kisses. They helped me through some of the toughest and most challenging moments. You have already brought so much love and happiness into our life, and I cannot wait for new adventures to come. You are a hero. I love you!

Big thanks also to my parents and my father-in-law who supported us with a network of love, care and support. Dad, I know how much this means to you as you have always dreamt of doing a doctoral degree yourself. I dedicate this to you and hope that at some point, I will find the time and translate this all for you.

This thesis is also written in loving memory of my mother-in-law. I know she would have loved to see us all moving forward, reaching our goals and changing the world.

I am extremely grateful for having so many inspiring souls in my life who have encouraged, supported, guided, and motivated me in many different ways. I cannot mention you all, but I hope you know who you are (Lisa S., Jenny, Lisa K., Viola, Alina, Kathrin, Tabea, Vie, Amanda, Gill, Gilian, Lara, Sophie…)!!

Special thanks also to Dr Michelle Jones, Dr Kasjan Richlik and Dr Roel van der Velde for sharing your invaluable PhD expertise as friends and mentors with me. You helped me believe in the light at the end of the tunnel.

The final lines are dedicated to two amazing, strong women: first, Taisia Kann, thank you so much for helping me overcome my fears toward statistics and for mentoring me along the SPSS path. I would never have thought that I would enjoy (and actually understand) the quantitative part, but thanks to you, I did and was able to acquire many new skills!

Last but not least, this is to my best friend, soulmate and "sister in heart", Antonia Jones. Words cannot express my gratitude for your unconditional support, your uplifting words and encouragement at all times. "Diolch" for always believing in me and reminding me of my strength and talents. Our friendship is the ultimate proof that heart connection matters more than geographic distance. You mean the world to me and I am forever grateful to have you in my life.

Abstract

Taking up the stance that every body in swimwear is a beach body, this PhD project dealt with women's diverse beach body experiences as they engage with the world around them from a sociocultural body image perspective. It provides insights into how swimwear-clad female bodies have been constructed and negotiated by society, culture and the mass media before moving on to discuss and empirically explore, how this links to women's experiences of embodiment at the beach and on social networking sites (SNS). To contribute original insights to that matter, a sequential mixed methods cross-cultural study was conducted consisting of three qualitative focus groups (N=19) and a quantitative survey (N=659).

Qualitative data suggest that young women across cultures have internalised relatively homogeneous ideas about how female bodies in swimwear should look and that these affect how they think, feel and behave with regard to their bodies prior to and during summer, and beyond. The survey presents evidence that viewing normative beach body images on SNS links to heightened appearance concerns during summer, whereas viewing non-normative bodies, engaging in physical activity and relaxing at the beach correlated with positive body image outcomes such as heightened appearance evaluation and decreased self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation.

Implications are drawn from these findings that may serve to inform and assist individuals inside and outside of academia to attend better to the needs of women at a time, in which many feel more vulnerable than usual about their bodies. Further, the research discusses how spending time at the beach during summer might be beneficial for women's mental health and wellbeing. This might pave the way for future investigations of the beach from a body-positive perspective.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Relevance and Potential of the Female Beach Body for Appearance Research

Research over the past 50 years has sufficiently demonstrated that appearance concerns are normative amongst women around the world regardless of age, ethnicity and aesthetics (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-More, 1984; Sigman, 2014). Women worry about their appearance more than their male counterparts, and some do so throughout their entire lives (Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp, 2008). Research suggests that every second woman might feel at least moderately concerned about her body (Becker, Verzijl, Kilpela, Wilfred, & Stewart, 2019). Although much research has focused on adolescents' body image during puberty, it has been suggested that body image might be particularly complex as the body undergoes further changes (e.g., ageing, pregnancy) during adulthood (Kilpela, Becker, Wesley, & Stewart, 2015).

Appearance dissatisfaction in females typically relates to body size, shape and weight, which many women consider central determinants of their identity and self-worth (Levine & Murnen, 2009) . Negative thoughts and feelings about the body thereby may become so habitual and automatic that individuals not even notice them consciously (Cash, 2008).

Feeling dissatisfied with one's appearance constitutes a risk factor for a range of physical and psychological dysfunctions. Those include body-focused anxiety (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004) , low self-esteem (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002), body shame, bad mood, sexual dissatisfaction and dysfunction , depression (Stice, Hayward, Cameron, Killen, & Taylor, 2000), substance abuse (e.g., intake of laxatives and diet pills) and an increased willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery (Gillen & Markey, 2021). In a 2019 study, the British Mental Health Foundation (2019) even uncovered a correlation between body image concerns and suicidal thoughts.

Individuals with low body satisfaction have also been found at particular risk to develop and sustain seriously distorted relationships with sports and food. Behaviours may range from obsessive exercising to particularly low levels of physical activity, and from excessive dieting, excessive compulsive behaviours around eating "clean" and "healthy" food ("orthorexia nervosa"), through to self-induced vomiting and heavy overeating (Dunn & Bratman, 2016; Thomas, 2019; Turner & Lefevre, 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that negative body image has been identified as a key risk factor for the development and maintenance of eating pathology including disordered eating and eating disorders (Stice et al., 2000). Thomas (2019, p. 15) describes disordered eating as a distorted relationship to food "that may include skipping meals, binge eating, restricting certain food types, or fasting, which represent a deviation from the cultural norm, accompanied by a sense of shame, guilt or anxiety, or other negative mood state in relation to eating food". Disordered eating behaviour can come in varying combinations and degrees; but the most extreme and serious forms are chronic eating disorders, to which they might, in some cases, develop. The latter may entail further serious psychiatric and somatic diagnoses ranging

from "common" body dissatisfaction to severe disturbances, such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)[1], and even lead to death (Chesney, Goodwin, & Fazel, 2014). According to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the most common forms of eating disorders are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating. Lately, symptoms that do not meet the full criteria of the previous types, but still show similar clinical manifestations or complications, such as body image disturbance or a disturbed relationship to food, have been added under the category "Other Specified Feeding and Eating Disorders" (OSFED) to the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This category demonstrates that eating disorders, relative to disordered eating, can come in different forms and intensities. Those may not always fit into a certain set of diagnoses criteria but may entail equally concerning and health-risking behavioural patterns that require professional intervention.

Given the myriad consequences attributed to bodily discontent, researchers in recent years have attended to the question of what causes appearance concerns in women and have identified some root causes and precursors in order to tackle, reduce and prevent those. A central role has been attributed to the sociocultural environment, in which we live because it constitutes the context, in which ideas of femininity and beauty are constructed, discursively manifested and visually (re-)produced (Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, & Thompson, 2006; Grogan, 2017; Jackson, 2002; J. K. Thompson & Stice, 2016).

According to sociocultural theories and models of body image and eating disturbance, such as the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999), individuals receive appearance pressure from three primary core sources of influence: family, peers, and the media. Women who are repeatedly exposed to dominant visual, textual and non-verbal appearance messages within their sociocultural environment may start and internalise them as their personal beauty standard, a process called "thin-ideal internalisation" (Cafri et al., 2006; Dittmar, Halliwell, & Stirling, 2009). One characteristic of this is that individuals feel that adhering to socioculturally prescribed appearance ideals is their internal motivation and personal responsibility rather than an externally prescribed norm (Tiggemann, 2011). They may accept physical and emotional pain, obsess about weight (loss), become particularly vulnerable toward appearance-related cues and oversee potential health risks attached to achieving the ideal (Tiggemann, 2011). Cafri et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis on the perceived influence of social and cultural factors on body image confirms that high thin-ideal internalisation constitutes a significant risk factor in the development and maintenance of body image and eating disturbances.

Thin-ideal internalisation forms a foundation for two theories that have been applied in the study of appearance concerns and in this PhD thesis: social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The social comparison theory holds that women may routinely compare their bodies against internalised, socially prescribed appearance norms to evaluate their own standing within the culture they inhabit. Because popular beauty standards are

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[1] According to the DSM-5, individuals who suffer from BDD experience persistent and intrusive appearance preoccupation with a self-perceived physical flaw or defect that is either non-existent or hardly visible to others.

largely unrealistic and not naturally accomplishable for all, they may experience body discontent. According to Thompson et al.'s (1999) Tripartite Influence Model, both appearance comparisons and internalization of (unrealistic) media content mediate the relationship between sociocultural influences and body image.

The objectification theory describes the psychological process when individuals, based on the way bodies in their culture are treated and negotiated, turn to look at and assess their bodies from an observer's perspective; that is, as controllable, modifiable objects or even enemies. In combination, both theories provide a framework to understand profoundly the impact of society and culture on women's body image.

Amongst the numerous studies that have analysed how the female body has been socioculturally (re-) produced, (re-)constructed and treated, scholars in the field of tourism and leisure have remarked that particular pressure is put onto women to optimise their bodies prior to and during summer (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017). This has been linked to a concrete appearance scheme: The ideal female beach body.

Rooted in our general understanding of the heteronormative female body perfection, the ideal beach body is a well-established term in our contemporary consumer culture that encompasses idealised understandings of how women ought to look when exposing their bodies dressed in a specific outfit (i.e., modern swimwear) in a specific public setting (i.e., the beach) at a certain time of the year (i.e., summer). The ideal female beach body is supposed to be slim, toned, young, attractive, hairless, able-bodied, with suntanned, flawless Caucasian skin and dressed in Western swimwear (Jordan, 2007; A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012; Small, 2017).

Images of models, celebrities and female athletes in swimwear who adhere to these "norms" prevail almost omnipotently in the mass media during springtime and summer. For more than 50 years, they have been used to promote various kinds of appearance-related and appearance-unrelated products and services ranging from suncream, beauty products and swimwear through to cornflakes, holiday artefacts and cars, oftentimes displayed in sexually suggestive ways posing in a bikini in a blue-sky-and-white-sand environment (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Schmidt, 2012). Although marketers have started to respond to consumer requests for body positivity, diversity and inclusion, existing content and critical discourse analyses (e.g., Jordan, 2007; A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012; Small, 2017) find beach body messages on traditional mass media channels such as magazines and TV to be largely mono-visual and objectifying. Further, participants Kleim, Eckler and Tonner's (2019) qualitative study identified beach body images on social networking sites (SNS) as largely idealised, staged and even deceptive.

Although representing a narrow and one-sided appearance standard, the ideal beach body is socioculturally constructed as normal, as desirable and as attainable for all women, regardless of age, ethnicity or life stage. In order to accomplish the ideal look, they are encouraged to physically prepare their bodies for public display at the beach during summer; that is, to get "beach (body) ready" (Kleim et al., 2019). For instance, by engaging into beach body-specific diets, bikini boot camps, (fake) tanning,

and removal of unwanted body hair along the bikini line. Inseparably linked to consumption and oftentimes reinforced by countdowns to summer, Jordan (2007) describes these marketing- and media-produced appeals as potential triggers of "body panic" in women.

This is unsurprising given that modern Western swimwear, as opposed to most everyday outfits worn in public, typically covers as little as a woman's most private parts (i.e., breasts, butt, pubic area, and perhaps the stomach area), thus disclosing bodily details that are usually hidden or concealed. Even swimwear that covers more of the body, e.g., modest swimwear such as the burkini, is made of light, water-repelling, quick-drying and stretching fabrics such as nylon- or polyester blends. Those offer good conditions for swimming and (sun-)bathing, but are also tight-fitting, therefore, accentuating the (few) covered body parts; including hips, buttocks and stomach, areas that women have been found to feel most critical about (LaBat & DeLong, 1990; Sarwer, Wadden, & Foster, 1998). Swimwear resultantly reveals more than any other outfits worn in public, to what extent women adhere or differentiate from the concurrent (beach) body ideal.

However, along with rising needs for diversity and inclusion, ideas of what a beach body is have begun to shift in our society. Body positivity activists such as Brown (2018) suggest that "every body is a beach body, and the only two criteria that need to be met for a beach body are 1) that you have a body, and 2) that body is at a beach". Supporters of this approach may not only hold critical attitudes toward the normative beach body ideal; they may also consider all bodies on the beach as beach bodies. This, in turn, may affect how they experience their own and others' swimwear-clad appearances as they engage with the world around them.

To capture different views and attitudes ascribed to the female beach body, the body-positive stance was adopted as a foundation for this PhD thesis (see also chapter 2.2).

A review of the literature revealed that swimwear-clad models have been routinely employed in appearance research to investigate the effects of thin-idealised images on women's body image (Ogden, Gosling, Hazelwood, & Atkins, 2020). However, findings of such studies have not been interpreted considering the concept of the ideal beach body. Conversely, a small number of qualitative studies in the area of tourism and leisure, such as by Field, Pavlidis and Pini (2019) attribute women's appearance concerns to how the ideal beach body is constructed by society and the media. There is a lack of quantitative data to assess that link though. Little is, moreover, known about women's beach body experiences on SNS, although the impact of social media on body image has been demonstrated (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). These research gaps motivated the overarching objective of this PhD thesis to investigate women's beach body experiences from an appearance research perspective.

1.2 Research Objectives and Structure of the Thesis

The central research aim of this PhD project was to explore, how women's beach body experiences relate to their body image as they engage with the world around them.

This was divided into four sub-goals that guided the overall structure of this PhD thesis:

1. To provide a workable, body-positive definition of the beach body that allows studying the complex notions of swimwear-clad female bodies in various mediated and unmediated contexts.
2. To investigate how female beach bodies have been constructed and treated by society, culture, and the mass media.
3. To explore, how women are affected by this as they engage with the mass media and natural beach environments.
4. To uncover research gaps and contribute to filling those.

Chapter 2 starts with contextualising the beach body within two established appearance concepts, body image and embodiment, which seek to guide and inform the remainder of this work. Existing one-sided conceptualisations of the beach body will be critiqued, and informed by body positivity activism, a fresh definition will be offered that allows studying a variety of beach bodies in different contexts.

Chapter 3 reviews how swimwear-clad women have been socio-historically and contemporarily constructed by society, culture and the mass media. By putting together knowledge from various disciplines including psychological, sociological, tourism, leisure and media studies, it discusses how deeply embedded and manifested the concept of the ideal female beach body is within our global society. In line with the definition of the beach body in this work, emphasis will be put on reflecting recent developments toward diversity, inclusion and body positivity in our society that have advanced the dissemination of non-normative beach body content.

Chapter 4 then moves on to discuss, how viewing, sharing and engaging with normative and non-normative beach bodies on social media and at the beach might relate to the way they perceive, think and feel about their own bodies during summer. Thereby, "blue mind research", an interdisciplinary branch of research led by the US-American marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols (2018) that deals with the human mind and its connection to water, will be linked to appearance research.

Chapter 5 proposes to address the research gaps identified in the literature review through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data within a sequential mixed methods research design. The details of the empirical studies conducted as part of this PhD thesis, three focus groups and a survey, will be specified and discussed under the philosophical "umbrella" of pragmatism. It is argued that a combination of qualitative and quantitative data may generate the most meaningful insights to the research questions.

The findings of both research strands will be discussed separately in the subsequent chapters 6 and 7 before meta-inferences generated through the combination of all data will be discussed in chapter 8. The conclusions chapter finishes with an outline of implications of the research for individuals outside and inside of academia. Emphasis will be put on the question of how negative body image during summer might be reduced and prevented, and how the beach might assist women in building and maintaining a peaceful relationship to their body. This will be complemented by concluding remarks and reflections.

Note, there is an emphasis in this doctoral research on individuals who identify as adult females. However, the world in which we live characterises through diversity. In line with the overall body-positive stance of this work, it is attempted to occasionally challenge and extend this view by discussing underrepresented and marginalised groups of individuals and their beach body experiences.

1.3 Personal Positioning

My interest in the topic was sparked by a journalistic article titled „Why the beach is good for body image", written by Paula Joye of the Sydney Morning Herald in January 2013. In this, Joye (2013) makes the case for bringing people to the beach in order to get a more realistic impression of what real bodies in swimwear look like. In particular, she contrasts bodies at the beach to the idealised beach bodies portrayed by the media and encourages women to stop worrying about their looks at the beach.

The content of this article resonated with me in many ways and shaped my motivation, questions and objectives underlying this research.

Coming from a marketing and media background, I had dedicated my Master thesis to the impacts of society and culture on body image. An exploration of the beach body phenomenon constituted an apt opportunity to extend my knowledge in that field based on a specific case example. Personally, I had been routinely exposed to images of perfectly thin, toned, bronzed and somewhat streamlined bikini models in the media during summer and had experienced beach body concerns myself. Witnessing peers, family members, and colleagues sharing the same negative attitudes about their bodies during summer had shown me the actuality of the topic and increased my motivation to raise awareness and, where possible, contribute to resolving beach body concerns.

This had been of particular importance to me in my function as a body image activist who strongly believes that everybody deserves to live at peace with themselves and to enjoy the beautiful world around them rather than wasting time worrying about their looks.

Therefore, I decided to not only study how the beach body phenomenon relates to our body image, but also to explore the extent to which Joye's (2013) assumption that going to the beach was good for our body image could be supported by research. Given that I had spent time at the beach each summer throughout my entire childhood, I was particularly curious to find out how women related to their bodies in this unique environment and why.

When I became a mother in 2017, I developed a growing interest in mothers whom I had identified as a relevant subpopulation in the literature review. Specifically, I wondered how women whose bodies had undergone the changes naturally ascribed to pregnancy and birth were dealing with the pressure to attain an ideal beach body. At the same time, I had also started to experience the joys of spending quality time at the beach as a family. Rather than a place to worry about one's looks, to me, the beach appeared as a place for family bonding, joyful activity, fun and play. Knowing how important it is for both

our children and us as parents to role model a non-negative relationship to our bodies, I became increasingly interested in exploring, how spending time at the beach during summer might be helpful in achieving this.

CHAPTER 2: Key Term Definitions

The following chapter aims to define the key terms of this thesis: body image, embodiment and the beach body. Body image and embodiment form two central constructs in the scholarship of the psychology of human appearance that may help us to understand how women experience their (beach) bodies as they engage with the world around them.

Much of how body image and embodiment have been psychologically, ontologically and socially conceptualised relies on objectivist and dualist viewpoints as put forth by early philosophers such as Descartes who focused specifically on the opposition and clear distinction between body and mind (Cartesian dualism) (Grosz, 2020; Synnott, 2001). Body-mind dualism considers body and mind as two separate entities with the mind being constructed as a superior source of cognition, knowledge and meaning over the body (Blood, 2005; Grosz, 2020). Given that "dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchises and ranks the two polarised terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart" (Grosz, 2020, p. 3), the human body has been constructed as a passive, material, hence malleable physical object that can be looked at, controlled and judged (Bordo, 2013).

Contemporary appearance researchers acknowledge that a person's body image lies embedded in their overall experience of embodiment and that a consideration of both psychological and sociological aspects is needed to create a profound image of women's appearance psychology (Grogan, 2017). This view is adopted in this PhD thesis.

Following a discussion of body image and embodiment under these notions, existing definitions of the beach body will be discussed. Owing to the unidimensionality of existing approaches, a fresh definition and conceptual approach will be proposed. Those allow studying a diversity of swimwear-clad female bodies in various contexts and were therefore deemed eligible to build a workable theoretical foundation for this research.

2.1 Body Image and Embodiment

Probably amongst the most cited definitions of body image is the one provided by Schilder (1935, p. 11) who described it as a "subjective picture of our own body which we form in our mind; that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves".

Body image constitutes a multi-dimensional psychological construct that comprises of body image attitudes and perceptions. Attitudinal body image has been studied in terms of body evaluation and body image investment, two conceptually distinct components (Cash, 2002; Cash, Melnyk, & Hrabosky, 2004). Body evaluation thereby considers how individuals evaluate their appearance, i.e. their global subjective satisfaction (van den Berg, Thompson, Obremski-Brandon, & Coovert, 2002). To what extent a person feels (dis-)satisfied about their physical appearance greatly depends on their self-perceived discrepancy or congruence between their physical self as they think it *actually* is and how they would *ideally* like to look, i.e. their personal appearance ideal (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002).

Body image investment is a more complex construct that encompasses an affective component (i.e. feelings about one's body), a cognitive component (i.e. thoughts and beliefs about one's body) and a behavioural component (i.e. behaviours directed at one's body) (Cash, 2012). In addition, perceptual body image considers how accurately individuals perceive their appearance in terms of measurements such as body size (Cash & Pruszinsky, 2002). This multi-dimensional perspective on body image allows researchers to explore a variety of different appearance-related aspects in individuals, such as how they feel about their body, how central the body is for their self-worth, what they think and believe about bodies in the culture they inhabit, and to what degree they engage in appearance-related behaviours, such as regular body checking or "avoidance of situations where the body will be exposed" (Grogan, 2017, p. 3), for instance in swimwear at the beach.

Cash (2002, 2008) emphasised the reciprocal cycle between historical, developmental (i.e., past) and proximal (i.e., concurrent) factors that may predispose a person to acquire certain body image attitudes. Historical factors are based on the fact that body image begins to develop in early childhood and continues to do so across the lifespan. They thus describe the accumulated memory-stored knowledge a person holds about their body, which they have acquired throughout their life based on processes of social learning (Cash, 2002). In his cognitive-behavioural model, Cash (2002, 2008) proposed the following four key historical influential factors on body image attitudes, some of which have already been noted initially:

1. *Personality traits:* Personality traits relate to people's characteristics, including their level of self-esteem, perfectionism and their approach to social relationships (Cash, 2008).
2. *Physical characteristics and changes:* Individuals might experience (temporary) struggles with their bodies due to physical characteristics and changes that occur across the lifespan, such as during puberty, (post-) pregnancy, and after traumas or accidents (Cash, 2008).
3. *Interpersonal experiences with family and peers:* These may strongly influence individuals' body image, especially when engaging in body talk or "fat chat", i.e. conversations, in which weight and dieting are discussed (for a systematic review, see Mills & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2017).
4. *Cultural socialisation:* The internalisation of cultural norms, values, associations and standards, such as understandings of beauty, attractiveness and femininity can influence basic body image attitudes and predispose individuals' reactions to life events (Cash, 2002).

Every person may store a relatively persistent accumulated set of cognitions (appearance-related self-schemas), that is, thoughts and beliefs about their own body derived from the past, in their memory, which is based on past life experiences (Cash, 2002).

Body dissatisfaction is globally prevalent and normalised. The overarching question of how individuals inhabit their bodies, therefore, has been studied primarily under consideration of the negative body image construct (Piran, 2016). Negative body image has been defined as "a persistent report of dissatisfaction, concern, and distress that is related to an aspect of physical appearance" (J. K.

Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999, p. 11), or, in simpler terms, "body dissatisfaction is […] a person's negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body" (Grogan, 2017, p. 4). Less linked to the affective rather than the perceptive body image component is the term body image disturbance, which is used as another expression for negative body image; body image disturbance describes a person's self-perceived discrepancies between their actual and ideal body (Stice & Shaw, 2002).

Given that body image forms a part of our self-concept and constitutes a core aspect of our physical and mental health (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008), the consequences of body dissatisfaction are manifold, as outlined initially. Understanding this is of continuous relevance.

Importantly, body image is a highly elastic construct and the way a person relates to their body may be re-learnt, hence changed (Piran & Tylka, 2019). That means that even a person who has had a rather negative relationship with their body for most of their life can learn to accept and embrace it. This insight has contributed to an important shift in 21st century appearance research and practice. The awareness that body image may not only be distorted, but instead encompass positive aspects, has informed a whole new branch of appearance research: the study of positive body image.

Based on definitions provided by Wood-Barcalow, Tylka and Augustus-Horvath (2010) as well as Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015), positive body image encompasses how people love and accept their body as it is; they embrace its uniqueness and individuality by appreciating what the body is capable of doing, i.e. its functionality (Alleva, Martijn, Van Breukelen, Jansen, & Karos, 2015). Even though they might not love every single aspect of it, they might still accept their body as part of themselves and be at peace with it. Individuals with a positive body image are not committed to one narrowly defined set of socially constructed beauty standards; instead, they conceptualise beauty in a broader, more diverse way. This allows them to build defence mechanisms to filter appearance-related information so that they can build and sustain inner positivity (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). In summary, positive body image describes more than just the absence of negative body image; rather, it can be seen as an independent, multi-faceted, holistic, stable yet adjustable, somewhat protective individual appearance-based construct, which melds body acceptance, appreciation and self-love (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

A third emerging concept is body neutrality. It can be described as a state of mind, in which individuals neither love nor hate their body (Haupt, 2022). Body neutrality advocates encourage individuals to place less importance on appearance and instead engage with other, unrelated things such as nature.

Scholars like Leboeuf (2019, p. 16) have proposed combined concepts that allow focusing on the body, but equally encourage individuals to "reconsider what it means to focus on the body"; the author emphasised the need to look at the body in a holistic rather than fragmented-objectified way and to internalise it as a site of pleasure and sensualism, for instance, through moving for joy rather than punishment.

Embodiment has been broadly described as "the physical and mental experience of existence" and "the condition of possibility for our relating to other people and to the world" (Gregan, 2006, p. 3). As such, it builds an overarching construct that subsumes how individuals experience inhabiting their bodies as they engage with people and the world around them (Piran, 2016). Embodiment exceeds the rather physical viewpoint of the body image construct such that it allows to incorporate important social and cultural influential factors into an extended perspective on how, what and whom we experience as we are acting in and on the world (Eccleston, 2015). As Grogan (2017, p. 6) suggests: "Only by investigating social context will it be possible to produce an explanation of body image that recognises the interaction between individual and societal factors".

To date, the most comprehensive theoretical framing of embodiment in appearance research is provided by Piran (2016) who identified five key dimensions to study the "Experience of Embodiment" (Piran, 2016, p. 47): (1) body connection and comfort vs. disrupted body connection and discomfort; (2) agency and functionality vs. restricted agency and restraint; (3) experience and expression of desire vs. disrupted connection to desire; (4) attuned self-care vs. disrupted attunement, self-harm and neglect; and (5) inhabiting the body as a subjective site vs. inhabiting the body as an objectified site.

Acknowledging that an individuals' experiences of embodiment may range from positive to negative outcomes, Piran (2016, p. 47) defines negative embodiment as "disrupted body connection and discomfort, restricted agency and passion, and self-neglect or harm" and positive embodiment as "positive body connection and comfort, embodied agency and passion, and attuned self-care". Equivalent to the previous conceptualisations of negative and positive body image, positive embodiment expands beyond the mere absence of negative embodiment through the inclusion of a range of health- and wellbeing-related variables. While Piran's theorisation certainly provides a comprehensive foundation for contemporary embodiment research, previous approaches should not be completely neglected. In fact, they may nicely complement the modern, subjective view of the body by helping us to understand how the human body has been historically understood as a material, rather passive object; this may as well concern how it has been treated and constructed when exposed in swimwear in beach environments.

Then, although globalisation has facilitated the global dissemination and domination of modern, Western forms of embodiment cross-culturally, the co-existence of different embodiments should be acknowledged because individuals across cultures may have fundamentally different understandings of publicly displayed semi-naked beach bodies.

In summary, a person's affections, cognitions, perceptions and behaviours regarding their body can be complex, multi-faceted and subject to change. Whether someone keeps a positive, a negative or a neutral relationship to their body is of great relevance as the body image construct forms a fundamental part of our human psychology and self-concept and strongly affects our physical and mental health and wellbeing, self-esteem and psychosocial adjustment. Although both positive and negative elements of body image will be broached in this PhD thesis, there is an emphasis on trying to understand how the female beach body relates to appearance concerns in women. These will be connected to different

contexts of embodiment, most notably to the media and natural beach environments in order to provide multi-faceted insights about women and their beach body experiences.

2.2 The Beach Body

The search of a workable, i.e., diverse and inclusive definition of the beach body as a foundation for this PhD research revealed a paucity of definition approaches in the academic literature. It appeared that past studies had handled the concept of the ideal beach body distinctly from women's experiences at the beach (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2017, 2021), whereby it seemed to be presumed that we agree in what a beach body is.

The few available dictionary definitions confirmed the prevalence of one-sided ideas of the beach body in our popular culture. These linked the beach body inextricably to physical perfection, that is, the pre-condition for public bodily exposure in swimwear at the beach. For instance, the Macmillan Dictionary (2015) describes the beach body as "a body that is slim and toned and therefore ready to be uncovered on a beach". Similar to that is the definition by the Urban Dictionary (2017) as "a body that's pretty much perfect. Perfect enough to show off in swimming trunks or a bikini".

While these definitions may resonate with popular ideas of the beach body, an internalisation of these one-sided viewpoints may be problematic. Especially the social construction of the beach body as a superior bodily status contributes to the overall stigmatisation and marginalisation of physical "otherness" that has been observed, criticised and counter-campaigned as it may contribute to negative body image and body shaming (Orbach, 2016). Beyond, it enforces a misinterpretation of the beach as an appearance-focused site, where only those who subscribe to the norm are allowed to wear and display their bodies in swimwear and where appearance matters more than anything; this view may further impair how individuals experience embodiment in this space.

The body-positive stance that "every body is a beach body" was deemed better suitable to avoid a marginalisation and discrimination of non-normative bodies in swimwear and to be able and explore profoundly how women experience their own and other women's beach bodies in different contexts of their everyday lives. However, given that Brown's (2018) definition does not sufficiently express how the beach body characterizes in comparison to other appearance phenomena, a literal adoption was not suited as a study foundation.

Attempting to offer a solution to that problem, in Kleim et al. (2019), we proposed a distinction between "real" (i.e., actually existing) and "mediatised" beach bodies (i.e., beach bodies displayed in the media). With this we encouraged researchers to move beyond the popular mediated construction of the beach body as an ideal physique and to take actual female bodies at the beach into account. While this is without doubt helpful in obtaining a more comprehensive and more inclusive understanding of beach bodies exposed both in the media and in natural environments, our initial distinction approach may not sufficiently acknowledge that popular understandings of how semi-naked bodies in swimwear should

look may be constructed and affected by more than just the media; for instance, through social discourse, power relations, fashion, and (beach) culture, as will be shown in the upcoming sections.

In this PhD research, the (semi-naked) beach body was thus understood as **a human body in swimwear displayed in a textile beach environment.**

In line with the research objectives of this thesis, the definition set the stage for a broader and more inclusive interdisciplinary study of the beach body, such that it enabled the PhD researcher to move away from looking at the beach body exclusively as a sun-tanned body perfect. Extending and updating previous one-sided understandings of the beach body, it allowed to subsume a *diversity* of beach bodies of different genders, sexualities, ethnicities, body shapes, sizes, conditions, abilities and different swimwear outfits as naturally displayed at textile beaches and increasingly reproduced by body-positivity activists and marketers (see also chapter 3.2.1.4 and 3.2.2.4). By so doing, it served to embrace the possibility that exposure to and (inter-)action with different kinds of natural and idealised beach bodies may correlate with different body image outcomes in women.

Implying that the beach body herein is understood as *semi*-naked, the definition further attributes the beach body to textile beach environments as a specific public setting for embodiment. Beaches, in general, can be described as natural or artificially created aquatic "blue" spaces, i.e. shores of sands, gravels, muds or mixtures of both that exist alongside a body of water and that are used for recreation purposes such as (sun-)bathing and swimming (A. Williams & Micallef, 2011). Nude and textile beaches can be distinguished. While nude beaches usually consist of hidden, advertising-free zones that are frequented by smaller nudist/naturalist subcultures (Green, 2003; West, 2018), textile beaches are typically centrally located, frequented by the general population and accommodate infrastructures such as changing rooms, showers and bars. Swimwear is compulsory. Textile beaches share characteristics with outdoor (swimming) pools and lidos. However, as put forth by Olive and Wheaton (2021), they differ from natural blue environments materially, socially and symbolically. Equally, women have reported of different experiences of embodiment at nude and textile beaches (see also chapter 4.3). This PhD research, therefore, concentrated primarily on women's experiences in textile beach contexts.

Moreover, the definition allowed a clearer distinction of the beach body from other terms that have been used synonymously or interchangeably in the past. One example is the term "bikini body", which might wrongly indicate that there is no other than a female-gendered beach body dressed in a bikini. However, given that beach bodies of other genders exist and are equally valid, a gender-neutral terminology, as proposed in the previous dictionary definitions, seemed adequate.

Aside from this, the term "bikini body" just as its equivalent "swimsuit body" refer to one specific type of female swimwear. However, wetsuits, tankinis, burkinis (modest swimwear worn by Muslim women) and the likes should be equally considered given that they distinguish from other publicly worn everyday outfits, and by so doing, may affect women's experiences of embodiment when publicly exposing their bodies. The outfit-neutral umbrella term "swimwear" was thus selected to be able and include a diversity

of beach bodies across cultures. This was considered especially purposive in light of our multicultural societies.

Next is the term "summer body". The summer body certainly constitutes a fitting umbrella term, under which to capture a person's changing appearance-related behaviour that is specifically targeted at summer. Getting beach body ready might be part of this, and to some individuals, perhaps it may mean the same. But the summer body might include wearing a variety of summer clothes such as skirts, short dresses, shorts, or sleeveless tops, whereas the beach body typically refers to individuals wearing no more than swimwear. Western swimwear exposes more skin and intimate bodily details than does the summer body. And while it must be acknowledged that summer outfits reveal more skin than do winter clothes, they still enable individuals to conceal more parts of their body than swimwear; for instance, summer outfits because of the warm temperatures typically include a variety of loose clothes that allow individuals to cover up. Thus, the beach body should not be equalised with the concept of the summer body, but rather be considered a closely related, beach context-specific subcategory of it. Some scholars in the field of tourism and leisure have also applied the term "holiday body" indicating that individuals might spend a lot of efforts into aesthetically preparing their bodies for public display during their (beach) holidays (Small, 2007, 2016). As has been acknowledged in these works, going to the beach might as well be part of people's everyday life and a common way to spend their leisure time if only they live closely enough to a beach. This view was adopted in this thesis, so that the holiday body, too, was considered a distinct appearance concept.

As elucidated previously, a combination of psychological and sociological elements builds a solid foundation for appearance research in that it allows us to consider individuals' subjective relationships to their bodies (i.e., their body image) and how this is affected by and reciprocally shapes the world around them (i.e., their experiences of embodiment). Approaching the beach body through a combination of these elements allowed the researcher to understand the psychological impact of the beach body on women's body image as well as to identify relevant influential social and cultural factors such as (beach) culture, swimwear fashion, and the media in order to create an insightful overview of the subject. The following paragraphs aim to summarise how both perspectives were addressed in this PhD research.

Psychological perspective
To study the beach body from an appearance psychology perspective, existing conceptualisations of body image as a multidimensional construct were applied to the beach body. This underlay the assumption that the beach body, as a seasonally emerging and dominating sub-type of the ideal body, may temporarily infiltrate and penetrate people's relationship to their body, especially as they plan to expose their swimwear-clad bodies in textile beach environments during summer.
Following Cash's (2002, 2005) conceptualisation of body evaluation and investment, this encompassed an exploration of:

1. *affective* elements, i.e., women's subjective feelings toward their swimwear-clad body at the beach (e.g., whether and under what circumstances they feel anxious, uncomfortable, proud or appreciative about (the prospect of) exposing their semi-naked body in swimwear at the beach);
2. *cognitive* elements, i.e., thoughts and beliefs they hold about their beach body (e.g., to what extent they have internalised the beach body ideal);
3. beach body-related *perceptions,* i.e., an understanding of how accurately women judge their biological beach body when dressed in bathers (Gardner, 2002; Cash & Pruszinski, 1995);
4. beach body-related *behaviours* carried out before and after a (prospective) beach visit.

Additionally, as suggested by Thompson and van den Berg (2002), women's global subjective satisfaction with their swimwear-clad body as displayed at the beach was considered. Further connections were made to Griffiths, Austen, Krug and Blake's (2021) concept of seasonal body image, which is based on a study of sexual minority men, in which the authors observed seasonal body image fluctuations with peaks for body dissatisfaction in summer, when beach body discourse prevails in the media.

Sociological perspective

The sociological perspective sought to investigate the impact of society and culture on individuals' understandings and interpretations of the beach body. In line with modern views about embodiment, the way women perceive, think, feel and behave with regards to their appearance in swimwear at the beach was considered affected by the dynamic, constantly changing world around them. Put differently, the sociological perspective sought to explore how the beach body has been socio-historically constructed, how it has been embedded into social discourse, what meanings are ascribed to it and how women's experiences of embodiment are affected. Different natural and media environments were thereby taken considered in order to comprehend the complexity of beach body-related experiences of embodiment in women's everyday life. Reciprocally, the possibility was taken into account that bodies might contribute to shaping and (re-)defining social environments such as the beach (Metusela & Waitt, 2012).

The psychological and sociological perspective will be addressed in the remainder of this PhD thesis as follows: first, chapter 3 seeks to provide a detailed literature review of how female bodies in swimwear have been socio-historically constructed, treated and negotiated both at the beach and in the media. Chapter 4 then moves on to discussing the potential psychological impacts of this on women's body image and their experiences of embodiment at the beach. The subsequent empirical part of this PhD thesis attempts to update and expand our existing knowledge through qualitative and quantitative data. The eligibility of the definition and conceptualisation of the beach body proposed in this section will thereby be re-discussed.

CHAPTER 3: Society, Culture, Female Bodies and the Beach

Contemporary appearance researchers agree, a person's body image is largely determined by sociocultural factors (Grogan, 2017). Those have received the most attention within attempts to identify and examine what triggers and perpetuates appearance concerns and may serve to explore some root causes for beach body-related concerns in women (for a meta-analysis, see Cafri et al., 2005). It is believed that the way members of a certain culture relate to their own and other's outward appearance is greatly affected by cultural values and beliefs available in a given historical context (Jackson, 2002). In this social constructionist thinking, ideas of beauty and femininity are believed to be socioculturally produced, and individuals and society are considered inseparable.

The body is accepted as a subjective site that perceives, interprets, and experiences the world in a meaningful way and that is inextricably linked to the mind, mediated by body image; a phenomenon that requires the interplay and mutual dependence of both biology and psychology and which is situated within a dynamic social context (Grosz, 2020; Piran, 2016). Social constructionist researchers consequently understand "the concept of 'body image' and its disturbances […] as specific socio-historic productions" (Blood, 2005, p. 29).

In order to increase our understanding about women's beach body-related experiences of embodiment, it is necessary to explore, how heteronormative and non-normative female beach bodies have been socially constructed and treated both historically and contemporarily. The subsequent sections aim to review and discuss what is known about this.

3.1 Women's Bodies and The Beach - A Socio-Historical Review

The meaning of the human, especially the female body has been debated over centuries, and "each new age seems to create and re-construct the body in its own image and likeness; yet at any given time there are likely to be many paradigms of the body: competing, complementary, or contradictory" (Synnott, 1993, p. 36f.).

There is no record of the initial usage and manifestation of terms such as "ideal beach body" or "beach (body) ready"; however, history leaves no doubt that, although the first swimsuit was initially introduced as a functional item for women to participate in water sports without drowning, public discourse surrounding women in modern female swimwear soon concentrated on their outward appearance rather than their sportive performance (Daley, 2003; Schmidt, 2012).

Situated within a complex economic, political-legal, and sociocultural context, this resulted in the construction of idealised, one-sided Western-centric conceptualisations of how women in swimsuits should look, behave and be treated at the beach. These evolved along with the introduction of further swimwear items and continue to shape how we perceive and treat bodies in swimwear today. Based on a series of socio-historical analyses about swimwear (Alac, 2012; Schmidt, 2012) and the beach (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Daley, 2003; Metusela & Waitt, 2012; Walton), the following timeline attempts to provide a chronological overview of the most important milestones in the sociocultural construction of the ideal female beach body.

Formation of modern beach culture *(precursor: UK)*
Exploitation of seaside resorts through industrialisation
Establishment of modern concepts of leisure and (beach) holidays, even for the working class
Diminishing social class system leads to acceptance of tanned skin amongst upper classes
Changes in fashion from corseted, all-body covering dresses to revealing, accentuating women clothes
Growing interest in swimming to get the uncorsetted body in shape

1905 ················ **Australian Annette Kellermann**
presents the first streamlined swimsuit

1910 ················ **Kellermann is officially declared "the ideal body"**
according to measures of the Venus de Milo

1920s: Iconisation of Hollywood's "bathing beauty"

1921 ················ **First Miss America pageant is crowned as**
"The Most Beautiful Bathing Girl"

Emergence of first muscle beaches in California, USA

1920s/30s: Popularisation of comic postcards that depict
larger bodies as subjects of ridicule

1946 ················ **French designer Louis Réard**
introduces the Bikini

1951 ················ **First "Miss World" is crowned in a bikini**

Vatican declares the bikini as sinful

Bikini bans from beauty competitions, media,
entertainment and beaches

The *Vogue* publishes the first bikini advert;
1954 ················ it is embedded in editorial content about weight loss
for summer

1960s growing acceptance of the bikini
as a symbol for female empowerment; but also
increasing
sexualisation ("Itsy-Bitsy Teenie-Weenie
Yellow Polka-Dot Bikini"; first Bond girl in a bikini)

1964 ················ **American designer Rudi Gernreich**
introduces the Monokini

1980s fitness boom;
emergence of the bikini-ready celebrity mummy theme

Ideal body shape becomes thinner and thinner

Ideal beach body theme omnipresently conveyed through all
mass media channels

2014 ················ **Australian designer Aheda Zanetti introduces**
the Burkini

Burkini bans at French beaches

FIGURE 1: MILESTONES IN THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE IDEAL FEMALE BEACH
BODY

Adding context to our contemporary understanding of swimwear-clad women and the beach, these milestones are elaborated in the following pages. Because the UK played a precursor role in the formation of modern beach culture, much of the literature has concentrated on the history of the British seaside (Braggs & Harris, 2006) and related cultures, including Australia (Metusela & Waitt, 2012;

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Stranger, 2011) and New Zealand (Daley, 2003). Furthermore, the US contributed substantially to the global dissemination of swimwear-related beauty ideals, Hollywood's "bathing beauties" (Schmidt, 2012). Although there will be an emphasis on these places in the following section, it is important to acknowledge that beach cultures have developed differently worldwide at different points in time and continue to do so until today.

In the 19th century, people began to go to the seaside for health reasons (Schmidt, 2012). That was because medical professionals had started to scientifically explore and prescribe the internal and external use of seawater - and later sunlight - to cure a range of contemporary illnesses: anaemia, asthma, skin diseases and gout, to name but a few (Alac, 2012; Braggs & Harris, 2006). Patients received clear medical and therapeutical instructions on the correct use of seawater; that is, whether and how much they should drink, or, if applied externally, how long and deep they were supposed to dip into the water; or how (long) to expose their skin to the sun.

At the same time, the rising industrialisation in countries such as the UK contributed to making seaside places better accessible and the general population, supported by rising living standards and improving working conditions, became enabled to take annual holidays off. Because natural beach resorts offered a welcome antipole to the noise and dirt of growing industrialised places, many chose to spend their leisure time nearby the sea for recovery and pleasure, or, as Braggs and Harris (2006, p. 29) suggest, to "discover the real, the unspoilt and the romantic" of natural beach resorts. Some have thus characterised the beach as a "liminal space" between land and sea, where regular social norms, values and moral propriety do not apply (see also Preston-Whyte, 2004).

This new hype on the beaches clashed with the conventional puritanical values and morals of the Victorian era. Public nudity was considered obscene, immoral and uncivilised, i.e., something that distinguished "superior" white races from indigenous people. Most importantly, it was inextricably linked to morally despised sexual intentions. To give an example, Metusela and Waitt (2012, p. xiii ff.) describe the situation in Australia as follows: "Amongst the British colonial gentry, revealing naked flesh in public, initially that of women and later that of men, was understood as disgusting, uncivilised and disrespectful […and….] as a threat to the 'strength' and 'purity' of the British empire". The beach was resultantly considered "a morally and physically dangerous zone where anything might happen" (Daley, 2003, p. 120).

These views prompted the introduction of by-laws to discipline and control beachgoers' dressing and undressing practices on many beaches of the world including Britain and its colonies, from the 1830s (Metusela & Waitt, 2012). Beachgoers had to endure restricted bathing times, sexual and racial segregation and strict regulations regarding dress, movement, posture and practices of the body at the beach. The act of changing, which naturally entailed a risk of bodily exposure, was a particularly strictly regulated element, even at sexually segregated beaches. To avoid that too much skin got exposed, one-person bathing huts, cubicles, dressing sheds, and traditional Victorian bathing machines (i.e., wooden carts that were rolled into the sea to allow beachgoers to change into and out of their swimming costumes and sea-bathe in decency) were offered at public beaches against a fee that enabled beach

visitors to put on a bathing costume and enter the sea in decency without being judged as immoral, sexual, uncivilised, and savage (Metusela & Waitt, 2012).

Compliance to those rules was examined by special bathing ordinances who did, for instance, measure the length of people's bathing costumes to make sure they were suitably dressed; any sorts of "transgressions" were punished with penalties (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Metusela & Waitt, 2012; Stranger, 2011). The manifold legislations at the beach not only entailed the popularisation of "lidos" (i.e., open air swimming pools nearby the sea filled with sea water) and outdoor pools as alternative settings for swimming and sunbathing; they also transformed the seaside into a politically regulated and disciplined space rather than a place for sensual enjoyment, pleasure and relaxation (Daley, 2003; Stranger, 2011). These approaches set the foundation for considering bodies at the beach as publicly disciplined and controllable objects; an attitude that persisted in the creation of beach body standards and how to achieve them. Bodies at the beach have thus been discussed as loci of political control, discipline and power relations, for instance through the works of poststructuralist Michel Foucault (Metusela & Waitt, 2012).

3.1.1 Socio-Historical Construction of Women in Modern Swimsuits

Although some bathing regulations lasted until the 1930s, the early 20th century saw some tremendous paradigm shifts away from the modesty and decency of the Victorian age that lay the foundation for the introduction of modern swimwear and the emergence of new appearance standards including slender and tanned women in exposing swimwear. In fact, it had long been of great importance for women in the upper-class societies to keep a possibly delicate complexion in order to visibly differentiate from those who were working outside, e.g., on fields and farms. Whiteness had been associated with delicacy, idleness and racial seclusion (Urry, 2008) and women in the Victorian age had tried and avoided exposing their skin to the sun. But declines in agricultural work and increases in factorial work made the visible distinction to the working class redundant[2]; exposing the body to the sun got increasingly associated with health and wellbeing (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Metusela & Waitt, 2012; Walton, 2000). More than that, revealing and accentuating women's fashion replaced voluminous, corseted Victorian dresses that had covered most of the body. The feminine body ideal became slender and toned. Schmidt (2012, p. 43) remarks: "Over 400 years, women had come to rely on their undergarments to mould their bodies to an accepted form and to conceal their imperfections. The more body-revealing fashions that emerged in the twentieth century were less forgiving and required the body itself to provide the necessary structural silhouette". A well-shaped body was believed to prepare women for their social roles as wives and mothers and, according to eugenic beliefs, served as an expression of racial superiority (Daley, 2003). Eugenics was a science-based approach toward self-optimisation through mental and physical improvement proposed in 1901 by the English scientist Sir Francis Galton (Daley, 2003; Metusela & Waitt, 2012). Given the contemporary interpretation of the

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[2] Note, in some Commonwealth countries outside the UK, including Australia and New Zealand, suntan established as an attractiveness feature even sooner, not least because it offered a way to visibly distinguish from the "white Englishness" of the British Empire (Metusela & Waitt, 2012).

body as a streamlined and efficient machine, bringing the body in shape was inextricably connected to bodily discipline, mostly in the form of dieting and exercising (Daley, 2003; Synnott, 1993).

Swimming rapidly popularised as "one of the healthiest forms of exercise" (Daley, 2003, p. 117). Being considered a male sport, swimming females were controversially discussed. Most notably, the topic inflamed debates about Victorian and Edwardian bathing costumes. Those typically consisted of "black, knee-length, puffed-sleeve wool dresses, often featuring a sailor collar, and worn over bloomers trimmed with ribbons and bows. The bathing suit was accessorised with long black stockings, lace-up bathing slippers, and fancy caps" (VictorianaMagazine, 2016). Weighing up to 30 pounds in a wet state (Schmidt, 2012), many women had drowned in the sea when covered like this. Thus, individuals such as Annette Kellermann (1887-1975), an internationally recognised Australian swimmer, began to advocate for women's right to wear streamlined, light swimwear and the swimwear-clad female body became an important symbol for this societal turning point.

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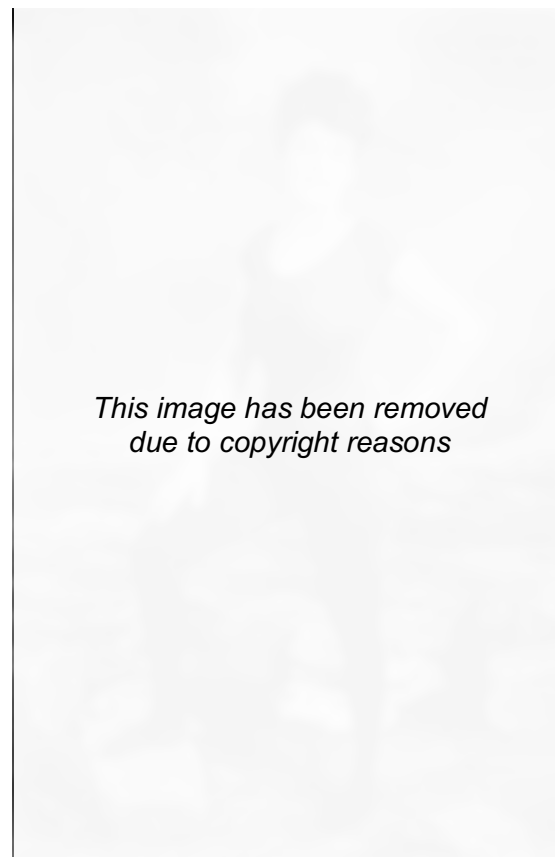
FIGURE 2: ANNETTE KELLERMANN IN A STREAMLINED SWIMSUIT

Swimwear historians attribute the "inception of the modern swimsuit for women" (Schmidt, 2012, p. 25) to a performance act that Kellermann delivered in front of the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, Queen Victoria's third son, in the UK in 1905. Up until then, she had usually performed in a non-corseted one-piece (male) swimsuit. This daring outfit was, however, considered inappropriate to be presented in

front of the royalties. The young swimmer therefore decided to attach stockings to the legs of her swimsuit; that way, the bottom part of her body was covered without the need for her to dress in one of the heavy conventional female bathing costumes of the Victorian era. The streamlined design she wore in front of the Duke and Duchess is described as one of the first modern female swimsuits ever publicly presented (Schmidt, 2012).

Being one of the first female athletes who competed against men and the first woman who attempted to swim the English Channel, Kellermann received international popularity. Not only did professional swimming performances historically constitute one of the few exceptions in the early 20th century, where audiences were encouraged to look at (semi-)naked bodies in swimwear without being accused of sexual intentions. Metusela and Waitt (2012, p. 19) explain, "in the context of the ocean bath, gazing upon the semi-naked body at swimming carnivals was legitimised through the transformation of the swimmer's bodies into a mechanistic device through discourses of sport, health and medicine".

Photographs of Kellermann's swimsuit-clad body appeared in the nationwide media and contributed to reforming people's understanding of women in swim sports. She received further public attention and international media coverage in 1906, when getting arrested at Revere Beach, Boston, US, for wearing a fitted, sleeveless swimsuit, which, according to American law, was deemed indecent (Schmidt, 2012). An even more remarkable aspect is, however, that this first woman who was depicted in the media in a revealing modern swimsuit was officially declared *the* ideal body a year later. That is, Kellermann's international media coverage had caught the attention of Harvard Professor Dr Dudley A. Sargent, who studied physical education in women. After measuring the bodily proportions of 10,000 women - Kellermann included - and, comparing them to the measurements of the Greek Goddess Venus de Milo, the beauty ideal of the time (Schmidt, 2012; Daley, 2003), he officially announced that the Australian swimmer most closely adhered to the feminine ideal (The New York Times, 1910)
Importantly, although an athletic, toned body shape in females was heavily contested because some feared that it would make them look too masculine; Sargent and Kellermann argued that physical activity increased both a woman's attractiveness and her health, which were important markers of physical beauty and wellbeing at the time (Schmidt, 2012).

Kellermann turned into an internationally recognised icon of feminine attractiveness; a body to be looked at not (only) for what she could do, but for how it was shaped. In her bestselling book "Physical Beauty: How to Keep It"[3] published in 1919, Kellermann shared how average women could achieve the same body shape through exercising, self-care and healthy eating; this was in line with the general public health discourse of the time, in which the swimsuit got popularly endorsed as a fashion item to disclose women's successfully transformed bodies. For instance, Daley (2003) describes how men and women in New Zealand, South Africa and India enrolled into the "Sandow System", an exercising and dieting programme offered by the globally recognised German-born, London-based strongman Eugen Sandow

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[3] The book is only available as a hardcopy in Australian archives and no electronic copy can be accessed online, so that secondary sources will be quoted here.

(1867-1925). Sandow motivated young women to exercise in order to strengthen and form their uncorseted bodies according to the standards of the Venus de Milo and expose them in swimsuits at beauty contests. An ideal swimsuit-clad body, consequently, got increasingly associated with social approval, admiration, success, sexual appeal, and good health and, reinforced by the movie and entertainment industry (e.g., underwater shows), with unearthly romantic myths and fairy tales such as of mermaids (Schmidt, 2012).

These associations, some of which are still valid a century on, further manifested in the 1920s, advanced by popular culture and media discourse. Hollywood began to iconise and institutionalise the image of the "bathing beauty" as an aspirational beauty norm for women (Schmidt, 2012). Young, thin, toned and tanned swimsuit-clad bodies of actresses such as Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth and "America's Mermaid" Esther Williams[4] dominated in globally broadcasted romances and studio publicity materials and were reproduced in different mass media contexts including advertisements, postcards, magazines and catalogues of international swimwear manufacturers (Alac, 2012; Daley, 2003; Schmidt, 2012).

Swimsuit photographs and/or performances of young and attractive women in bathing suits also dominated in beauty contests and bathing beauty parades whose popularity increased at the time. As suggested by Sandow, swimsuits revealed the contestants' body shape and uncovered their physical beauty, which was integral for the judges to measure and assess who came closest to being ideal (Schmidt, 2012; Daley, 2003). The first Miss America pageant was even referred to as "The Most Beautiful Bathing Girl in America" in 1921 (Hohman, 2018).

Altogether, popular culture reinforced the pre-existing associations of a young, thin, tanned female body in a modern swimsuit with glamour, success, sexual appeal, happiness and health/fertility of (future) wives, young mothers and their entire family (Curtis, 2003; Daley, 2003; Devienne, 2019; Schmidt, 2012).

Furthermore, the media enforced the message that women could not attain the bathing beauty ideal by putting on a swimsuit alone. Rather, the proliferation of idealised images of beautiful women in swimsuits as a standard for all facilitated the emergence of a whole new market niche. This consisted of dieting and exercising programmes as well as ever-changing products to accomplish the aspirational beach look including sunglasses, beach towels, tunics, beach pyjamas, overskirts, beach-specific head- and footwear and cosmetics (Alac, 2012; Braggs & Harris, 2006; Daley, 2003; Schmidt, 2012). Women were considered naturally interested consumers of these products (Daley, 2003).

New swimwear materials such as machine-knitted wool, nylon, lastex and silk lastex were introduced, too (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Curtis, 2003; Schmidt, 2012). Those offered improved swimming conditions and made the way for new luxury fashion swimsuit designs such as Jantzen's one-piece, a swimwear item with no overshirt and which covered only the tops of the legs (Schmidt, 2012). It was promoted as "the suit that changed bathing into swimming" (Braggs & Harris, 2006, p. 58). Alongside was an

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[4] Esther Williams was an elite swimmer in the 1930s, then a Hollywood actress, for whom the aquatic musical sub-genre was invented. Williams starred in "Million Dollar Mermaid" (1952), a biographical musical film about the life of Annette Kellermann.

increasing demand for designs that allowed for "an even coat of tan" (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Curtis, 2003).

Temporary commentators have been quoted describing the shifts toward more revealing and figure-hugging bathing costumes for women as "very pleasing to the eye, especially the masculine eye" (Daley, 2003, p. 155); which testifies to an increasing sexualisation of exposed female bodies. Notwithstanding this, the mass media constructed women as choosing agents and the beach as the most liberal environment for embodiment (Daley, 2003). Some have argued that the imposed governmental control of bodies as in early beach history was increasingly replaced by self-control and self-discipline (Daley, 2003). This aligns to the remarked shift from objectification to subjectification of female bodies throughout the 20th century, as proposed by (post-)feminist thinkers (Gill, 2007).

Larger-sized bodies in swimwear were constructed quite oppositional; namely as objects of shame and derision (Daley, 2003). Braggs and Harris (2006) report of a growing popularisation of comic postcards in the UK in the 1920s/1930s that constructed larger-sized bodies at the beach as subjects of ridicule and contrasted them to young, slim and sexually appealing beach girls in sunshine, blue sky and golden sand-contexts. The authors suggest that the motive to create these caricatures was "crude humour of a different kind" (Braggs & Harris, 2006, p. 119); that is, to show that real bodies on the beach were different from the ideal and that even the holiday experience itself may not be as depicted on tourism brochures, especially regarding the unsteady weather in the UK that did not always grant sunshine and blue skies. Others noted the same polarising discourse in nationwide print media though. For instance, Daley (2003, p. 155) describes, "if nothing else worked, shame was used to encourage New Zealanders to reshape their bodies before revealing them on the beach". A fat body in a swimsuit was constructed as something undesirable, ridiculous and "not normal".

Social researchers have highlighted how language adds meaning and social value to physical appearance that contributes to the coding of bodies in polarising black-and-white notions (Featherstone, 2010; Grosz, 2020; Murray, 2016; Orbach, 2016). There is no doubt that the polarising language in combination with the rising economic power ascribed to the desirable beach look contributed to keeping idealised images and narratives of young women at the beach alive.

As some have argued, these one-sided understandings miss the opportunity to ascribe more distinguished meanings to physical features like fatness and thinness and, by judging people based on nothing but their outward appearance, preclude the idea that women might be (worth) more than their looks (Blood, 2005; McKinley, 2002). More so, by disseminating ideas of how people should and should not look when exposing their bodies in swimwear at the beach, social discourse and language may substantially affect individuals' body image and their experiences of embodiment at natural beaches (Urry, 2008). These in turn are constructed as appearance-focused spaces rather than natural environments for recovery, health and wellbeing.

In America, the new beach beauty standards contributed to the formation of a whole new, purely appearance-focused beach culture: the muscle beach. By the 1920s, exercising on the beach, for

instance in municipally installed beach-located gymnasiums and playgrounds, had become a popular trend to attain the "California look" - tanned, muscular, and with sun-bleached hair, as promoted by Hollywood movies (Devienne, 2019). This shifted the already appearance-centred Southern Californian beaches into places of extensive body work, where beach body transformation took place publicly and with great transparence to other people (Devienne, 2019). The consequence for those who exercised was that going to the beach became inextricably intertwined with working out for appearance reasons. As Devienne (2019, p. 14) notes, ""Muscle-Beachers," spring-breakers, surfers, and other "beach bums" not only found relaxation and a sense of belonging on the shores, they sought to shape and display their bodies in a combination of traditional seaside hedonism with an ethos of bodily discipline." On the flip side, beachgoers were disproportionately exposed to good-looking, athletic, toned and tanned bodies in swimwear in real life. Rather than seeing celebrities in movies or the local press, they could witness them transforming their beach bodies in real-time, which might have increased the desire to fit in and be(come) one of them. Because the chance to meet or become a Hollywood celebrity was more realistic at Californian beaches than elsewhere, Devienne (2019) attributes particular pressure to Californian women. She argues that they tried to "always be ready for the camera" (Devienne, 2019, p. 9); a phenomenon that reminds of today's selfie culture (see chapter 3.3).

A decade on, suntan became a particularly dominant attractiveness feature for young women, which affected behaviours at the beach. Braggs and Harris (2006, p. 49) note that by the 1930s, "the practice of deliberately exposing the body to the sun for the sole purpose of acquiring a tan became fashionable". Sunbathing became more common than actually swimming in the sea (Braggs & Harris, 2006); thereby increasing the appearance focus at beaches outside of California.

The mass media fostered associations of a tanned body with attractiveness, health, youthfulness, wealth, leisure, sophistication, vigour and good citizenship (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Daley, 2003); some of those persist until today. While covering up was recommended for ageing women (Daley, 2003), young and wealthy generations used body tan to demonstrate that they could afford a nice beach holiday (especially in places with no sun guarantee, such as the UK). In other words, the degree of suntan symbolised their disposable amount of leisure time and money. In Australia, the "local beach girl" look became fashionable, which, interestingly, has been attributed to the same physical characteristics as the "California look" or Hollywood's "bathing beauty" (Schmidt, 2012). This implies that, although called different names, these rather homogeneous beauty schemes served as synonyms for the same Western-centric appearance concept that today is subsumed under the ideal beach body.

Some have argued that the hype to sunbathe contributed to reducing racism (e.g., Daley, 2003); however, the rising political paradigm of the time was Nazism with ideas about pure blood and colour at the forefront (Synnott, 1993) and eugenic thinking about racial superiority and national health was still deeply embedded in many cultures. For instance, images of attractive, Aryan women in minimalist swimsuits, displayed in idyllic beach sceneries were a common motive in the political propaganda of the time, too (Alac, 2012; Schmidt, 2012). During unsteady political contexts in particular, idealistic portrayals like these linked to an increasing desire to find and experience love, romance, happiness

and freedom, and to be(come) someone else (e.g., a celebrity) afar from the restrictions and turbulence of everyday life (Braggs & Harris, 2006; Devienne, 2019). This supports the idea of the beach as a liminal space.

Another example testifying to racial elements in female beach bodies were bathing parades, where racial minority groups were underrepresented and marginalised, something that Devienne (2019) refers to as "whitewashing". Although public onlooking was explicitly encouraged during the shows, it was tolerated only within an acceptable racial social order. That is, white, heterosexual men were legitimised to look at swimwear-clad women whereas intentions by homosexual and non-white individuals were despised of (Devienne, 2019). This adds some racial, gendered, homophobe, classed and sexualised dimensions to early (beach) body discourse.

Taken together, the literature testifies to the complex context, in which women's bodies have been embedded as soon as modern swimwear emerged. It affected how they were socially constructed and displayed in marketing, media and entertainment contexts; but also, inseparably, how women have been treated in real-life contexts. Historians consent that these aspects have contributed to growing appearance preoccupation and concerns in women that further increased along with the introduction of more revealing swimwear items such as the bikini.

3.1.2 Socio-Historical Construction of Women in Bikinis

In June 1946, French designer Jacques Heim introduced a two-piece swimsuit named Atome, which he promoted as "the smallest swimsuit in the world" (Alac, 2012). Only days after, on 5 July 1946, his colleague Louis Réard launched an even smaller one that gained worldwide popularity, the bikini.

The name bikini is believed to respond to Heim's Atome by referring to the atomic tests that had taken place only four days prior to Réard's launch of his new product on the coral atoll Bikini in the South Pacific and served to emphasise the revolutionary, "explosive", politically provoking symbolism of his new creation. (Alac, 2012) Indeed, the launch of the bikini took place during one of the first beauty contests in Paris following World War II in a public swimming pool and was performed by a nude dancer from the Casino de Paris, Michelle Bernardini. As shown in Figure 3, she wore a bikini made of nothing but newspaper cuttings and headlines (Alac, 2012). The introduction of the bikini, comparable to

Kellermann's initial swimsuit performances, therefore, conveyed a clear political message and inflamed new public controversies about women's rights, sexuality, social values, morals and the media.

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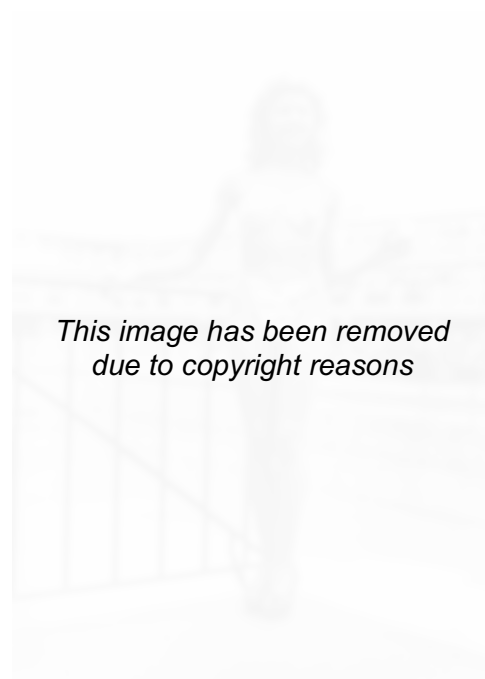
FIGURE 3: MICHELLE BERNARDINI IN THE FIRST BIKINI

Being "a bathing costume that is narrow and in two parts, of a maximum area of 45 sqcm (8 square inches) […][and that] can be sold in a matchbox, or folded easily into a handbag compact" (Alac, 2012, p. 39f.), the bikini not only was smaller than any swimwear items introduced before; as opposed to former two-piece swimsuits such as Heim's creation, it exposed a woman's navel, which was new, revolutionary and heavily contested (Schmidt, 2012). It took time and several backlashes until the bikini was socially accepted. After the first "Miss World", Kiki Håkansson from Sweden, was crowned in a bikini at what was still called the "Festival Bikini Contest" in 1951, the Vatican declared it as sinful and corruptive (Alac, 2012; Vivek, 2016). Alac (2012, p. 80) describes, "the bikini broke all the standard rules of good taste, all the moral norms accepted by clothiers around the globe".

As a result, bikinis were temporarily banned from the Miss World Competition and other beauty competitions. Until today, Håkansson remains the only winner who received her crown in a bikini (Vivek, 2016). The ban concerned multiple beaches, too, including Italian, Spanish and German ones. In fact, the (Western) German standard swimwear code did not allow the bikini until the 1970s, although nude beaches had popularised before with a popularity peak in former Easter Germany following World War I (Alac, 2012).

Alongside, feminist, religious and communist groups protested against it, Hollywood moviemakers refused to show bikini-clad actresses on cinema screens and even the mass media did not directly address it until eight years after Reárd's launch, when the magazine *Vogue* first advertised the bikini in their summer special edition (Alac, 2012).

Then, however, the bikini quickly dominated any summer-and-appearance-related media discourse. According to Alac (2012) Vogue's first bikini advert was embedded in editorial discourse that encouraged women to sculpt their bodies for public display on the beach during summer, for instance through dieting, exercising and summer-specific grooming behaviours.

Exposed female bodies began to serve as symbols for freedom, liberation and empowerment during the youth quake revolution and second wave feminism in the 1960s. Women tried to visibly dissociate from sexual objectification by rejecting and contradicting oppressive gender norms. Curves were replaced by extreme thinness; tanning was temporarily replaced by a trend toward pale skin, and body hair served as a political statement against the patriarchal system, especially amongst women with strong feminist attitudes (Synnott, 1993). All this could be well demonstrated in bikinis. Responding to this trend, simple and shapeless forms were introduced, for instance with no cups (Alac, 2012; Schmidt, 2012).

But while the bikini symbolised bodily liberation for some, the sexualisation of bikini-clad women got reinforced in and through popular culture and the fashion industry. Alac (2012) reports of bikini models made of wine leafs, inflatable ones to maximise the size of the breasts, and of an experimental bikini design with windmills on the breast. Those were "intended to refresh and cool men overheated at the sight of a female body so nearly bare" (Alac, 2012, p. 262). In 1964, designer Rudi Gernreich introduced the "monokini", a topless swimsuit held by two thin straps as a halter around the neck. Just as the bikini, it was introduced as a political statement against the continuing stigmatisation of nudity. Although this item never manifested, it may be seen as a symbol for ultimate minimalism and bodily exposure.

Alongside, internationally recognised songs such as Brian Hyland's "Itsy-Bitsy Teenie-Weenie Yellow Polka-Dot Bikini", the appearance of the first bikini on a Playboy cover in 1962 and the white bikini of the 1962 Bond girl Ursula Andrews in *Dr. No* left further reinforced the sociocultural construction of the bikini as a sexualising item worn by sexually appealing young women to attract men in paradise beach environments (Schmidt, 2012). Sun, sand, sea and sex were considered inseparable.

The introduction of the bikini has been linked to the popularisation of pubic hair removal as well (e.g., shaving, waxing and plucking their "bikini line" or doing "Brazilian waxes", i.e., near or total pubic hair removal) as a beauty ritual amongst ordinary women (Hildebrandt, 2001; Labre, 2002; Li & Braun, 2017). Scholars such as Synnott (1993), Tiggemann and Lewis (2004), and Braun, Tricklebank, and Clarke (2013) have emphasised the meaning of body hair in body image, its social significance and symbolic utility. Women used their hair to publicly convey their musical taste, fashion belongingness and political orientation (Synnott, 1993) whereas hairlessness has been linked to meanings such as femininity, attractiveness, and cleanliness (Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004), and described as a "taken-for-granted condition for a woman's body" (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003, p. 341).

Studies have consistently shown that the ideal female body as depicted by the media became increasingly thinner and more unrealistic in the decades to come (Grogan, 2017). The 1980s then saw

a fitness craze that added muscularity - as a symbol for physical strength - to the mix of the ideal beach body that concerned individuals outside muscle beaches and gyms (Nash, 2018; Schmidt, 2012).

It has been suggested that the convergence of the fitness boom in the post-1980s along with post-second wave feminism contributed to blurred boundaries between maternity and sexuality, thus facilitating the construction of a perfect pregnant and a bikini-ready postpartum body (Nash, 2018; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). As Nash (2018, p. 10) notes, "crafting the 'perfect' pregnant figure was an outcome of this cultural turn and the bikini became a vehicle for highlighting the shape of the 'perfect' pregnant body: large breasts and a contained belly". Around the same time, white pregnant celebrity bodies became increasingly visible in the mass media and extended the ideal bikini body standards onto another subpopulation of women.

By the 1990s the bikini was popularly accepted on beaches around the world and got allowance for beauty competitions such as the Miss America contest from 1997-2018, when the Miss America Organisation dropped the swimwear element (Hohman, 2018). What is noteworthy also is the growing relevance of Brazil as a non-Western country to significantly influence the global understanding of how women should look on the beach and what the perfect beach holiday looked like. Schmidt (2012, p. 104) describes, "Australia and Brazil, remote from the fashion hubs of Europe and the United States, have built national identities and fashion narratives underpinned by beautiful women and men in swimsuits enjoying a lifestyle that is tropical, exotic and always on holiday". For instance, Brazil introduced new styles (e.g., the Brazilian bikini) and swimwear models, oftentimes with large buttocks and small breasts displayed in beautiful beach sceneries. This new non-Western impact added to the overall mythology of the beach body (or bikini body) narrative as an increasingly globalised social phenomenon.

3.1.4 Thematic Excursion: Women in Burkinis

In many parts of the world, public (semi-)nudity has persisted as a political topic that underlies governmental regulation (e.g., through clothing laws) and that sparks public controversy. A suitable case example is the introduction of the burkini by Australian designer Aheda Zanetti in 2004. The name burkini was created as a word alignment of the Islamic burqa and the Western bikini and constitutes a modest, yet body accentuating swimsuit for Muslim women. Its form is similar to that of a Western wetsuit as typically worn by surfers, in combination with a swimming cap (Figure 4).

The burkini is socially and historically embedded in a complex interplay of social, cultural, religious, and political aspects that are related to, but still different from those attributed to Western swimwear (Fitzpatrick, 2009). A profound analysis of the topic would exceed the scope of this thesis; yet we cannot fully understand how women in modern swimwear have been constructed and treated without acknowledging the relevance of Muslim women's beach body experiences in our diverse, multicultural societies. This constitutes a relevant field for future appearance research.

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FIGURE 4: WOMEN IN BURKINIS (ZANETTI, 2016)

Resembling the inception of the first modern swimsuit by Annette Kellermann, the burkini was introduced as a solution for Muslim women to comply with traditional religious values, but still be allowed to participate in social life at the beach and engage in water-based physical activities such as swimming (Zanetti, 2016).

Despite this positive rationale and the burkini's resemblance to the Western wetsuit, it entangled lots of public controversies, most of which testify to a cultural clashing between rather oppositional Western and non-Western norms that the new item tried to unite. As Berg and Lundahl (2016, p. 269) explain, "the traditional burqa intends to hide as much of a woman's "attributes" as possible, whereas the bikini is designed to cover as little as possible in order to expose the body/skin to nature, sun, and water, and possibly to the gaze of others".

Unsurprisingly then, the burkini turned into a "media sensation" soon after its introduction (Fitzpatrick, 2009, p. 1). In her analysis of burkini discourse in the English-speaking media, Fitzpatrick (2009) noted how burkini-clad women at the beach were framed in comparison to Western norms. This resulted in two dichotomous narratives that either constructed them as symbols of progress and liberation from "backward" traditional Muslim conventions; or as pitiful, culturally oppressed subjects whose attempt to assimilate into Western culture had failed.

Given that these discursive constructions of women and their bodies resemble historical ones as discussed in previous sections, Fitzpatrick (2009) argues that the narratives of women in burkinis might be easily substituted by any other public debates about women, sexuality, national identity, social freedom, and multiculturalism.

While images of burkini-clad models have more recently covered fashion and lifestyle magazines and seem to be more integrated (see also chapter 3.2), a recent analysis of burkini discourse in the Spanish press by Calvo-Barbero and Carrasco-Campos (2020) implies that the negative construction of burkini-clad women persists in some parts of the world. The framing of the non-Western swimming item through the popular media has been described as something "abnormal" and even "extremist" (Calvo-Barbero & Carrasco-Campos, 2020; Fitzpatrick, 2009).

This is reflective of how women in burkinis have been treated at some Western beaches; an often cited, although not exceptional example is France. France is a country with strict laws on secuiarism and was

the first country to ban covers of the face, e.g., through a veil, in public spaces in 2011 (Berg & Lundahl, 2016). After the terrorist attacks carried out by extremist Islamists in France in 2016, the burkini got described as a security threat and as "the Uniform of extremist Islamism" and was banned municipally at several pools and beaches across the country (Aljazeera, 2019; B. Quinn, 2016). Although materially, the burkini's look resembles that of a modern wetsuit worn by surfers, Muslim women were repetitively banned from beaches or issued fees if they had not agreed to wear Western swimsuits or bikinis. A photograph showing a woman who was surrounded and forced to undress by three policemen on a beach in Nice went viral (Evolvi, 2019). The municipal burkini ban did not conform with the 2011 law though, which explicitly forbid the covering of the face in public but did not refer to any other body parts (Berg & Lundahl, 2016).

In spite of this insufficient legal backing, public debates about "Islamophobia" went on and continue to affect how women in a burkini are perceived and treated on beaches around the world. New debates inflamed in the summer of 2022 when France's highest court rejected an appeal by the city of Grenoble to authorize all types of swimwear in state-run pools and by so doing supported the ban of burkinis from these settings (Plummer, 2022).

All this is happening although Muslim women living in non-Muslim countries commonly associate the burkini with safety, happiness and freedom, as Evolvi (2019) observed in an Internet discourse analysis following the first burkini ban in France in 2016. Her analysis shows us the timeliness of public debates surrounding female bodies in swimwear, which continue to be based on Westernised, patriarchal understandings of what is "normal" rather than analysing and respecting women's subjective feelings and perceptions. More than a century after Annette Kellermann's introduction of the first streamlined swimsuit, modern swimwear has thus shifted back into a subject of racial, gendered, homophobe, and sexualised discussion that stands in stark contrast to the social progress toward diversity and inclusion in our modern society.

In summary, modern female swimwear items have been historically introduced to advance women rights, racial- and gender equality within patriarchal systems. Individual milestones such as the invention of the modern streamlined swimsuit, the bikini and eventually the burkini consistently link to the liberation and empowerment of corseted, covered and otherwise socially restricted women with no or limited access to social amenities including beach life and water sports. However, the popularisation of modern beach life and revealing swimwear was heavily affected by social norms and conventions. These oppressed and restricted elements stand in stark contrast to modern swimwear's semiotic sense of female empowerment, gender equality and women's rights. This shows us how ideas of women in swimwear have been embedded in contradictions, tensions, and a clashing of different (cultural/religious/individual/societal/etc.) viewpoints.

History shows us that it is imperative for beach body researchers to capture these tensions for they may influence how women experience and make sense of their own and other women's bodies. Sufficient attention should be paid to aspects such as (body) politics, law and religion. While the impact of the mass media is a widely studied area in appearance research, these aspects are often overlooked.

Linked to that, there should be heightened emphasis on understanding the beach (body) experiences of minority groups within multicultural societies, for instance, enhancing Evolvi's (2019) discourse analysis by studying Muslim women's experiences of embodiment at the beach. Only by capturing those will we be able to adequately contextualise and understand women's diverse experiences of embodiment at the beach.

3.2 Beach Body Discourse in the Contemporary Mass Media

The previous historical review testified to the influential role of the rising mass media in constructing and disseminating idealised and sexualised images of women in modern swimwear across the globe. Appearance researchers have identified the mass media as one of the most pervasive and potent purveyors of visual and textual messages promoting socioculturally valued body perfect ideals (Dittmar et al., 2009; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). Wimmer and Dominick (2013) define mass media as "any communication channel used to simultaneously reach a large number of people, including radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, billboards, films, recordings, books, the Internet and smart media". The Internet thereby includes social media, and the term smart media embraces new high-tech communication channels such as smart phones, smart TVs and tablets (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). As of 2018, the average media consumption around the world amounted up to 473 minutes or over 7.5 hours per person per day and is estimated to grow further (A. Watson, 2022).

Contemporary mass mediated beach body discourse is complex. It consists of visualisations of female bodies or body parts in swimwear and accompanying textual and linguistic elements that are pervasively communicated during springtime and summer in various contexts and across media channels (Jordan, 2007). Normative images of women in swimwear, oftentimes accompanied by ideal beach body discourse, have been noted on traditional mass media channels such as lifestyle magazines (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017; Wykes & Gunter, 2010), sports magazines (K. Kim, Sagas, & Walker, 2011; Weaving, 2016), tourism brochures (Small, 2007), television programmes (A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012), billboard advertisements (Chochinov, 2019), video games (Downs & Smith, 2010) and persist as a central theme in contemporary journalism, especially within "tabloid" or "soft" news coverage. While these sources might be dismissed in academic works, it is relevant to note that they represent a specific form of beach body discourse that is consumed and internalised by great numbers of people, both in print and online. Contrary to more qualitative news sources, they are particularly likely to report on celebrity beach bodies and temporary beach fashion and appearance trends that may affect popular understandings of female bodies in swimwear. Therefore, they will occasionally be cited in completion to scientific findings.

Persistent beach body discourse has also been observed on social media (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018; Kleim et al., 2019). Social media can be defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User-Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Serving as an important means to socialise with likeminded others and as a source to share, search for and collect appearance-related

information, they have become one of the most influential media sources, especially amongst young women.

Given the pervasiveness with which the beach body is contemporarily communicated, even women who do not actively search for it might be regularly and persistently confronted with implicit and explicit messages of how a female body in swimwear ought and ought *not* to look and behave, and how it might be treated in the culture they inhabit.

Based on the previous section and in line with the research questions addressed in this PhD thesis, the following sections seek to explore how female beach bodies are constructed and communicated in the contemporary mass media. Because mass media, popular culture and everyday life are interrelated, the findings presented in this section are of specific relevance to increase our understanding of how exposure to different kinds of beach body content may affect women's experiences of embodiment, a question that will be discussed later on.

3.2.1 Beach Body Discourse in Traditional Mass Media

The most comprehensive analyses of the female beach body on traditional media have been delivered by Jordan (2007) and Small (2017) who analysed how the theme was discursively constructed in (pre-)summer editions of women's lifestyle magazines in the UK and Australia respectively. Based on her initial analysis, Jordan (2007) proposed three key themes of bodily representation, which Small (2017) later seconded and that now serve to structure the remainder of this section: (1) the homogenised beach body, (2) the sexualised beach babe/ beach beauty body, and (3) the disciplined (bikini boot camp) body.

The following literature review aims to exceed Jordan's (2007) and Small's (2017) work by looking into different media contexts in which women in swimwear have been represented and discussed. More so, it will be critically reflected to what extent contemporary beach body discourse in the traditional media landscape continues to apply to these themes; notably with diversity and inclusion being emerging marketing trends.

3.2.1.1 The Homogenised Beach Body Theme

The homogenised beach body describes the homogeneous, i.e., mono-visual, diminutive and artificially idealised picture, with which female beach bodies are displayed across contemporary media channels, advertising contexts and cultures (Field et al., 2019; Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017). Jordan (2007, p. 98) reported, "the 'beach body' was female, almost exclusively white, UK clothing size 8-10, slim or thin, toned and sometimes muscular, often tanned and frequently used as a canvas for the display of beach fashion and summer cosmetics". Thereby, attractive swimwear-clad bodies of celebrities and athletes routinely served as benchmarks and, just as in the 20th century, continued to be linked to social acceptance, success, wealth, glamour, romance, sex, and happiness (Jordan, 2007; Wykes & Gunter, 2010). Ten years on, Small (2017, p. 26) confirmed, "they were all able-bodied; none showed any sign

of impairment or disability […] body shape favoured the slim […] the ethnicity of the women was overwhelmingly white Anglo ethnicity". It is important to note that photo manipulation is a routine today. Saiphoo and Vahedi (2019, p. 269) claim that "even traditional media content that is thought to be candid and unedited is not (e.g., scripted reality television)" and Want (2009, p. 265) stresses that "the extent that media portrayals are artificially manipulated to appear especially thin and attractive, they represent a standard that no-one, not even the models or actors in the portrayals themselves, can hope to achieve in everyday life".

These findings suggest that even as we are living in increasingly diverse global societies, mediated beach body discourse continues to privilege white femininity, thinness, and ableism as aspirational norms for *all* women. Reinforced by photo manipulation, normative beach body representations can be considered more unrealistic and one-sided than ever before. This applies also to the environment, in which they are presented. Jordan (2007) highlighted that ideal beach bodies were typically displayed in white sand and blue sea settings; another characteristic that has persisted over time. The idealised depiction of the beach environment may contribute to equally idealised, perhaps unrealistic understandings of what the perfect summer holiday should look like and consequently add to an overall pressure to conform to unrealistic societal constructions of a "flawless" life. This overall narrative of archetypal beach bodies in dreamlike beach locations constitutes one dominant pole of contemporary beach body discourse.

This is contrasted to non-normative bodies in swimwear. As in early beach body history, Pritchard and Morgan (2012) found that swimwear-clad middle-aged women were commonly marginalised from media representations. In congruence, both Small's (2017) and Jordan's (2007) analyses identified the majority of swimsuit models shown in magazines being younger than 30, and Dixon, Warne, Scully, Wakefield and Dobbinson (2011) highlighted that younger women were more likely portrayed with darker suntan and more skin exposed than mature women; because suntan was linked to decreased skin attractiveness in an ageing body. Exceptions might be celebrity bodies that, although chronologically ageing, conform to the normative beach body ideal. For instance, Tanner, Maher, and Fraser (2013) explored how a 2008 bikini photo featuring Helen Mirren at age 62 appeared in media discourse (Appendix A).
Because of her still youthful-looking body, i.e., "no loose flesh, no heaviness. Her breasts are voluptuous" (Tanner et al., 2013, p. 103), the actress was discursively discussed as a role model for tasteful, confident, beautiful and sexy ageing; perhaps the only condition under which it is accepted to publicly expose an ageing body in a bikini.

Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John and Slater (2019) observed that celebrities' physical "flaws" such as cellulite, acne and stretchmarks were commonly portrayed either in adverts to promote beauty products to resolve those flaws or when being publicly body-shamed.
To give an example, in 2013, the *Daily Mail* published an article titled "the unflattering bikini shots celebrities wished you HADN'T seen" (Appendix B). In this, they described the allegedly imperfect

beach bodies responsible for causing the female stars a "bad day" at the beach. A bigger body in this article was ascribed to a "lack of conditioning", "fatty snacks" or because the body had been less prioritised post-pregnancy (Daily Mail Reporter, 2013); as opposed, particularly thin bodies were described as "painfully thin" and lacking definition; one explanation was a too high priorisation of weight loss to get beach body ready after giving birth (Daily Mail Reporter, 2013). Collectively, these examples aptly show the continuous importance to display an ideal body in swimwear at all life stages in order to succeed as a public figure; and the difficulty to be measured up against polarising unrealistic societal standards, according to which a woman must neither be too thin nor too fat.

With the relevance of celebrity beach body discourse remarked by Jordan (2007) and Small (2017), the pregnant and postpartum body can be identified as a particularly salient theme in the contemporary mass media, which is in line with the historical review. Scholars have noted a clear rhetoric focus on quickly slender, sexy, bikini-ready celebrity moms in entertainment and lifestyle media (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015; Nash, 2012; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015; B. M. Williams, Christopher, & Sinski, 2017). Gow, Lydecker, Lamanna and Mazzeo (2012) found that celebrity postpartum weight gain was more likely to be negatively than positively or neutrally discussed and that celebrity mom-related media discourse typically included photographs of ideal pregnant and postpartum bodies, which were associated with body satisfaction. Before-and-after images are common means to visually contrast the "fat", "out of control", "gross", hence "bad/worse" pregnant body (before-image) to the successfully transformed "slender/sexy", "controlled", "pleasurable", hence "good/better" postpartum bikini body (after-image) (O'Brien Hallstein, 2015).

Apart from coding bodies according to dualist perspectives, this kind of discourse enforces that commenting on and judging people's exposed beach bodies is normal and with no consideration of individual aspects such as performance or health. More than that, they "mobilise, configure, increase and stabilize particular ideas of who belongs at certain beaches in terms of race, sexuality, gender, pleasures and moral hierarchies" (Metusela & Waitt, 2012, p. xxvii). This is particularly problematic in light of beach history, such as racial segregation and the recent discrimination of Muslim women in France for wearing a burkini. The potential consequences of women being exposed toward homogenised beach body images may thus extend beyond a certain state body image; they may foster narrow societal interpretations of the beach as an appearance-focused, exclusive and judgmental space where non-normative bodies are discriminated. By focusing on aesthetics rather than what the body can do, the media contribute to reducing the female body down to a passive sexual object of gaze (Small, 2017), a public property (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015; Jordan, 2007), in which swimwear prevails in its function as fashionable leisure dress rather than active sports attire.

3.2.1.2 The Sexualised 'Beach Babe/ Beach Beauty' Body Theme

The socio-historical review (chapter 3.1) discussed how swimwear has been constructed as both empowering and sexualising. Content and critical discourse analyses indicate that the sexualised beach

babe/beach beauty or bathing beauty theme continues to be prevalent, e.g. in "sexotic" (sex + exotic) tourism-related promotion materials (Schaper, Beljan, Eitler, Ewing, & Gammerl, 2020), women's lifestyle magazines (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017; Wykes & Gunter, 2010), TV programmes (A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012), Hollywood movies (O'Meara, 2017), video games (Downs & Smith, 2010), billboard advertising (Chochinov, 2016), and sports media such as the *Sports Illustrated* annual swimsuit issues[5] (K. Kim et al., 2011; Weaving, 2016) and (wind-)surfing magazines (Hunter, 2018; Wheaton, 2003). The literature consents that the display of fragmented bodies that are separated from a person's identity are particularly typical of sexual objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kilbourne, 1999).

Several studies have noted how bikini-clad women were routinely portrayed in "sexually alluring" and "semi-pornographic poses" (Jordan, 2007, p. 100) with "wet T-shirts, pouting lips and topless shots" (Wykes & Gunter, 2010, p. 86); as "goddesses, sun kissed, glowing, smooth and passive - to be gazed at" (Small, 2017, p. 28), "either reclining, leaning, sitting or standing" (Small, 2017, p. 26), or posing "in a gesture of apparent ecstatic pleasure" (Alac, 2012, p. 550). Also, the image of sexually appealing "Yummy Mummies", i.e., bikini-ready postpartum celebrity bodies, has been remarked (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015; Nash, 2012).

Scholars observed that a sexually appealing, young and well-groomed beach body was communicated as a means to succeed not only in (appearance-focused celebrity) careers, but also in heterosexual relationships (Jordan, 2007) and in girl-to-girl friendships (Small, 2017). In contrast to the sexualisation and objectification of young female bodies in swimwear, Small (2017, p. 27) observed, "where images of women over the age of 40 in swimsuits appeared, the body was *desexualised* - the focus being concealing rather than revealing". Given that ageing women in swimwear were generally rarely displayed, this again highlights how non-normative beach bodies are stigmatised in the media; the implication being that they should manage their appearance "appropriately" (e.g., through clothing) in order to hide flawed bodily details from public views.

Both Jordan's (2007) magazine analysis and Pritchard and Morgan's (2012) analysis of TV programmes identified that the beach was constructed as a place for sexual licence and liberation. For instance, Pritchard and Morgan (2012) found that female beach bodies were repetitively placed in the context of spring breaks or contemporary forms of Carnivals that showed unrestrained excessive behaviours with respect to alcohol, sex, and "games"; the latter included water-assisted bikini strip contests, which very clearly implied a sexualisation of young female bodies at the beach, although those are presented as actively choosing and enjoying this experience.

Similar impressions might be gathered in popular reality shows such as *Love Island*, *Bachelor in Paradise*, *Too Hot To Handle*, *Are You The One?* and *Laguna Beach* that deal with dating and romance in beach environments (Zamora, 2021). Displaying a sexy and attractive body in swimwear is part of

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[5] Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues can be considered an influential yet controversial media source with focus on displaying models in swimwear and has gained repeated scientific attention.

this, and, as Pritchard and Morgan (2012) make clear, it is inseparably linked to experiences of pleasure, fun and freedom at the beach.

The controversy between the allegedly liberal beach environment and the socially scrutinised, judged and disciplined female body in swimwear is reflected in this. As Kilbourne (1999, p. 31) critiqued, "I loathe and fear the advertisers' cynical equation of rebellion with smoking, drinking, and impulsive and impersonal sex, the way they encourage all of us to confuse addiction with liberation, enslavement with freedom".

The sexualised media portrayal of female beach bodies may thus add to the narrow societal understanding of the beach as a place for heterosexual possibility and gender-related power relations, as discussed by scholars such as Jordan (2007) and Small (2017); not only may it enforce the normalisation of young women in swimwear as sexual objects of heterosexual men's gaze; but also present this as a compliment that may increase women's confidence.

Emphasising the passivity and appearance-focus, with which women were displayed in print media, Small (2017) noted that only few models in Australian lifestyle magazines were displayed as actively engaging in a water or beach sport. The trivialisation of women's athletic performance when depicted in swimwear has been confirmed by sports media analyses. Sexualisation occurs when women athletes are reduced to their appearance, most often displayed posing rather than performing with functional attire typically substituted by sexy bikinis.

Wheaton's (2003) analysis of windsurfing magazines revealed that female windsurfers were commonly portrayed as "heterosexualised commodities" rather than embodied, performing athletes. Wheaton (2003, p. 215) concluded: "The beach babe remains a potent image in popular mythology about the beach". In congruence, Kim et al.'s (2011) content analysis of the US-American magazine *Sports Illustrated* annual swimsuit issues (SISI) from 1997-2009 found that female athletes were predominantly depicted as sexual, commercialised objects, even when shown in athletic positions: "Most female athletes portrayed in swimsuit issues did not necessarily have distinguished athletic achievements but were more often than not famous for their physical beauty" (Kim et al., 2011, p. 159). This focus on appearance may reinforce traditional connections between a thin, toned and sexually appealing body and a healthy, physically active and successful life, a view that already prevailed in the early 1900s. It is also interesting that females were found to be exclusively portrayed wearing swimsuits on the beach while their male counterparts were portrayed in sports uniforms or casual suits in sport-related locations.

Weaving's (2016, p. 382) philosophical analysis, in which she discussed how beautiful bodies had been displayed in the magazine for 50 years supports that "SISI […] perpetuates women as objects by treating the most overt symbols of women's bodily agency in the contemporary world, female elite athletes, as being reducible to objects of male consumption".

Sports media scholars have discussed the sexualisation of women athletes in light of neoliberalism, (post-)feminism and the concept of hegemonic masculinity, i.e., the configuration and maintenance of gender inequalities aimed at strengthening the dominance of the male gender over females in society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). They confirmed that the magazines, through these messages, might

enforce stereotypical, male-dominated power relations in sports, in which female athletes in swimwear might be perceived as subordinate to men. While this aligns to the overall sexual objectification of women in Western culture, Daniels (2009) argued that the athletes themselves may contribute to this by modelling (semi-)naked and in sexually alluring poses for magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit editions.

A more recent study by Hunter (2018) revealed a greater tendency to focus on athleticism when depicting female surfers. Media portrayals with a focus on athletic performance may potentially be less objectifying than those depicting women as passive sexual objects. However, this impression might be misleading given that female surfing athletes, according to Hunter (2018), were in many ways dominated and controlled by males. Exposing clothes and model-like looks were, for instance, commonly expected of female athletes to succeed in acquiring sponsorships and becoming brand endorsers. "The production and consumption of surfing via the materials of surf wear and their bodily coverage is enmeshed with sex, gender and sexuality, covered over by fashion but of a dual nature that manifests as double standards" (Hunter, 2018, p. 1395).

Collectively, these findings strengthen the assumption that media images of women in swimwear seem to inextricably and (almost) exclusively link to women's sexual performance and attractiveness, which seems to dominate over their (sportive) accomplishments and success as well as inner characteristics. Media representations might resultantly reinforce societal interpretations of women in swimwear as passive objects of sexualised gaze and, in a wider sense, associations of beach environments as places for sexual possibility and patriarchal power relations.

3.2.1.3 The Disciplined (Bikini Boot Camp) Body Theme

In alignment with historical constructions of the beach body as a product of successful body transformation, Jordan (2007), in her concept of the disciplined (bikini boot camp) body, noted that in order to attain an ideal beach body, hence to be socially valued as attractive and sexy, women were encouraged to engage into self-disciplining and self-surveilling regimens to physically prepare for summer; that is, to get beach (body)/bikini ready. The third theme of bodily representation thus encompasses media messages triggering the behavioural component of the beach body construct. It is linked to dualist-objectivist perceptions of the body as a modifiable, malleable and unfinished "project" that can be segmented, controlled and "planned out with almost militaristic precision" (Jordan, 2007, p. 100). Jordan (2007) applied Foucault's concept of docile bodies[6] to discuss the element of external regulation. But the disciplined beach body theme is as well relatable to other conceptualisations that describe how women, as a result of socialisation, distance from their physical selves and turn to look at

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[6] In this, philosopher Michel Foucault (1977) argued that individuals were manipulated and disciplined through constant observation; when internalising this perspective, that is, as individuals believe they are surveyed, they might likely accept the system in which they live, begin to self-survey, and work to conform to the norms. Resultantly, they might start to believe that the motivations to get beach body ready were their personal, free choice rather than an external prescription. These viewpoints align to objectification theory and the concept of thin-ideal internalisation.

their bodies as isolated, inferior, hence controllable objects or projects. This includes Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory.

Jordan (2007) noted that displaying a perfect beach body was typically communicated as *the* ultimate goal during summer and as an indisputable social responsibility that women needed to fulfil in order to experience true happiness and relaxation when unclothed at the beach; even as the legitimation to display one's semi-naked body in public in the first place. The previous section has shown that this view has persisted over decades.

In support, Featherstone (2010) highlighted the concurrent ideology of seeing physical transformation as a means to achieve a better self and a better - essentially a healthier and happier - life. He described transformation as a central theme in contemporary consumer culture and as a key tenet of Western modernity, and disciplined beach body discourse can be situated within that context.

While fashion and beauty advice are consistent themes in women's lifestyle magazines, Wykes and Gunter (2010) noted seasonal variations in the summer issues of Glamour, Cosmopolitan and Marie-Claire, such that bikini-clad models and summer body discourse dominated. Small's (2017) observation that women perceived the ideal body promoted during summer different to the ideal body promoted during other seasons corresponds to this. Interestingly, beach body-related media discourse often contains relatively subtle hints. For instance, "a common theme was the reminder that it was "*that* time of the year again", when women needed to prepare for summer" (Small, 2017, p. 26) or "time for a spring shed" (Atayero, 2021). These observations confirm how self-explanatory, culturally manifested the beach body theme is.

The sexualised-idealised way, with which normative beach body images are displayed in the media, is tied to and mutually reinforcing consumption (Chochinov, 2019); and although "becoming bikini-ready can be a difficult task to accomplish" (Alac, 2012, p. 656), it is discursively constructed as a realistic and quickly attainable goal for *every* woman. That is, if only they were willing to spend sufficient effort into achieving it. To "assist" along the way, magazines were found to offer instructions and manifold means to "resolve" appearance "problems" and prepare one's appearance for bodily display at the beach (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017). Jordan (2007, p. 99) describes, "the pre-holiday grooming requirements stipulated were stringent and involved waxing, plucking, smoothing, dieting, exercising, conditioning, exfoliating, oiling and fake-tanning, to name but a few". Thereby, individual (fragmented) body segments often require individual beauty regimens. This again testifies to body fragmentation, hence objectification, of the female body. The underlying socio-economic relevance of the ideal female beach body construct is indisputable and linked to the popular construction of a perfectly transformed beach body as a healthy, free and empowered one (Field et al., 2019).

Jordan (2007, p. 100) noted the "measurability and arithmetic nature of self-surveillant body management" in this. For instance, beach body adverts included countdowns to summer or specific beach body-related weight loss scales. Her analysis revealed that the average time span for women to ideally prepare their body for public display at the beach, according to lifestyle magazines, amounted

to six weeks (Jordan, 2007). While the literature remains unclear about how long the beach body typically endures as a dominating theme in the traditional media landscape, this time frame confirms its start *before* the actual arrival of summer. It also resonates with Griffiths et al.'s (2021) argument that many industries, especially appearance-related ones, ultimately profited from Summer-centric appearance anxieties; therefore, media advertisements might trigger those on purpose.

Although the promoted means to get beach body ready are manifold, beach body or bikini body diets and specific workout regimens continue to be the most saliently promoted means to accomplish a slim and toned beach physique. Pritchard and Morgan's (2012) study of TV programmes revealed a large number of commercials featuring the beach while promoting diet products and services, and daytime programmes encouraging beach body diets while displaying the "perfect image of a 'hard earned beach body'" (A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012, p. 137).

In line with previous findings, Jordan (2007) emphasised how magazines discussed female celebrities as role models for extensive body work (e.g., bikini boot camps). Importantly, as highlighted by Atayero (2021), following the global COVID-19 pandemic, "some advertisements also include an added messaging emphasising the need to lose "lockdown love handles"", which may increase the pressure to put extra work into one's body once it gets warmer.

A focus on bikini-related dieting and exercising has also been confirmed for pregnant and postpartum beach body discourse (Nash, 2018; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). Nash (2018) argues that pregnant women's bodies were now disciplined in the same way as non-pregnant bodies and O'Brien Hallstein (2015) observed that before-and-after-pregnancy-images were typically accompanied by dietary and workout advice how to successfully bounce back: "According to the quickly slender profiles, the primary means for getting bikini ready is by taking control of the postpartum body: both by disciplined diets and controlled and intense body work" (O'Brien Hallstein, 2015, p. 121). Specific emphasis is typically put on the stomach, the area that is typically exposed in a bikini, but undergoes most changes during pregnancy. The preoccupation with body weight and shape constructed through this beach body discourse might create unhealthy models of behaviour with potential consequences for both mother and child by reinforcing the cultural validation of thin and toned beach bodies, regardless of a woman's life situation or individual context (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015; Jordan, 2007).

As demonstrated previously, the ideal female beach body extends beyond a certain physical shape and size; both Jordan (2007) and beach historians confirm that swimwear fashion items and accessories such as sunglasses or sun hats were promoted equally pervasively to complete an aspirational beach look. Tanner et al. (2013) additionally argued that age-defiance and the maintenance of youthfulness appeared critical in age-related beach body discourse. For instance, Helen Mirren's youthful-looking celebrity body was constructed as a result of effortless, natural, and proper body work that distinguished from an act of vanity or superficiality. The authors observed that cosmetic surgery got normalised and accepted in this as something every woman could do.

The normalisation of surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures amongst ordinary women has been well documented and is supported by rising numbers of annually conducted surgical/cosmetic procedures worldwide. The International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2019) reports of

11,363,569 surgical and 13,618,735 non-surgical procedures in 2019, which constituted an increase of 7.4% from 2018 alone. The most surgical procedures were carried out in Brazil and the most popular surgical procedure undertaken by women over the past years has been breast augmentation (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 2019). Hermans (2021b) has noted the prevalence of bikini-clad women and the summer (holiday-) theme in cosmetic surgery advertising in women's lifestyle magazines, for instance a model showcasing her new breasts in a bikini on the beach. This type of discourse promotes cosmetic surgery as a quick and easy tool to resolve women's physical flaws. Also, using (post-)feminist discourse, it is promised to empower women as subjects to look good and feel truly confident at the beach; thereby downplaying medical risks (Hermans, 2021).

In recent years, ongoing concerns have also been raised with regards to the promotion of suntan, which is linked to an increased risk for skin cancer. Dixon and colleagues (2011), in a content analysis of 538 spring and summer issues of Australian women's magazines from 1987 to 2005, observed increases of tanned models in the 2000s that showed poor sun-protective behaviours (e.g., wearing no hats and exposing much skin directly to the sun). This applied more to models depicted at beaches or pools compared to other outdoor settings; notably, "women in these settings were around three times as likely to be portrayed with a moderate to dark tan than women in other settings" (Dixon et al., 2011, p. 799). Abramovici (2007, p. 121) even reported of a whole "tanning publicity" in Italy that persisted in newspapers, magazines, TV and on other public spaces throughout the summer.

This implies, a tanned body continues to be glamorised in contemporary mass media contexts, be it in celebrity discourse or product advertisements, thereby reinforcing socio-historical associations of body tan with health, leisure, sexual appeal and attractiveness in women (Dixon et al., 2011).

In combination with homogenised and sexualised beach body images, disciplined beach body behaviour normalises beauty regiments, that according to Fallon (1990) and Rudd and Lennon (1994) can encompass "impractical", low-risk beauty regimens such as selecting the right bikini for the beach, "painful" regimens such as hair removal, and "life-threatening", high-risk medical procedures. This creates ideal standards that are so high they cannot be naturally and realistically met by most. Most women are consequently condemned to fail in the attempt to aesthetically optimise their beach bodies, no matter how hard they tried to self-discipline and control their bodies - unless perhaps they underwent cosmetic procedures. Still, this is omnipresently communicated as their undebatable responsibility. In line with previous (post-)feminist argumentations, Small (2017, p. 28) thus argues, "the magazines through coaxing and assuring the reader of the easy attainability of the desirable beach body, suggest the magazines are supportive and understanding of women but at the same time are promoting "body panic" and a culture of guilt and shame. The promoted ease and simplicity to achieve the desired body underline the treachery of societal control over a woman's body". This might as well account for other media channels that uphold the same beach body discourse.

3.2.1.4 Critical Reflection in Light of Body Positivity

Although there seems to be universal agreement in how the female beach body has been visually and discursively (re-)produced in traditional mass media contexts in recent years, it is imperative to reflect upon these findings in light of our dynamic, constantly changing environment. More so because Jordan's (2007) analysis was based on a magazine sample from 2001, Wykes and Gunter's (2010) on a sample from 2003 and Small (2017) studied magazine samples from 2007 and 2014. Growing public awareness of body image-related topics and an increasing consumer demand for more inclusion, equality, diversity, and body positivity, most notably "beauty for all", have recently started to reform bodily media representations (Culliney, 2020; Schmitz, 2021). These impacts must be considered as marketers have started to respond to them.

A recent GlobalData 2019 survey with 5,000 interviewed clothing shoppers in the UK revealed that 80% of women asked for more diversity in marketing campaigns by including models of different sizes, shapes, ethnicities and age groups. Thereby, women aged 45+ felt the most under-represented in public media and 86% of them called for greater age inclusivity (GlobalData, 2020). The increasing importance of inclusion and diversity in marketing and media is confirmed by a similar research report carried out by Accenture (Standish, 2019). They found that more than 40% of ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ shoppers would readily switch to a retailer that was authentically committed to inclusion and diversity. Market researchers and journalists have thus claimed for more diverse, inclusive, equal and body-positive marketing approaches (Fearing, 2020).

Following this, more marketers are likely to include diverse models and body-positive notions - or "Love Your Body (LYB) discourses" (Gill & Elias, 2014)- within their marketing activities in the future. LYB discourses are positive affirmations "that exhort us to believe we are beautiful, to 'remember' that we are 'incredible' and that tell us that we have 'the power' to 'redefine' the 'rules of beauty'" (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 180). In line with postfeminist values, LYB discourse typically constructs women as empowered, individual subjects rather than subordinate, trivialised objects.

In line with this development, thin-idealised and sexualised bodies in the media have been heavily contested, challenged and reformed. The female beach body played a central role in this when a beach body advert released in the London tube by weight loss product manufacturer Protein World caused public outrage and global attention in 2015.
The ad was designed to promote one of Protein World's slimming products. It featured a thin female model in a bright yellow bikini alongside the question "Are you beach body ready?" (Figure 5). The question was followed by an introduction to the firm's weight loss collection.
The campaign was launched at a time when the body positivity movement was growing in popularity and the first body-positive advertising campaigns such as Dove's 2004 Campaign for Real Beauty had

long been in the marketing landscape and lingerie brand Aerie had stopped to digitally retouch the lingerie and swimwear models in their adverts (Rodgers, Kruger, Lowy, Long, & Richard, 2019).

This image has been removed due to copyright reasons

FIGURE 5: PROTEIN WORLD'S BEACH BODY READY ADVERT (SWENEY, 2015)

Activists, public figures and eating disorder organisations accused Protein World of body shaming and sexualising female bodies. As Chochinov (2016, p. 53) described, "the model's open-legged stance, exaggerated chest, squinted eyes and open mouth have all been pointed out by admiring onlookers and scathing critics alike, as being overtly sexual".

Main criticism arose from the seemingly normalised connection between women wearing a bikini and them having an "ideal beach body" though, which corresponds with popular dictionary definitions of the beach body as previously discussed in this thesis. Together with the question "are you beach body ready?", the advert not only reinforced the idea that a perfect beach body was accomplishable by every woman if only they invested enough time, energy and money; it also enhanced the idea that women who failed to be beach body ready might not be legitimated to wear a bikini in public or perhaps even have an enjoyable time at the beach. Therefore, critics argued that by encouraging women into unhealthy weight loss behaviours, Protein World were acting irresponsibly.

While thin-idealised advertising images have been observed and debated amongst appearance researchers and activists for decades, few have led to public outrage of a comparable size and reach. Over a course of two weeks, more than 70,000 people from around the world signed an online petition to ban the advert, printed versions (e.g., billboard adverts) were defaced, a "taking back the beach" protest was organised in London's Hyde Park, and the British Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) received 378 complaints (Davies, 2015; Sweney, 2015). Under the motto and corresponding hashtag #everybodyisbeachbodyready, social media users began to counter-campaign for a more inclusive and diverse definition of the beach body (see also chapter 3.2.2.4).

The worldwide attention and activism triggered by Protein World's advert indicate that the ideal beach body construct might have touched a nerve in women; or, as Chochinov (2016, p. 56) puts, "women are perhaps more aware of this normalisation of objectification as a social issue than ever before". Several

organisations such as Dove responded to Protein World's heavily contested beach body ready advert with an adjustment of the original ad featuring diverse models of different body shapes, sizes and skin colours accompanied by statements such as "Yes. We Are Beach Body Ready."

Despite the public outrage and activism, the ASA decided against banning the advert, justifying that it was not found at risk to seriously harm, body-shame or offend women. Instead, they argued that the term beach body "carried connotations of a toned, athletic physique similar to the image of the model in the ad" (Sweney, 2015). By so doing, the authority reinforced popular one-sided definitions of the beach body as discussed previously. Although ASA further linked the term to a state of "feeling sufficiently comfortable and confident with one's physical appearance to wear swimwear in a public environment" (Sweney, 2015), they denied that the model displayed on the advert had linked these feelings to a certain body shape.

The publicity caused by the scandal even led to an increase in sales and profits for Protein World, which encouraged the company to publish the same advert on the New York Time square soon after (Hackman, 2015). There it caused slightly fewer, but still controversial reactions, most likely influenced by what had happened in London and on social media before (Hackmann, 2015). The case of Protein World's beach body advert shows us how deeply ingrained normative, Western-centric beach body discourse is and, similar to the debates surrounding women in burkinis in France, how much the social construction of female bodies in swimwear relies on the political and economic power of public authorities and organisations.

Plus-size fashion brand Navabi picked the theme up once again in 2018 and launched a beach body ready advert in the same design scheme as Protein World featuring three plus-size models - one ethnically diverse and one with tattoos - stating "three years on: a little reminder. We're beach body ready" (Calderwood, 2018).

In the same year, Procter and Gamble's brand Gilette Venus started to expose non-normative female bodies in bikinis in their 2018 "My skin. My way." campaign. This was based upon company-led research that, in line with previous market trends, revealed a demand amongst female consumers to display more realistic bodies (Commercials, 2019). Importantly, the TV commercials picked up the postpartum bikini body theme by displaying a woman with a c-section scar embracing her body; another video showed a woman with congenital nevi, i.e., a birth marks skin condition. This is particularly noteworthy given that visual disfigurements are rarely picked up by mainstream adverts. In 2021, the company additionally launched a campaign to de-stigmatise women's pubic grooming (Kelly, 2021). This yields further implications for the typically hairless beach body ideal.

Apart from Aerie who manifested their #AerieReal campaign in 2016, global fashion retailers such as ASOS (Barr, 2018) and H&M (Sheppard, 2019) have started to include models of different body shapes and sizes, ethnicities, and with cellulite, stretch marks and body hair into their swimwear campaigns. By so doing they correspond with a rising number of swimwear brands such as MIGA, Swimsuits for All, Sidway, Kitty and Vibe, Knix, and Chromat featuring swimwear models of different shapes, skin

colours and abilities in their campaigns, trying to dismantle the one-sided concept of the ideal beach body (Haines, 2021; Yates, 2022). The perceived discrepancy between real bodies on the beach and beach bodies shown in these media examples may be reduced as compared to normative beach body campaigns.

In line with that, (post-)feminist and neoliberal scholars such as Gill (2007) and Gill and Scharff (2011) have remarked a shift from objectification to subjectification in contemporary media discourse. Rather than objectifying women, marketers have started to present a "modernised version of heterosexual femininity". In this, women appear as playful, free and narcissistic sexual subjects who choose to please themselves first, and by doing so (conveniently) receive approval from men (Gill, 2007). At first glance, this redefinition of femininity seems to empower women, hence align to the concept of body positivity as defined by Wood-Barcalow, Tylka and August-Horvath (2010) and Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015). However, much of this discourse is marked by an increasing complexity, contradiction and ambivalence that may complicate the lived experience of femininity in modern women (Budgeon, 2011). For instance, when normalising and somewhat presupposing a woman's fears and insecurities to expose her body in swimwear, LYB messages may reinforce or re-cite negative culturally manifested views of the female body as one that is difficult to love as it is. Also, beauty is not only communicated as tantamount to a woman's empowerment, but also as a chosen (and somewhat expected) state of mind. In this, women are held responsibility to turn self-loathe into self-love and to take the blame if they failed.

As argued by Elias and Gill (2014, p. 185), "women must makeover not simply their bodies, but now - thanks to LYB discourse - their subjectivity as well, embracing an affirmative confident disposition, no matter how they actually feel". It has thus been argued that the essence of those messages may not differentiate much from normative media messages (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill, 2007). Even if the woman is visually depicted as an empowered subject who actively chooses to please herself, they may still implicitly encourage her to physically and psychologically transform through self-monitoring, self-surveillance and self-discipline rather than accept herself. Moreover, the communication of beauty as a chosen state of mind might further problematise rather than facilitate women's experiences of embodiment.

The ambivalence of this discourse represents the challenge to holistically and authentically embed body positivity into economic, consumption-oriented marketing approaches; while it also testifies to the complex interplay between culture and subjectivity, and the tensions between different co-existing dimensions of (post-)feminism, neoliberalism and body positivity, through which contemporary media messages can and should be read (Darwin & Miller, 2020; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Campaigns featuring female models, athletes and celebrities in swimwear may be at the very centre of these tensions, reinforced by the historical construction of the female beach body.

Appeals to display more inclusive and diverse bodies in the mass media have been supported by governments and organisations. For instance, the Australian Government released a Voluntary Media Code of Conduct on Body Image "to encourage the fashion, media and advertising industries to place

greater emphasis on diversity, positive body images and a focus on health rather than body shape" (Office of Youth, 2008). Alongside the appeal to show people with diverse body shapes and of healthy weight and size, the Code discourages of the display of digitally altered, unrealistic images, or, alternatively, recommends to label those; something that has been pursued through so-called Photoshop laws in countries such as Israel and France (Krawitz, 2014). Moreover, magazines are asked to carefully consider editorial context, in which diet, exercise or cosmetic surgery adverts are placed to send a consistent and concordant healthy message to the readership. Exploring to what extent the Code was respected within the annual swimsuit issues published by seven Australian young women's magazines, Reid Boyd and Moncrieff-Boyd (2018), within a preliminary analysis found that some aspects of the Code had been consistently applied. However, only one magazine appeared to have fully embraced them.

Small (2017) reviewed female beach bodies in several issues of Australian lifestyle magazines dated from 2007 and 2014. When comparing magazine issues from both years, she noted that 88% in 2014 as compared to 97% in 2007 had favoured the slim ideal. Moreover, "in 2014, there were slightly more older women, women who were judged not slim, not of Anglo white ethnicity and who were more active" (Small, 2017, p. 26). Accordingly, most magazines had continued to display the young, thin, Caucasian and passive "beach babe"; but at least small shifts were noticeable.

Gill and Elias (2014), too, noticed that more and more magazines encouraged women to "get body confident for the summer". The same theme has been picked up by the reality TV show *Naked Beach*, launched by the British Channel 4 in 2019. The show was based on a study by West (2017) who claimed that engaging in nudist/naturalist activities with others may boost individuals' body confidence. Accordingly, participants in the show were coached and encouraged to feel good about themselves naked on the beach after being exposed to other naked, naturally flawed bodies. Although broaching nude beach activities, the show may yield implications for bodily exposure at textile beaches because if someone manages to feel confident all naked, then they may as well feel confident in swimwear.

Reid Boyd and Moncrieff-Boyd's (2018) analysis further revealed that some ways, in which body diversity was discursively discussed did not consistently send healthy, body-positive messages. Instead, they seemed to counter-effect the potential positive impact that the exposure of diverse body images might entail. Further criticism of the Code has arisen because of its voluntary nature and because the interpretations of what are considered diverse and healthy-looking bodies are self-regulated by the industry, which may lead to contradictory viewpoints hence remain inefficient (de Freitas, Jordan, & Hughes, 2017; Seselja & Sakzewski, 2017).

Since Kim et al.'s (2011) and Weaving's (2016) contributions, diverse bodies have been displayed also in *Sports Illustrated*'s annual swimsuit issues. The magazine first featured a plus-size model, body positivity advocate Ashley Graham, on its cover in 2016 and has since included models that visibly differentiated from the thin, flawless, primarily Caucasian, heterosexual Western beach body ideal; for

instance, a model with vitiligo[7], a model in a burkini, a model with disability, two transgender models including one of colour, several ageing models and an Asian plus-size model (Hoo, 2019; Stern, 2021; Yu, 2021). However, more diverse and inclusive representations do not automatically dissociate the ideal beach body from being constructed as a sexualised and disciplined, hence restricted, suppressed and stereotyped one.

The *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issues have sparked ongoing controversies for empowering diverse women on the one hand and displaying them in sexualised-objectified ways on the other hand. For instance, plus-size model Hunter McGrady, "the curviest model ever" (Tempesta, 2020), who appeared on the cover of the 2020 swimsuit issue was described "posing in the surf wearing a black halter bikini with criss-cross ties that draw attention to her cleavage and hips. She is holding a large sunhat on her head and giving the camera a come-hither stare" (Tempesta, 2020). The US-American National Center on Sexual Exploitation (2019) further argued that even burkini model Halima Aden, despite her modest dress, was displayed "lounging seductively on a beach". They thus denounced the magazine "for its legacy of sexual objectification of women and its crass exploitation of cultural diversity to sanitize its actions" (National Center on Sexual Exploitation, 2019).

A randomly selected extract of a recent SISI contribution titled "Five Workout Moves to Get Bikini Ready" published in May 2021 also indicates that beach body discourse in the magazine may be as inconsistent as other previously described magazines:

> "While Sports Illustrated Swimsuit is known for celebrating women of all shapes in sizes, there is one common thread: everyone looks stunning in a bathing suit. And while the SI Swim model contingent may be used to donning bikinis throughout the year, most of us only do it during the summer months. We may need to put in a little extra effort before hitting the beach. What can you start doing now to see some change in the next few weeks? We tapped trainer to the stars (think Lady Gaga to Kim Kardashian) Harley Pasternak to get his top five moves" (Lippe-McGraw, 12.05.2021)

Even with a broader and more inclusive definition of beauty, the magazine keeps to discursively construct the female beach body as a disciplined object that is linked to intense body work and transformation. In line with the previous remarked tensions regarding LYB messages, this reflects that traditional constructions of the ideal beach body may only slowly and perhaps somewhat inconsistently be reformed; especially in consumption-, sales- and profit-oriented societies and industries. As argued by Grimes (2021), "our culture (by and large) is still fearful of non-normative bodies and obsessed with beauty and physical appearance". As long as this lasts, the female beach body might remain a socially disciplined object that is equated with (hetero-)sexual attractiveness and "the dominant belief system in our culture will remain oppressive" (Chochinov, 2016, p. 58).

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[7] a skin condition that leads to pigment loss in random patches on the skin.

To summarise, while empirical research is needed to explore the concurrent female beach body discourse on traditional media channels across cultures, the literature presented in this section suggest that Jordan's (2007) initially proposed key themes of bodily representation - the homogenised, sexualised and disciplined beach body - continue to play a dominating role in the representation of female models, athletes and celebrities on traditional mass media channels. The bikini seems to play a dominating role, thereby reinforcing the connection between swimwear-clad female bodies and sexuality.

Non-normative beach body campaigns testify to a noticeable shift away from homogeneous, Western-centric, thin-idealised beach body representations toward more diverse and inclusive ones. Those may align more closely to the diversity of female bodies displayed on real beaches and by so doing contribute to challenging the historically grounded ideal beach body narrative that has persisted over decades.

Two things should be noted: first, diverse and body-positive advertising campaigns are still in their infancy and have not yet reached mainstream. Some have, for instance, proposed differences between media channels, industries, and target audiences. Amongst those, Onyejiaka (2018) and Grimes (2021) argue that teenage girls- and women-aimed TV entertainment was still lacking body shape diversity; while there was increased visibility of people with disabilities, people of colour and LGBTQ+ characters, main characters were typically of thin and toned body shape. Even the diversity displayed in individual body-positive advertising campaigns may be somewhat limited and although promoted as "real bodies", images are usually idealised and retouched (Rodgers, Kruger, Lowi, Long and Richard, 2020), something that Gill and Elias (2014, p. 183) referred to as "paradox of realness". It can therefore be assumed that beach body discourse in contemporary traditional mainstream media continues to greatly align to the Western-centric beach body ideal identified in previous content analyses and differ from natural, flawed bodies on the beach.

Second, even heterogeneous, allegedly body-positive images of women in swimwear are often sexualised and, although contrary to the appeal to accept one's body as it is, linked to consumption-backed physical and psychological transformation. Resultantly, beach body narratives and commercial strategies may not authentically and consistently align to body diversity and inclusion (yet), but instead continue to stick to profit- and consumption-oriented fractions of the ideal beach body narrative. Celebrity discourse may further endorse this. As a result, women may be surrounded by ambivalent, controversial beach body-related media messages.

3.2.2 Beach Body Discourse on Social Media

Consumers spend about one quarter of their media time engaging with mobile Internet media and an average amount of 145 minutes per day on social media (Zenith Media Consumption Forecasts, 2018). Social media comprise of a wide spectrum of different communication channels including blogs, content communities, virtual game worlds, and social networking sites (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Social networking sites (SNS) are "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

They resultantly not only allow private users to *passively* consume content created by others (e.g., family, peers, (micro-)celebrities, acquaintances, strangers, professional marketers) or themselves (e.g. when scrolling through their timeline, commenting on or liking a photo); they also allow to *actively* produce content and engage into activities. This element differentiates social media from traditional mass media channels and contributes to an atmosphere that resembles real life more than any other mass media channels.

As of a January 2022 statistic by Statista (2022), the most popular SNS worldwide has been Facebook with 2.91 billion monthly active users, followed by Youtube with 2.56 billion and WhatsApp with 2 billion monthly active users. Instagram ranked 4th with 1.48 billion monthly active users. Along with the growing traction of mobile device usage and mobile social networks, these numbers are forecasted to rise even further (Statista, 2022).

In the following, the existing literature on body image and social media will be reviewed based on the question, to what extent Jordan's (2007) three key themes of bodily representation - the homogenised beach body, the sexualised beach babe/beach beauty body and the disciplined (bikini boot camp) body - prevail on SNS. In addition to Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) initial definition of SNS, the use of certain software applications (apps) is commented on that relate and are relevant to beach body behaviour online by allowing users to self-track and share physical parameters, edit photos or "load, embed, and wrap platform content in third-party apps" (Gerlitz, Helmond, van der Vlist, & Weltevrede, 2019, p. 18).

To the best of the author's knowledge, Kleim et al.'s (2019) qualitative investigation has been the only study to date that has specifically explored beach body discourse and embodiment on SNS. Given that the data were retrieved from focus group discussions rather than content analyses, the comparability to the previous findings on traditional media is limited.

Nevertheless, images of (semi-naked) bodies in swim- or underwear have been noted in several hashtag-based content analyses and those studies may complement our findings. Hashtags are used to describe the content of a posting (e.g. #beachbody), to tag individual body parts (e.g. #bikinibottom) or to express identity, belongingness and cultural genre; for instance through meta-comments (e.g. #bikinibodyhereiam) or by tagging body image trends (e.g. #bikinibridge) (Daer, Hoffman, & Goodman, 2014; Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018). Dependent on global and regional trend themes and/or specific algorithms, postings that include (trending) beach body hashtags may reach great numbers of people and encourage them to comment and (inter-)act, even if they did not actively search for it (Costa, Silva, Antunes, & Ribeiro; Daer et al., 2014). From a research perspective, hashtags are helpful in exploring and contextualising appearance-related content on social media as they increase search capabilities within the great amount of data produced on SNS (Daer et al., 2014; Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018). Minority groups and communities may use hashtags to address and increase the public visibility of sensitive

topics (e.g., sexual assault, racism, unrealistic, narrow beauty norms), something that has been referred to as "hashtag activism" (Singh, 2019). An example of this are body positivity users posting self-portraits (selfies) of non-normative bodies in swimwear at the beach, which contribute to challenging the socioculturally manifested ideal beach body narrative.

Kleim et al. (2019) identified the beach body as a popular hashtag on social media. To give an example, as of 23 May 2021, Instagram reported 11,723,958 postings with the hashtag #beachbody, 2,011,195 using the hashtag #bikinibody, 80,396 posts using the hashtag #beachbodyready and 582,435 using #bikiniready. As compared, on Facebook, 90,229 users posted content that included the hashtag #beachbody; 16,735 included the hashtag #bikinibody and 1,942 included the hashtag #beachbodyready within their postings. Although this is just the status quo of a randomly chosen day, scholars such as Drenten and Gurrieri (2018), Doshi (2018), and Griffiths et al. (2021) confirm the prevalence of beach body content in the digital media:

> "During Summer, social media will necessarily reflect Summer-centric bodies, clothing, environments, activities and anxieties and feelings. For example, on Instagram, individuals will see their peers wearing less clothing, more revealing clothing, going shirtless or wearing bikinis, visiting beaches and swimming pools, exercising outdoors, and engaging in (and posting about) the various diets and workout regimes that […] both target and reflect Summer-centric appearance anxieties" (Griffiths et al., 2021, p. 270).

Arguably, not all postings in which semi-naked female bodies in swimwear are displayed link directly to the ideal beach body. For instance, with swimwear being athletic attire, women may wear bikinis whilst exercising and add health- and fitness- rather than beach body-related hashtags to these postings. But their bodies and the displayed appearance-related behaviour may resonate with women's predisposed knowledge of what an ideal beach body ought to look in the world they inhabit and what a woman should do in order to get beach body ready. With the concept of the ideal beach body so deeply manifested in Western culture, words may not be needed to trigger associations. Exposure to any of those images, therefore, may more or less consciously enforce or complement a person's understanding regarding exposed swimwear-clad female bodies in public places. This and the paucity of beach body-related social media analyses make it imperative to review different contexts in which exposure to female bodies in swimwear takes place online. In the following, I aim to touch upon several of those.

3.2.2.1 The Homogenised Beach Body Theme

Social media empower individuals to express themselves in a unique, unconventional way and to produce beach body content that challenges the homogeneity of images presented in traditional media contexts. That notwithstanding, social media researchers have noted a prevalence of idealised, staged images including images of women in swimwear on SNS. These were posted in direct beach body contexts (Kleim et al., 2019) as well as in discourse related to health, fitness and thinness (Deighton-

Smith & Bell, 2018; Doshi, 2018; Duttweiler, 2016; Lupton, 2017; Talbot, Gavin, van Steen, & Morey, 2017; M. Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), in social media-endorsed body image trends (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018), and advertising campaigns, such as of cosmetic surgery (Hermans, 2021) or the aforementioned Protein World advert (Chochinov, 2017).

Although users are usually very skilled to imitate poses, gestures, and expressions that make them (or certain body parts) look good (Marwick, 2015); taking and posting appropriate beach body content might be a rather complex and advanced undertaking that often involves the taking of large numbers of pictures and digital photo manipulation (Aguayo & Calvert, 2013; J. Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015) In order to present themselves as likeable, friendly, sociable and aesthetically pleasing as possible (Haferkamp & Krämer, 2011; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016), behaviour that has been referred to as "visual impression management" (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008), users may add filters or even professionally photoshop their images, which, owing to easy accessibility is now a widespread technique (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Research by the American Renfrew Centre Foundation (2014) found that 70% of 18- to 35-year-old women regularly edited their images before uploading them online, and this number has likely grown.

As a result, many female users may produce highly gendered, staged visualisations of themselves in swimwear on the beach that greatly adhere to the dominating cultural standards and hegemonic values attached to beach beauty and femininity, and the overall iconography of good looks.

Young social media users in Kleim et al.'s (2019) qualitative study confirmed major discrepancies between actual bodies displayed on the beach and beach body content they were exposed to on SNS. We concluded that "the mediatized beach bodies of young people online are not only photographic versions of their real bodies, but an improved and perfected representation, which agrees with the cultural standards of the day, and which sometimes is quite removed from the original" (Kleim et al., 2019, p. 66). Photo-editing was normalised, but participants mentioned greater actual-ideal discrepancies in beach body content posted by (micro-)celebrities, a finding confirmed by other studies (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2020; Marwick, 2015; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018).

(Micro-)celebrity-generated content is increasingly colonised on social media (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2021) and often perceived as authentic, realistic, and normative. Even if identified as potentially deceiving, users may still accept photoshopping as part of social media fame (Kleim et al., 2019). One reason for this has been identified as the emotional ties between famous social media figures and their fans, which may strengthen in the seemingly unmediated online environment (Marwick, 2015), so that their parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956) transforms into a potentially social one. In other words, public figures may feel like close friends and be worshipped (Maltby, Giles, Barber, & McCutcheon, 2005).

Although peer-generated beach body content, in our study, was considered more trustworthy and less deceptive, general pressure to present an ideal self on social media was acknowledged. Specific importance was ascribed to mimics and gestures. For instance, women would feel obliged to smile, but

in a grown-up, sexy rather than childish way; posing predominantly related to the purpose to look thin, toned and attractive, for instance by wearing well-fitting, form-enhancing swimwear or showing one's muscles (Kleim et al., 2019). Because these behaviours are typically adopted from (micro-)celebrities, peer-generated beach body content may resemble that of public figures. The risk is when both enmesh on a user's newsfeed, they may perceive and process both in a similar way (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). In other words, they may produce similarly inaccurate, distorted perceptions of what ordinary women in swimwear look like on the beach as in traditional media and still be perceived as more trustworthy and realistic than content generated by professional marketers.

Images of women in swimwear have been mentioned in a series of content-analyses that explored thinness- and fitness-related hashtags on social media. Those are frequently promoted and endorsed by (micro-)celebrities who, consistent with their role in traditional media, serve as inspirational sources, endorsers or benchmarks for aspirational body types and related body modification practices (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2022).

Lupton (2017) found that GIFs featuring young and lean female bodies in swimwear were commonly accompanied by thinspiration hashtags such as #thinspo, #thin and #skinny, often coupled with #beauty and #perfect. The hashtag #thinspiration is a blending of thinness and inspiration and has been described as "the first class of body-idealising content to naturally emerge on social media" (Griffiths et al., 2018, p. 188). Its content has traditionally been shared on pro-eating disorder websites such as pro-Ana (pro-anorexia) and is found to encourage unhealthy or health risking behaviours such as disordered eating and a fixation on weight loss by all means (Leboeuf, 2019; Lewis & Arbuthnott, 2012). Emphasising the idealised nature of thinspiration images, Leboeuf (2019, p. 8) argued, "the ability to enhance one's own images might blur the line between a signature distinction in online thins culture - namely, the difference between "thinspo" *simpliciter*, which can include images of celebrities, and "real thinspo", which refers to the images of "real" women who uploaded photos of themselves". This not only once again highlights the resemblance of peer- and (micro-)celebrity-generated images; but also, the normalisation of online deception, potential consequences of which are growing appearance obsession and wide proliferation of unrealistically thin beach body images.

Constituting "a more extreme form of thinspiration that idealises the extremely thin body type" (Talbot et al., 2017, p. 5), the hashtag #bonespiration is a blending of bones and inspiration. Congruent with thinspiration, bonespiration images were found to feature extremely thin and objectified bodies, however, with even more protruding bones that may be well accentuated in a bikini. Whereas the valorisation of thinness is deeply rooted in Western culture, the form of appearance obsession attributed to thinspiration and bonespiration culture, takes this to new, more extreme levels (Leboeuf, 2019). Because they may contribute to promoting, glorifying and encouraging self-harming behaviours through the display of extremely thin bodies and the communication of dangerous weight loss messages, SNS such as Facebook and Instagram started to censor thinspiration and bonespiration hashtags in 2012 (Judkis, 2012). Nevertheless, as Talbot et al. (2017, p. 6) encountered, "social media users are easily

able to manipulate the language of hashtags to sustain content and avoid blocking algorithms. So, simply blocking content like thinspiration and bonespiration will not stop it from existing".

In fact, social media-endorsed body image trends such as the "bikini bridge" have been adopted as simplistic terms to "legally" spread images of extremely thin, often fragmented bodies in bikinis (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018). The bikini bridge describes a space between the bikini and the abdomen that comes to display when bikini bottoms are suspended between the two hip bones (London, 2014). It popularised as an Internet hoax by the social network 4chan.org in collaboration with self-proclaimed Internet trolls in January 2014 (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018). Although quickly identified as a prank a few days later, the bikini bridge gained lots of traction, traditional mass media channels included. Importantly, it got widely accepted as "a believable body image goal" (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018, p. 57). Drenten and Gurrieri (2018), within a netnographic approach, explored 10,310 tweets that were posted under the hashtag #bikinibridge within a week after the launch of 4chan.org's hoax, "Operation Bikini Bridge", in January 2014. Central to those were selfies of young and often severely thin women (sometimes exclusively) exposing the visible space between their bikinis and hipbones in a beach environment. Moreover, the authors found that pro-anorexia online communities had paired the hashtag with other weight loss-related social media hashtags such as #thinspiration, #thinspo or #thighgap, "using it as a shared goal within the community and as an indicator of extreme weight loss success" (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018, p. 60).

Two other body image trends with direct implications to the beach body are "sunburn art" and the "Toblerone tunnel". The former focuses on the beach body's characteristic as a tanned one and by so doing differentiates from thinness-focused body image trends. Sunburn art references to a gender-neutral trend that encouraged women and men to cover certain parts of their body with sunscreen or fabrics while the rest would get sunburnt in order to display patterns on the skin that looked like a tattoo (Leasca, 2018).
The "'Toblerone tunnel' is a term referencing the gap where a woman's upper thighs and bikini bottom meet" (Molina, 2018); through its triangular shape, this gap not only resembles a Toblerone candy bar, but would also (theoretically) allow women to fit one between their upper thighs as a proof of their "abilities" (K. Miller, 2018). Just as the bikini bridge, the Toblerone tunnel is directly linked to the exposed female body in a bikini and may thus influence one-sided representations and understandings of women's beach bodies in contemporary consumer culture.

Because swimwear allows exposing many details of the body in a socially accepted manner, other body image crazes such as the "rib cage bragging" (i.e., displaying one's protruding rib bones when lying down) and the "ab crack" (i.e., "a visible dip in between the ribs which usually indicates that a person has been to the gym and worked on toning their abs" (Harvey-Jenner, 2017) that are oftentimes communicated as "bikini body 'must haves'" (E. Pritchard, 2018) may reinforce these associations; more so, because multiple trends are often displayed in combination by (micro-)celebrities, who typically endorse or at least are connected to them. While journalists have linked the Toblerone tunnel to "the

extra-toned butts and thighs of, say, Emily Ratajkowski and Kylie and Kendall Jenner" (Zane, 2018), celebrities with great numbers of followers; a holiday photograph of singer Rita Ora in a bikini was described as "she's managed to tick the box of every social media craze: thigh gap, bikini bridge and in-your-face rib-cage" (Kelsey, 2017). Because research on body image trends apart from thigh gap and bikini bridge is scarce, future content and critical discourse analyses are needed to explore the details of this.

Given that body image trends such as the Toblerone tunnel not only emphasise a thin, but also a toned body, it is perhaps unsurprising that photographs of women in swimwear have been remarked also in the context of fitness. Indeed, participants in our qualitative study confirmed that they were most regularly exposed to beach body photographs in health- and fitness- rather than concrete beach body contexts (Kleim et al., 2019). A series of content analyses supports the prevalence of images of women in swimwear in fitspiration contexts on different SNS including Instagram and Pinterest.
Constituting an amalgamation of fitness and inspiration, #fitspiration, or short #fitspo, is another commonly promulgated hashtag on SNS (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017) and according to the website Top-Hashtags.com (2022), constituted a trending hashtag to couple with #beachbody in 2021. Fitspiration content generally seeks to encourage users to be fit and live a healthy lifestyle, e.g., by exercising and healthy eating. This may be linked to a positive - e.g., empowering and inspiring - purpose. However, content analyses have demonstrated how much of the visual content linked to healthy living and fitness featured rather homogeneous bodies that greatly adhered to the cultural norms of the fit and thin ideal (Boepple & Thompson, 2016; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018).

Fitspiration images typically feature slim, muscular and well-proportioned appearances, specifically of women engaging in exercising and wearing tight, accentuating sports attire such as swimwear shifting focus onto their fit and lean bodies (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Talbot et al., 2017; Lupton, 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). By so doing they may not differentiate much from thinspiration content. Lupton (2017, p. 6) remarked that "the hashtag #fitspo is often used by bikini, fitness or soft-porn models rather than average people who are advocates of working out". This points to the sexualised nature of many fitspiration images as discussed later. It also implies how much of the content is produced by professional models, that is women who correspond to the fit ideal and whose images might be professionally edited. These postings might reinforce one-sided associations between fitness, health and an attractive body in swimwear.
Nevertheless, given that fitspiration content is at the centre of "the booming social media sport ecosystem" (Stragier, Evens, & Mechant, 2015, p. 127), it is experienced by huge online fitness communities that consist of ordinary consumers, (recreational and professional) athletes and sports enthusiasts with the consequence of fitspiration content reaching great numbers of social media users.

The link between fitspiration content, mothers and the bikini-ready postpartum body unveils in social media hashtags such as #beachbodymama, #beachbodymom or #bikinimommychallenge testify to the prevalence of the narrative in this. Unlike traditional media, accomplishing and presenting a bikini-ready

postpartum body in the digital world is not exclusively reserved for celebrity mothers; instead, ordinary users might feel the same was expected of them.

As a result, streams of images featuring thin and toned mothers in bikinis are produced as part of idealised expectations projected onto mothers, i.e., "new momism" (S. J. Douglas & Michaels, 2004). This might, again, blur the lines between celebrity- and peer-generated content and preserve a highly idealised and purely appearance-based view on motherhood. Seeing this kind of content posted by ordinary others, women may feel specific pressure to discipline their bodies during and after pregnancy and to present an appealing bikini photo as ultimate proof of one's self-discipline, endurance and otherwise perfect mum-life; this strengthens the argument to consider mothers as an important subpopulation in beach body research, especially given the relative paucity of research on mothers, social media and body image in general.

To sum up, social media users are likely exposed to great numbers of photographs featuring young, thin, toned and tanned female bodies in bikinis or swimsuits in different contexts. For that, they do not need to actively follow or search for beach body hashtags. Owing to trending hashtags and social media algorithms, even users that do not intend to see this kind of content might frequently be exposed to it (Carrotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015).

Whenever the displayed figures correspond with the thin and fit body that is typically attributed to the ideal beach body, the link may automatically and perhaps unconsciously activate an individual's predisposed knowledge of what a beach body ought to look in the culture they inhabit. Just as in traditional media, beach body-related content on SNS thus needs to be considered in the wider context of society and culture.

3.2.2.2 The Sexualised 'Beach Babe/ Beach Beauty' Body Theme

With the sexualisation of girls and women in the mass media being well documented, Vendemia and DeAndrea (2018) argue that selfies were objectifying *per se*, as they emphasised the aesthetic of the human body as an object to be looked at; this might be enforced by revealing dress such as swimwear, accompanying sexually suggestive hashtags and captions, and posing as is often part of showcasing a certain body image trend. For instance, *Daily Mail* journalist Kelsey (2017) described model Bella Hadid in an Instagram photo as "artfully lying on her side, in a barely-there bikini, arms above her head to ensure maximum rib cage exposure" and Nicole Scherzinger as "arms raised languorously behind her head for maximum stretching, legs bent in and over — and a rib-cage looking like it's trying to break free…".

The sexualised nature of social media images displaying (fragmented) female bodies in swimwear has been confirmed in body image trends such as the bikini bridge (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018), the Toblerone tunnel (Miller, 2018) and sunburn art (Leasca, 2018); in fitspiration- (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), thinspiration- (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015) and general beach body content (Kleim et al., 2019).

Lupton (2018) remarked that thinspiration hashtags were commonly coupled with sexually suggestive hashtags such as #sexy and #hot. In a content analysis of 50 fitspiration images, Anne (2016) found that 50% of images showed women in revealing, gender-typical clothing such as bikinis or sports bras. The author suggested that women might try and suit the sexualised feminine ideal in order to please the male gaze in the largely male-dominated fitness world.

The popularity of social media hashtags such as #bikinisexy (280,854 posts as of 23 May 2021), #bikinibabes (385,502 posts as of 23 May 2021) and #beachbodybabe (2,480 posts as of 23 May 2021) confirm the association of female bodily exposure in modern swimwear with sexual attractiveness. Coupled with fitness, it may further link to health (Doshi, 2018), thus align to some one-sided messages identified in traditional media contexts; with the difference, that social media content may not exclusively feature professional models, athletes or celebrities, but also peers who may feel closer, hence better relatable and more trustworthy to individuals.

Arguably, images that emphasise and shift the viewers' attention to the abdominal, sexual area of the female body, as for instance encouraged in the recent trend to post "lelfies" (leg selfies) and "belfies" (belly selfies), are particularly sexualising. The consequence of these quasi-headless selfies is that "there is no smile to discern, no expression in the eyes; the images reduce the woman pictured to one body part" (Leboeuf, 2019, p. 7).

An overrepresentation of abdomen, thighs and parts of the pelvis and underrepresentation of chins and heads have been noted in thinspiration (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015) and fitspiration (Talbot et al., 2017) content; equally, bikini bridge and Toblerone tunnel focus on singularised parts of the lower female body. Anecdotal evidence suggests that images emphasising singularised body parts are relatively uncommon amongst ordinary users (Bell et al., 2018), which confirms Lupton's (2017) finding that fitspiration content was more often produced by professional models rather than average people. Nevertheless, seasonal body image trends and challenges such as bikini bridge and Toblerone tunnel would not have popularised in the way they did without great numbers of different users generating the respective content. These trends might, to a certain extent and temporarily, affect selfie-posting behaviours.

Furthermore, Drenten and Gurrieri (2018) observed that online pornographers had coupled the hashtag #bikinibridge with sexually suggestive hashtags such as #hotgirls and #sexieselfie. Thereby, the hashtag served as a means to disguise and deceive the circulation of sexual content, especially with sexually explicit hashtags being censored by SNS. As the authors stated, "in Western culture, a bikini, in and of itself, is not sexually suggestive. Yet, when paired with sexually explicit commentary or images, the bikini bridge term became a facilitator for online pornography" (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018, p. 62). The authors thus described the bikini bridge as "an impetus for sexual objectification" (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018, p. 61).

Similar findings could be obtained by Davis (2018) in a textual analysis of 600 Instagram posts from two much followed college accounts on Instagram, College Nationwide and Four Year Party. Davis

(2018) revealed how young female college students were frequently objectified by means of sexualised bikini photos. The author reported of several photographs featuring young women's backs with focus on their breasts or buttocks in thong bikinis. In line with Pritchard and Morgan (2012), sexualised bikini images notably arose in the context of Spring Break documentations. For instance, a popular video was described as follows: "A young woman in sunglasses and a black bikini top is pressing her breasts together with her hands. Meanwhile a young man is kneeling before her with his mouth at her breasts. Another hand pours a bottle of vodka down the woman's breasts while the man drinks it from between them. The caption reads, "Who need cups when you got boobs? NO ONE!" (Davis, 2018, p. 5). Even where images were not overtly sexually suggestive, textual elements such as captions and hashtags would shift the viewer's attention to the depicted women's buttocks or their identity as nameless sexual "beach babes", which confirms Drenten and Gurrieri's (2018) findings regarding bikini bridge content. Davis (2018) concluded that female sexualisation, greatly endorsed through bikini photos, was prominent on these sites.

The sexualisation of female bikini photos has been discussed in light of some heavily contested social media-connected mobile applications such as "Pikini" and "Badabing"; those were temporarily connected with SNS such as Facebook and, using image-analysing software and algorithms, allowed individuals to filter and save photographs that included bikinis or other swimwear from their newsfeeds (A. Brown, 2015; Romano, 2012). Because of the risk of pornographic abuse, the apps were eventually removed from app stores (A. Brown, 2015). Nevertheless, artificial intelligence and object recognition embedded into smart technology continues to raise privacy concerns regarding beach body images. For instance, in 2017, a tweet went viral in which an iPhone user had discovered a search function called "brasserie" in their photo app that would filter images of individuals in various states of bodily undress (Hern, 2017). While Apple announced that the categorisation of semi-naked images remained private, Hern (2017) remarked that images uploaded on platforms such as Google were automatically searched from artificial intelligences with the risk of users losing control. The steady development of and interconnectedness between social media platforms, app- and device software might thus lead to an increased risk for users to lose control over private (beach body) images and unwillingly become objects of strangers' surveillant gaze. Equally, the inflamed controversies require software developers to adjust privacy settings and consider the ethics of their decision-making.

Another emerging theme is the self-representation of female athletes on social media who, as aforementioned, are carriers of swimwear and who also heavily endorse fitspiration content. Because female athletes in the mass media are still underrepresented and often displayed in passive, sexualised ways, professional female athletes and young amateurs have been found using social media to demonstrate their active participation in sports by posting, sharing and engaging with images that differ from those depicted in traditional media (Olive, 2015; Shreffler, Hancock, & Schmidt, 2016). As Olive (2015, p. 103) in an ethnographic study of visual representations of surfing culture on Instagram noted, "the point of difference with these images is that they are of recreational women actively going surfing, rather than professional female surfers posing passively beside surfboards or modelling bikinis, which

remain common in mainstream and social surf media". By so doing, they may challenge hegemonic masculinity as well as stereotypical sexualised depictions of bikini-clad female athletes in traditional mass media that commonly emphasise heterosexual attractiveness while their sportive achievements are trivialised (Olive, 2015). Importantly, they also show what even non-professional bodies can do at the beach, which might send powerful messages about physical activity in blue environments. Equally, professional athletes may take the opportunity to emphasise their sportive and social competencies signalling that it is more important what they do rather than how they look (Shreffler et al., 2016). This is a common means to advocate against rigid gender norms, discrimination, and conventional hegemonic masculine values in the sports business (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018).

In contrast to this, Olive (2015) reported of sexualised, idealised images on Instagram that displayed notions of heteronormative femininity, central to which were female surfers' exposed bodies or body parts in swimwear; for instance, bikini-clad bums were identified as a popular motive of photo-editing to remove imperfections (Olive, 2015). Also, "captions and comments below images regularly sexualise pictured bodies further, with words like 'hot', 'babe', 'rig', 'peach' or 'sexy' and heart-eyed emojis appearing regularly" (Olive, 2015, p. 105).

Interestingly, Shreffler and colleagues (2016) found that this form of self-sexualisation was more likely to happen in team-sport rather than individual-sport athletes; however, they only analysed female athletes' avatar pictures on Twitter, which may not be representative of all contents that individuals share on social media, especially on photo-based platforms such as Instagram. When, in a more extensive content analysis, Coche (2017) analysed profile-, cover- and background pictures of athletes on Twitter, she presented mixed findings suggesting that many female athletes put primary focus on presenting their femininity rather than athleticism to self-brand and attract followers. Thereby, 5% of women wore revealing clothes such as bikinis in their cover photos. While this is a relatively low proportion, again, regular posting activities on photo-based platforms such as Instagram with stronger visual focus than Twitter may encourage the sharing of more sexualised and revealing photographs, as observed by Olive (2015).

Just as in traditional media, there resultantly appears to be a tension in the way physically active female bodies in swimwear are discursively constructed and (re-)produced on social media. It seems that in order to increase one's visibility and popularity on SNS, both professional athletes and amateurs readily self-sexualise, even if they are interested in asserting themselves as voices of (surf) cultural authority and in challenging the tradition of hegemonic masculinity in (water) sports.

3.2.2.3 The Disciplined (Bikini Boot Camp) Body Theme

With photo-editing programmes widely available for ordinary users, pictures of an ideal beach body technically can be produced on social media much easier and quicker than in real life. Instead of instead investing time and efforts into exhaustive beach body diets and exercising, users might choose to slim down and tone their beach bodies digitally. In other words, modern technology allows women to present

an ideal beach body on SNS with their own bodies not even looking half that way. One could thus reason that the disciplined beach body in a social media context might predominantly be a digitally enhanced and/or altered one.

However, our focus group discussions showed a strong relationship between online and offline behaviour, such that posting beach body images online was almost exclusively reserved for users who already had a slim, fit and attractive body in real life (Kleim et al., 2019). Not only reported female users of pressure to get beach body ready *before* taking acceptable photographs; they also described that exposing a perfect physique in swimwear mattered more on social media than in beach settings, which made an optimisation of the already perfect photograph imperative before posting it. In line with the finding that beach body images posted by peers were considered more credible than those of celebrities, easy photo manipulation techniques were widely accepted amongst ordinary users (e.g., applying a filter to look more tanned). Artificially slimming one's beach body down, however, was despised and resonates with the condition to look good before taking and posting an acceptable photograph. In other words, a traditionally *and* digitally disciplined beach body appeared as a widely accepted legitimisation for female users to expose their beach body images to the critical eyes of online communities (Kleim et al., 2019). In line with previous findings, this suggests that beach body images posted on SNS might to large extents adhere to sociocultural understandings of the ideal beach body.

Importantly, not only photographs of the successfully transformed body in swimwear are displayed online. A considerable share of postings addresses how users prepare their bodies for summerly display. A random search for hashtags co-existing to #beachbodyready or #bikiniready as of 23 May 2021 included #bikiniprep (1,346,141 posts), #beachbodyperformance (78,005 posts), #missionbeachbody (42,042 posts) and #beachbodytransformation (24,051 posts). Although content and critical discourse analyses are needed to explore these hashtags profoundly, the wording and the frequency with which these hashtags are used suggest that Jordan's (2007) theme of the disciplined (bikini boot camp) body prevails on social media.

While basically everything that is done offline to get beach body ready might be documented and shared online, some practices seem more salient on SNS than others. In line with previous findings, a study on the consumption of health and fitness-related social media content by Carrotte et al. (2015) suggested that female users were frequently exposed to diet plans, weight loss- and fitness challenges such as Kayla Itsines' Bikini Body Challenge. Carried out by large online communities, this type of content is typically industry-endorsed and linked to a multiplicity of digital services specifically targeted at women who aim to get beach body ready. To give an example, the billion-dollar US-American "health" and "wellness" company Beachbody Co employs about 340,000 independent beach body coaches who use social media to sell workout videos (e.g. intensive bootcamps), shakes and dietary supplements to health and fitness followers. As Debter (2018) in a Forbes article described, "the playbook goes something like this: Lose weight with Beachbody by doing at-home workouts and drinking the shakes. Share it on social media. Use your story to sell products and recruit new customers coaches. Repeat."

This is reflective of general fitspiration discourse that endorses health and wellbeing and at the same time emphasises weight loss ("thin praise"), encourages dieting, eating guilt, obsessive exercising ("fit praise") and self-control while stigmatising weight gain and body fat (Boepple, Ata, Rum, & Thompson, 2016; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017).

Beachbody owns a community-based-in-home fitness and nutrition brand, "Beachbody on Demand" with about 2.5 million subscribers (S. Saunders, 2015) that regularly awards women who successfully participated in one of their beach body challenges and who lost a certain amount of weight in a short period of time following specific exercising and nutrition programmes. Just as in traditional media, specific praise is typically dedicated to bikini-ready postpartum bodies (S. Saunders, 2015). It is noteworthy though that the postpartum bikini body theme in itself is backed by another multiplicity of beach body-related websites, blogs, apps, dieting and fitness programmes dedicated exclusively to mothers (e.g., bikinibodymommy.com); content of which is regularly shared onto SNS, e.g., in the form of before-and-after-imagery.

The centrality of food in health and fitness postings has been well documented. Status updates of one's personal physical activity and before-and-after images are commonly used to document a person's bodily transformation through "healthy" eating and strict fitness regimens (Carrotte et al., 2015; Kleim et al., 2019; Stragier et al., 2015). Food consumption, therein, is typically seen as a means to acquire a lean, allegedly healthy fit-ideal body as greatly displayed in the accompanying images: "When the people in #fitspo-tagged images refer to food, it is invariably low-calorie, high-protein 'clean' items, such as green juices, protein shakes, salads or egg-white omelettes (accompanied by such hashtags as #eatclean, #health or #healthylife)" (Lupton, 2017, p. 7). Different types of low-fat, high-protein and low-calorie meals are typically emphasised in beach body and summer discourse, often endorsed by (micro-)celebrities and accompanied by allegedly health-positive captions and buzzwords such as "get fit for the summer", "no pain, no gain", or simply "wellness" (Atayero, 2021; Kiefer, 2020).

Social media users may as well post about healthy meals when the true focus of the image is on their attractive bikini body rather than food (Kleim et al., 2019). Health and fitness discourse on social media thus normalises an appearance-focused lifestyle, central to which are diets and workouts aimed at creating a fit-ideal body that is deemed acceptable when exposed in swimwear.

With beach body trends such as the bikini bridge closely connected to thinspiration and pro-anorexia discourse, there is also a risk for users to be exposed to extreme weight loss and harmful pro-eating disorder messages that clearly extend normative beach body ready discourse. This is contrary to traditional media given that the pro-anorexic community exists exclusively online (Boero & Pascoe, 2012) and may misuse appearance trends and hashtags related to the thin beach body ideal to live their obsession with thinness (Drenten & Guerrieri, 2018).

Related to that, Beytin (2017) described how prospective US-American bikini competitors posted content of their bodily transformation on SNS. With fat loss being a central goal amongst competitors, postings greatly focused on dieting and exercising along with pictures, videos or video logs ("vlogs") documenting their body-in-progress. The content has attracted many followers in recent years, with

those gaining most attention "who share the fastest and most dramatic physical results, and […] who tend to display more pictures of their fit bodies in limited clothing", most notably in bikinis (Beytin, 2017, p. 9).

Oftentimes linked to a set timespan or metrics to make a person's "success" measurable, the documentation and disclosure of a person's beach body transformation onto SNS relates to the use of self-tracking apps that allow individuals to quantify their self; for instance, by measuring, recording and sharing intimate information such as calorie intake, level of physical activity, weight, and mental health parameters such as mood (Lupton, 2016). It can thus be considered a form of digital self-monitoring and self-surveillance (Stragier et al., 2015).

Sharing to SNS what is deemed as "health information" is heavily encouraged and normalised by those apps and promoted as what a healthy, modern woman does (Doshi, 2018). Indeed, the use of health and fitness applications and sharing of physical parameters with online fitness communities, fans and/or followers on SNS has become a popular feature of individuals' 21st century recreational sporting experiences (Stragier et al., 2015).

In an analysis of health and fitness apps such as the "4 Minute Workout: Beach Bikini Body - Women's Tabata", the Brazilian Butt app, and the Bikini Booty Workout app, Doshi (2018) identified the beach body as a central fitness goal attainable through specific workout and dietary programmes. The author further observed that idealised and fragmented, i.e., objectified female beach bodies - most notably featuring flat stomachs, small waists, full breasts and butts covered in bikinis or swimsuits - covered the icons of many health and fitness apps. The ideal beach body resultantly served as a powerful symbol to attract attention and, by testifying to fitness as a lifestyle, grant social approval and loyalty from health and fitness communities (Duttweiler, 2016). The risk is that constructions of "this bikini body - achieved by working on various body parts - perpetuates discourses that see the female body as fragmented rather than a cohesive whole and is antithetical to viewing health in holistic terms" (Doshi, 2018, p. 188).

Confirming the objectification of the beach body in this context, Duttweiler (2016), in another study, noted how it was visually and discursively constructed as an aspirational, hard earned, disciplined and castigated object in those apps. But just as in traditional media, the beach body was also promoted as an ultimate symbol for health and sexual appeal (Doshi, 2018).

By doing so, fitspiration discourse may perpetuate similar inconsistent, deceptive appearance-related messages and misleading associations between thinness, fitness and health - or physical functionality and attractiveness - as previously noted in traditional magazine and advertising contexts.

Researchers have thus described the hashtag #fitspiration as an allegedly healthy antidote to controversial hashtags such as #thinspiration and #bonespiration. Backed by an abundance of images featuring fit and thin-idealised, often fragmented bodies in swimwear, they may enforce the idea of the female (beach) body as a transformable project, which is promoted as part of modern women's self-care and empowerment with the ultimate goal to look good and feel good respectively. Doshi (2018) admitted that women may choose whether or not they access and use health and fitness apps to pursue an ideal beach body; however, "the implication is that thin, bikini-ready bodies are what women want"

(Doshi, 2018, p. 190). In case of the postpartum bikini body, it may even go as far as link women to being a good mother.

What is more, anecdotal evidence suggests that the look good: feel good mentality applied to cosmetic surgery and tanning prevails on SNS, too. For instance, in an analysis of 306 Instagram posts by UK cosmetic providers, Hermans (2021a) found that cosmetic surgery was normalised online. Just as in traditional media, there was a discursive focus on women's empowerment and agency, oftentimes in combination with depictions of idealised models in bikinis. Repeated exposure to discourse like this may reinforce the normalisation of cosmetic surgery as a means for women to get beach body ready. Mingoia, Hutchinson, Gleaves, Corsini, and Wilson (2017) observed that the tanned beauty ideal was ubiquitously displayed on social media. Although a darker body tan might be easily produced using photo-editing programmes (Kleim et al., 2019), images of women in bikinis on the beach who deliberately expose their bodies to the sun or even sunburn, as suggested in the sunburn art trend, may encourage others to replicate this behaviour, serious health risks disregarded. More so, when sunbathing on the beach is linked to self-care, relaxation and health rather than health-risking consequences. Concerns have thus been raised about the normalisation, with which tanned skin and tanning behaviour prevails online (Mingoia et al., 2017). The existing studies on tanning and cosmetic surgery have focused on health communication with no specific links to the concept of the ideal beach body. However, given that many women are motivated to transform their bodies in order to confidently display their bodies on the beach during the summer, analyses are needed to investigate the links.

A final aspect worth highlighting is that, unlike traditional media, beach body content is persistently shared on SNS. Doshi (2018, p. 188) observed that the ideal beach body in health and fitness apps was promoted as "a year-round ideal for women" given that it was always bikini season somewhere. Equally, in an analysis of 1,050 fitspiration postings on Pinterest, Simpson and Mazzeo (2016) found that most pins (71.8%) consisted of appearance-related messages such as "summer bodies are made in the winter". Based on messages like that, the objective to accomplish an ideal beach body stays relevant not only immediately prior to summer, but throughout the entire year. These findings raise the question as to what extent Griffiths et al.'s (2021) concept of seasonal body image applies to the online world and to users who frequently interact with beach body content on SNS. This aspect should be considered in appearance-focused content and discourse analyses, especially when posted in combination with summer- and beach body-related hashtags.

In summary, normative beach body discourse prevails in a multiplicity of social media contexts ranging from health and fitness ones to body image trends and are encapsulated in a wider digital environment of news websites, blogs, apps and the likes that further reinforce popular conceptualisation of the ideal female beach body in Western culture.

Beach body commercials and advertisements have not been addressed in this section because they are supposed to conform to traditional media adverts. Nevertheless, they may pop up on a user's newsfeed and complement those messages. While not all of them may apply beach body terminology

or explicitly link to the ideal beach body concept, they may accumulate to a powerful and consistent message about how female bodies in swimwear ought to look in the culture they inhabit. That given, normative beach body discourse on social media might take place similarly pervasively as in traditional media.

3.2.2.4 Critical Reflection In Light of Body Positivity

Just as in traditional media, these findings must be discussed with regard to the body positivity movement as a central component of online feminist discourse that has gained traction on SNS and on Instagram in particular (Darwin & Miller, 2020; Lazuka, Wick, Keel, & Harriger, 2020).
Body-positive content has been put forward as an antidote to the normative thin, young and toned body ideal by displaying more diverse, realistic-looking appearances on social media, for instance using hashtags like #effyourbeautystandards, #allbodiesaregoodbodies, #bodypositivity, #bodypositive or in short #bopo (Alentola, 2017; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). Analyses of body-positive content on Instagram revealed that between 31.67% (N=640) (Cohen et al., 2019) and 59% (N=381) (Alentola, 2017) showed women in revealing or very revealing dress including swimwear[8]; Lazuka et al. (2020) even observed somewhat revealing outfits in more than 90% of postings (N=246), of which 16.3% consisted of swimsuits; contrary, only 2% featured baggy clothing. which indicates a general tendency in body-positive postings to reveal and accentuate much of the body.

Wearing a bikini regardless of looks and sharing images of this embodied experience serves as a particularly powerful visual statement as it allows to expose many bodily flaws without being perceived as obscene and by so doing queer normative beauty concepts such as of the ideal beach body and challenge social stigma regarding non-normative bodies in swimwear on the beach. Instead of hiding bodies that do not succumb to the social norm, they aim to express diversity, inclusion, body confidence and self-love regardless of looks, trying to inspire others to feel the same bodily freedom (Alentola, 2017).
In the following, some concrete case examples reaching from social media activism linked to Protein World's beach body ready advert, through to postings and comments initiated to de-stigmatising and normalising fat, postpartum and visibly different bodies in swimwear will be discussed.

The Protein World advert in the London tube, as previously noted, led to considerable social media activism by ordinary users, activists and companies. The first post that went viral was by Hannah Atkinson who remarked on Twitter "This advert pretty much sums up everything that I despise about how we treat and value women's bodies" (Scholz & Weijo, 2016). It was retweeted 557 times and marked as favourite 505 times (Scholz & Weijo, 2016). Using hashtags such as #everybodyisbeachbodyready, #beachbodyforeverybody or #everybodysready, many women took pictures of themselves in swimwear standing next to the advert in the London tube and posted them on

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[8] It should be noted that revealing and very revealing dress in these studies was subsumed in one variable, with swimwear constituting one exemplary dress alongside revealing fitness attire and others.

social media in order to demonstrate what real bodies in swimwear looked like; photographs featuring defaced posters were shared as well (Davies, 2015). By so doing, activists tried and reinforced the message that all women needed to do in order to be beach body ready, was to put on a bikini and go to the beach, regardless of how they looked. The outrage caused by Protein World's beach body ready advert received international media coverage and the concept of the ideal female beach body was probably never more directly and intensely contested by great numbers of people around the world than in the summer of 2015. Although the activism did not convince the ASA to ban the advert and re-conceptualise what we popularly understand as a beach body, hashtags such as #everybodyisbeachbodyready have since persisted on social media, where activists continue to campaign for more diverse and inclusive ideas of women in swimwear.

Marcus (2016) found that bikini images posted by members of the fat acceptance community were oftentimes accompanied by hashtags such as #fatkini and #loveyourcurves and included body-positive captions and affirmations to embrace one's body regardless of looks.

Also, the social pressure to transform one's body for summer was addressed. The author describes, "one meme repurposed a message related to achieving a summer body with the quote: 'Need to be skinny for summer.' The word 'skinny' is crossed out and replaced with the word, 'bodypositive', while the word 'summer' is replaced with 'always'" (Marcus, 2016, p. 7f.). Inspirational (self-compassion) quotes like this are typical Love Your Body messages on SNS and clearly differentiate from disciplined beach body discourse in that they promote self-love, kindness and body appreciation regardless of a certain aspirational body ideal (Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017). These are oftentimes embedded in or linked to other approaches, such as anti-dieting, intuitive eating, mindfulness and Health at Every Size (HAES).

In a netnographic analysis of 922 blog posts composed by on fatshionistas, i.e. fashion influencers of the fat acceptance community, Gurrieri and Cherrier (2013) also revealed that the sharing of "aqua porko" (fat synchronised swimming) images was common to queer the idea that women needed to conform to a thin-and-fit body shape in order to enjoy and engage into water sports and look attractive in swimwear.

Relatedly, using the hashtag #mermaidthighs, body-positive activists encouraged "people to love their legs and embrace their thick thighs by comparing legs to a mermaid tail" (Scott, 2016). Mermaid thighs were a response to body image trends such as the thigh gap and the Toblerone tunnel, which had left women frequently being body shamed on SNS if they had not complied. As the name suggests, activists aimed to encourage women to expose their legs at the beach like a mermaid, regardless of whether they had a visible space between their thighs. The trend quickly gained traction and on Twitter was celebrated as "one of the best body trends" in 2016 (Scott, 2016).

Similar action was taken by body-positive activist Julie Johnson in the summer of 2017, when she started a hashtag campaign called #SummerofCellulite. Through this she encouraged women to stop hiding their Cellulite and instead confidently expose their legs in short and exposing clothing such as swimwear (Lanquist, 2017). Her initiative inspired other women to post images of their bodies in bikinis

and expose their Cellulite along with self-loving, body-positive messages (Lanquist, 2017). Research has not yet covered these trends. But given that especially activists with larger bodies have been found to display their full rather than fragmented bodies and that hashtag themes may not be significantly associated with skin exposure or body-revealing dress (Webb, Vinoski, Bonar, Davies, & Etzel, 2017), it would be interesting to compare the visual contents of thinness- versus body positivity-inspired body image trends.

Furthermore, Entwistle and Wissinger (2021) observed mothers posting photos of their bikini-clad postpartum bodies on Instagram to challenge the idea of the bikini-ready postpartum body and to demonstrate that it was okay to wear a bikini whilst pregnant, too: "A standard aesthetic trope shows the mum body in semi-naked selfies (often in bikinis or underwear) to reveal pregnancy bumps or the postpartum body with "mum-tum" "rolls" and "cellulite" and reflecting on the immediate and long-term impact of pregnancy and breastfeeding (and sleepless nights) on their body" (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2021, p. 25). Whilst the postpartum body, as previously noted, appears as a salient theme in beach body-related media discourse, pregnant bodies in swimwear are rarely addressed nor shown. This research therefore is of particular importance as it adds pregnant women as another relevant, oftentimes marginalised subpopulation to be studied with regards to bodily exposure and the beach. Entwistle and Wissinger's (2021) study resonates with controversies about the postpartum body that arose after Bugaboo, a Dutch buggy company, had posted a photo on social media featuring Dutch model and mother Ymre Stiekema going for a run in a park with her Bugaboo stroller wearing no more than a bikini. The accompanying captions on Facebook and Instagram praised the model for her fit and allegedly healthy lifestyle and her body.

The postings led to backlashes by mothers who responded with comments such as "I prefer running naked" (Valinsky, 2015) and "you can almost see her uterus" (K. Miller, 2015). Responses demonstrate an awareness amongst mothers to be confronted with images and expectations regarding a bikini-ready postpartum body. Showing a physically active rather than sexually posing mum in a bikini does not seem to alter this effect; just as in previous research, the last comment also indicates again that the perceived appropriateness of exposing a bikini photo depends on context. That is not to say that the advert would have sparked fewer outrage if Bugaboo had featured the bikini-clad mother in a beach context because much of the criticism centred around the normalisation of the fit-ideal postpartum body.

In addition to this, Rademacher (2018) investigated the posting of bikini photos to de-stigmatise and normalise visibly different bodies amongst people with ostomies; that is patients who, as a result of a medical procedure, have an opening in their abdominal body through which bodily wastes are removed (Rademacher, 2018).
To de-stigmatise the condition that is usually covered in everyday life, Bethany Townsend, aspiring model and ostomate, posted a selfie of herself in a black bikini on a British Crohn's disease Facebook page in June 2014. The photograph generally adhered to normative bikini selfies featuring "a young, attractive (white) women looking her best captured in some form of relaxing [holiday] activity", passively

lounging in a chair on the beach (Rademacher, 2018, p. 3863); what differentiated the photograph from the "norm" were two visible colostomy bags and abdominal surgery scars. By posting this selfie, the model raised awareness and normalised her health condition as part of her identity and personhood; as something many people experience and that, albeit socially stigmatised, may not hinder them from confidently exposing their bodies in swimwear and enjoying a day on the beach.

The holiday photograph quickly went viral seemingly resonating with many people beyond the originally addressed Crohn's disease Facebook community. Three years on, it had generated 246,000 likes and had been shared 20,000 times on Facebook (Rademacher, 2018). Bethany Townsend's photograph by far does not constitute the only body-positive selfie posted by a person with a visible difference. For instance, there are social media communities build around displaying women with visual disfigurements initiated by MIGA swimwear (@migaswimwear), a swimwear fashion line designed specifically for people with disabilities with 4,636 Instagram followers (as of 3 July 2021), and Love Disfigure (@love_disfigure), a body positivity account with 17.2k followers (as of 3 July 2021) by Sylvia MacGregor who regularly shares swimwear photographs such as of their Outdoor Swim Challenge in 2019. McGregor, too, was amongst a group of bikini-clad women with scars, skin conditions, disabilities and other visible differences who walked the runway in London's Trafalgar Square as part of a campaign by @the.realcatwalk, "a guerrilla-style fashion show in response to Victoria's Secret lingerie show" (Laws, 2019) who are followed by another 5,553 Instagram users (as of 3 July 2021) and have initiated similar social media-endorsed campaigns on the New York Times Square and Brooklyn Bridge (TheRealCatwalk, 2021). Despite rising numbers of diverse, inclusive advertising campaigns as remarked previously, individuals with visual disfigurements are still greatly marginalised in public spaces, especially when dressed in revealing swimwear. They thus constitute another crucial subpopulation to be considered within beach body research.

These cases collectively demonstrate female social media users' awareness and resistance against pressure to conform to a narrow (beach) body ideal during the summer. Following Cohen et al.'s (2019, p. 53) finding that "almost half of the imagery of human bodies displayed attributes incongruent with societal beauty ideals such as cellulite, stomach rolls, stretch marks and skin blemishes" and a growing body positivity trend to post "Instagram vs. reality images" (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019) and parodies of unrealistic celebrity postings (Slater, Cole, & Fardouly, 2019); active followers of body-positive social media content might likely get to see a variety of non-normative, non-idealised female bodies in swimwear that may adhere more to natural bodies exposed at the beach than other mass-mediated depictions. More so because many are of large(r) size and featuring ethnicities other than the Western-centric ideal (Cohen et al., 2019). Jordan's (2007) concept of the homogenised beach body, therefore, does not seem to apply to body-positive visual content.

Nevertheless, most body-positive images have been found featuring young women in their 20s (Cohen et al., 2019; Lazuka et al., 2020) and as Darwin and Miller (2020) noted, there are different more or less visible action frames coexisting within the body positivity movement (e.g., Mainstream Body Positivity,

Radical Body Positivity, Body Neutrality) that make it multi-faceted and sometimes divergent. Especially mainstream body positivity has been criticised for privileging white, fat women over thin women, women of colour, sexual and ethnic minorities; both age and body diversity displayed within this faction of the movement might resultantly be limited. This has, in parts, been confirmed by content analyses. Indeed, Lazuka et al. (2020) remarked that almost 80% of postings somewhat adhered to the mainstream beauty ideal displaying body features such as clear skin, white teeth and shiny hair, but also body tone and small waists. The disclosure of visible disabilities and of visible differences apart from stretch marks and cellulite was rare (Alentola, 2017; Cohen et al., 2019; Darwin & Miller, 2020). For instance, as little as 0.8% of images analysed by Lazuka and associates (2020) contained body hair. It must, however, be acknowledged that this bodily feature in particular may not always be easy to assess on a photograph and although the body hair has been used as a political statement against cultural beauty and gender norms by feminists in the past, many women remove body hair for hygiene reasons (Craig & Gray, 2019). Moreover, grooming does not exclude body positivity, but may as well be part of it.

While African-American/Black women represented at least more than a third in Cohen et al.'s (2019) analysis, Alentola (2017) remarked an underrepresentation of Muslim women, which she ascribed to their hesitation toward revealing much of the body. This is insofar noteworthy that women in burkinis might be underrepresented on SNS as well, an aspect worth to be explored in future research.

There is also the risk of body-positive hashtags being used in postings that do not conform to the body positivity concept. A relatively large subgroup has been observed in body-positive online forums though that interacted with topics related to the thin mainstream ideal including body weight (e.g., thin praise and weight loss), cosmetics, exercising and dieting (Lazuka et al., 2020; Rodgers, Meyer, & McCaig, 2020). This includes postings, in which body transformation toward a thinner, fitter ideal is interpreted as a way to increase body confidence (Alentola, 2017).

Resultantly, whilst body-positive postings in Cohen and associates' (2019) study fulfilled at least one criterium of the positive body image construct, an inflationary use of body positivity as a trending hashtag might lead to misinterpretations and contradictory messages similar to those found in some traditional media contexts. Those may, to a certain extent, limit the heterogeneous nature of body-positive beach body images and add a risk that even users following body-positive hashtags may be exposed to unhealthy beach body messages.

The sexualised bikini body theme is controversial. Although a tendency to display full bodies rather than fragmented body parts has been observed (Lazuka et al., 2020; Webb et al., 2017), about one third of body-positive images analysed by Cohen et al. (2019) and Lazuka et al. (2020) and more than 40% in Alentola's (2017) study portrayed women in feminine, objectifying ways, oftentimes in sexually suggestive poses. Depictions of bodies-in-action were rare (Lazuka et al., 2020).

Posing in suggestive manners wearing no more than a swimsuit or bikini might be seen as an expression of body confidence, self-empowerment, affirmation and pride, and a liberation from social standards and oppressions for the subject, as historically confirmed in the development of modern female swimwear (Murray, 2016; Tiidenberg, 2014). These images suggest that non-normative bodies

can be, and *feel,* sexy, too. Some have described the posting of sexy selfies as a "practice of freedom" for women (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015).

Others have, however, argued that women may still feel pressure to adhere to cultural norms of femininity in order to receive value, acceptance and recognition in the society they inhabit (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013). They may contribute to the commodification of female bodies as sexual objects (Murray, 2015; Webb et al., 2017) and enforce societal understandings of the beach as a sexualised space, in which women play a passive, possibly oppressed role. Importantly, sexualised images miss the point of displaying physically active women at the beach, e.g., engaging into water sports, which would emphasise the diverse experiences of embodiment that blue spaces hold part from sunbathing and posing.

As regards Jordan's (2007) concept of the disciplined beach body, body-positive text-based content has been found aligning to the theoretical conceptualisation of positive body image offered by Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) mentioned previously (Cohen et al., 2019). Instead of appeals to discipline and transform the body for public display during the summer, body positive content may encourage readers to accept themselves as they are and confidently expose their bodies no matter their looks. Although certain body-positive postings are appearance-focused and others might promote commercial products of some kind, appeals for excessive dieting and exercising to get beach body ready are rather unlikely (Cohen et al., 2019). Body-positive beach body discourse might thus oppose normative discourse by offering a perspective on human bodies that average women may better identify with than one-sided depictions of extremely thin and fit bodies.

Collectively, body-positive beach body discourse on SNS seems more nuanced and representations potentially closer to real bodies at the beach than in normative media discourse. Just as in traditional media contexts, exposing non-normative semi-naked bodies may not only receive support though, but also spark public controversies and body shaming. Body shaming starts with the perception of non-normative bodily details, which are central to body-positive content, but many cultures and societies have maintained negative associations for decades. Body shaming is common on social media as well as in real life, and as Cassidy (2019) notes, sometimes it comes as hybrid when real life observations are documented online. Scholz and Weijo (2016, p. 613) even described social media as an "ideological battlefield" of "hyper-polarisations", mostly between supporters and critics of the body positivity movement.

This two-edged sword became visible in almost all studies mentioned previously. Existing analyses of body-positive content typically identify images of larger women in swimwear in two oppositional contexts: either to symbolise body confidence/fat acceptance or in postings stigmatising weight and body fat (Cohen et al., 2019; Lazuka et al., 2020), which confirms previous findings of this thesis. To give some examples, a larger woman surfing in a bikini posted "…when I see a belly or fold in surf shorts I love it because I am moving my body in amazing ways because it's strong, capable and healthy" (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 53). In contrast to this focus on body confidence and body functionality, images

featuring larger women in bikinis were accompanied with stigmatising captions like "not everybody should be in a swimsuit" (Cohen et al., 2019, p. 51) or "just your average beached whale" (Lazuka et al., 2020).

Weight stigma and fat shaming, too, became visible after Gillette had posted a photo of bikini-clad plus-size fashion, fitness and lifestyle blogger Anna O'Brien with the caption "Go out there and slay the day" (Cerullo, 2019). The company experienced a severe backlash on SNS and was accused of irresponsible behaviour by glamorising obesity, which was ascribed to myriad physical consequences ranging from type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular disease up to mortality (Cerullo, 2019). Notwithstanding that, great support was expressed from body-positive communities. As of June 2021, the post had received 11.9k likes and was shared 5.700 times on Twitter alone.

Further controversies between supporters and critics of body positivity revealed in terms of the Bugaboo advert. Valinsky (2015) noted that "the Internet outrage cycle moved from backlash, to backlash *against* the backlash". While many women resonated with the criticism against the advert, others would accuse commenters to be jealous of the model's body shape and, in line with the company's statement, praised Stiekema for her active lifestyle and her fit, attractive postpartum body. To note, Drenten and Gurrieri (2018) observed similar conflicts between pro-bikini bridge and anti-bikini bridge parties that resulted in a cycle of thin-shaming and fat-shaming.

Critics of Protein World's beach body ready advert were accused of *fit*-shaming (Scholz & Weijo, 2016) and it is interesting how the fitness aspect in this debate dominated over the weight loss aspect, although the advert clearly promoted Protein World's weight loss collection. In light of previous findings, one possible explanation for this could be the trending fitspiration discourse that oftentimes incorporates preoccupation with weight and shape. This was clearly endorsed by Protein World who, corresponding with Bugaboo, stated that their advert had aimed to encourage "a healthier, fitter nation" (Davies, 2015). Following this, "thousands of Twitter users voiced their support for the brand, whose Twitter follower base grew by 15% over three weeks" (Scholz & Weijo, 2016, p. 613); moreover, Protein World experienced increases in sales and therefore decided against removing the ad, a decision that was later backed by the Advertising Standards Authority (Davies, 2015; Sweney, 2015). This case seconds the socio-economic relevance of the beach body and testifies to the power of trending buzzwords such as fitness, wellness and health, through which weight loss- and body transformation-appeals are readily accepted by large communities, in which body fat is feared.

Not only body shape may evoke controversies though. Rademacher (2018) found mixed reactions when exploring how people reacted to Townsend's ostomy selfie as covered by news media[9]. Those were reaching from emotional support and self-reflection through to disgust and anxiety. Critics notably judged Townsend for "choosing to wear a bikini rather than a more 'appropriate' one piece swimsuit"

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[9] For the record, it was, for instance, listed amongst "the most inspiring bikini photos you'll see this summer" (The Daily Mail), whilst others described Townsend as "Internet Sensation" (abc news) and inspiration (The Huffington Post) (Rademacher, 2018).

(Rademacher, 2018, p.3874) that would have covered more of her condition; although all sorts of bodies are exposed at the beach, these reactions are indicative of lacking familiarity and tolerance about seeing non-normative bodies in revealing dress and testifies to the fact that these are still underrepresented and marginalised in the popular mass media landscape.

In sum, the controversies sparked by publicly exposed non-normative bodies in swimwear are in line with previous findings and confirm how deeply ingrained the ideal female beach body is in our contemporary society. While body-positive users on SNS may expose and be exposed to non-normative bodies in swimwear on a regular base, thin-and-toned, idealised female bodies in swimwear are a commonly disseminated motive in health, fitness, fashion and beauty contexts with thousands of active followers; more so, they are at the centre of trending body image crazes such as the bikini bridge, oftentimes endorsed by much followed (micro-)celebrities and supported by an overall discourse of summer diets and bikini workout programmes that may spark appearance obsession, unhealthy behaviours and consumption.

What beach body messages individual users are exposed to, ultimately depends on multiple variables, including SNS usage, people, hashtags, and themes they follow, their personal social media settings, and complex social media algorithms. Exploring individual users' subjective perception of the beach bodies they view whilst engaging with SNS thus seems vital to study the potential effects of those images on women's body image.

Given that depictions of thin-idealised bodies have, however, been found dominating amongst the huge amounts of images shared via SNS every day (Slater et al., 2019), normative beach body messages on SNS are comparable to those conveyed through traditional media. Together, they may form a powerful one-sided idealised beach body discourse that is normalised by a century of appearance-focused beach body history and backed by million-dollar industries that construct it as a consumable lifestyle, a desirable choice and a result of successful body work.

CHAPTER 4: Exposure Effects of Different Beach Bodies on Women's Body Image

The ambivalent beach body messages conveyed through society, culture and mass media raise the question as to how they may affect women's experiences of embodiment.

As initially remarked, body image is a highly elastic and learnt construct that may undergo natural changes throughout a person's life and even on a daily basis (Grogan, 2017). Immediate changes in body image can be activated by any kinds of actual or anticipated, internally or externally retrieved appearance-related stimuli. Such "here-and-now influences" encompass immediate life events and situations (Cash, 2002); for example, when a woman exposes her swimwear-clad body or is exposed to other women's beach bodies at the beach, or when interacting with beach body content on mass media channels. Activating events or situational cues like these may trigger automatic and emotion-laden beliefs, assumptions, judgments, interpretations or other thoughts individuals hold toward their body (Cash, 2002). The following sections aim to explore the potential effects of engaging with normative and non-normative beach body messages on women's body image under consideration of two theories commonly applied in appearance research: objectification theory and social comparison theory. Both theories are introduced in the following section before the literature on media effects and women's experiences of embodiment at the beach will be discussed.

4.1 Theoretical Contextualisation

Appearance researchers have applied various frameworks to study how individuals are generally affected by culture and society, and by media messages in particular. Owing to the complexity of our field and human psychology in general, Thompson (2012, p. 92f.) remarked, "appearance research covers activity in a range of related areas, including, body image, attractiveness, disfigurement, and identity, and it is consequently naive (and undesirable) to expect that any one model or theory will account for all aspects of human experience across these areas".

The beach body can be considered just as complex and multifaceted so that a combination of two established appearance research theories - objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) - was deemed suitable to explore the potential impact of female beach bodies at the beach and on social media on women's body image; that is, based on the existing literature and as a foundation for the empirical research conducted as part of this PhD project. Both theories have been used to tackle women's appearance concerns. Importantly, they have been applied to media and "in vivo" contexts and are therefore suited to study a diversity of beach bodies in different contexts. In the following, a more detailed review of both theories is provided, advancing why and how they may contribute to beach body research.

4.1.1 Objectification Theory

The objectification theory, initially proposed by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), constitutes a commonly used framework for appearance investigations. It helps studying how women are routinely being objectified in their everyday lives and how, as a result of this, they come to self-objectify.

When being sexually objectified, women are treated as a body or as a collection of body parts with no respect to anything other than their outward appearance. Female bodies are hereby considered conveyors of cultural meaning (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Given that typical associations with features of the ideal beach body are deeply anchored within Western culture (e.g., thinness as a symbol for self-discipline, health and moral goodness); the belief that women's existence is valued predominantly by how much their looks please others or by how useful they are to them is rather normalised (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). It is, however, important to note that sexual objectification – or sexualization - may not be sexual *per se*. Rather, this terminology refers to various aspects under which women might feel pressured to attain an attractive physique such as an ideal beach body in order to be socially approved. This can reach from media depictions through to appearance-related feedback or acts of sexual harassment (Karsay, Knoll, & Matthes, 2018).

According to the literature, objectification in everyday life basically occurs under two circumstances: First, when a woman's body is being gazed upon, commented on and evaluated by others, for instance at the beach (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). This refers to both direct interpersonal experiences and witnessing of another woman being objectified (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Second, when a woman *imagines* or *anticipates* others to comment on her appearance (Calogero, 2004; Fredrickson et al., 1998).

Sexual objectification is considered to a certain degree omnipresent in our Western contemporary consumer culture, especially in mass media representations displaying fragmented female bodies and bodies in sexually alluring and submissive poses (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). As demonstrated, both of which apply to normative beach body discourse on traditional and digital mass media channels. Moreover, sexual objectification occurs in environments such as the beach, where "a high degree of attention is drawn to physical or sexual attributes of women's bodies […] a high probability of male contact exists [… and where…] there is approval and encouragement of male gaze" (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2010, p. 20f.). The probability that publicly exposed, swimwear-clad female bodies experience objectifying treatment, therefore, seems high.

Objectifying treatment holds multiple consequences. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) posited that "the cultural milieu of objectification functions to socialise girls and women to, at some level, treat *themselves* as objects to be looked at and evaluated". Put differently, as a result of observing, personally experiencing or even only anticipating or imagining sexual objectification within the world they inhabit, women may begin to view, evaluate and treat their bodies as malleable, controllable "things". Taking such a dualist-objectivist self-perspective has been referred to as *self-objectification* (Fredrickson &

Roberts, 1997), a cognitive and behavioural manifestation of which is body surveillance (Moradi & Huang, 2008).

As noted previously, self-objectification constitutes an overlapping aspect between the body image and embodiment construct (Piran, 2016). It has thus proved useful in understanding some intra-individual psychological consequences that may directly and indirectly contribute to mental health issues such as appearance concerns, eating pathology and depressive symptoms that may eventually negatively influence a person's quality of life (Moradi & Huang, 2008).

Self-objectification has initially been studied in two experimental tests by Fredrickson and colleagues (1998). Because participants were asked to try on either a swimsuit or a sweater and report on their level of state objectification, these experiments relate directly to the beach body topic. The researchers observed that participants who were wearing a swimsuit reported of increased self-consciousness and body shame and engaged more in body-related thoughts than participants wearing sweaters; wearing a swimsuit could further be linked to low self-esteem, few peak motivational states and reduced awareness of internal bodily states, e.g., sexual arousal. Participants in the swimsuit condition also scored higher in restrained eating and owing to their attentiveness toward their physical appearance, showed diminished math performance as compared to participants in the sweater condition.

When Hebl, King, and Lin (2004) repeated the experiment six years later with stronger focus on ethnicity and gender, they confirmed that "self-objectification serves as a mechanism through which the experience of wearing a swimsuit affected psychological and behavioural outcomes" (Hebl et al., 2004, p. 1329). To predict state self-objectification, other scholars replicated the swimsuit methodology (D. M. Quinn, Kallen, & Cathey, 2006; D. M. Quinn, Kallen, Twenge, & Fredrickson, 2006). Findings indicated that trying on and wearing swimwear centred women's attention directly on their physical appearance and thus resulted in a somewhat distressing and self-objectifying experience; even under laboratory conditions, where nobody was present to look at them. This confirms Calogero's (2004) finding that the anticipation or imagination of being gazed upon whilst in swimwear may increase body shame and body-focused anxiety.

A recent systematic review by Winn and Cornelius (2020) confirms that self-objectification impaired cognitive functioning, for instance a person's ability to think critically or logically. The cognitive element of self-objectification may trigger or reinforce behavioural actions such as habitual self-conscious body monitoring and appearance surveillance or what Karsay et al. (2018, p. 9) described as "chronic attention to one's physical appearance". This mindset is, for instance, marked by regular looks into the mirror and can keep girls and women in constant worries about how they appear to others (Calogero, Tylka, Donnelly, McGetrick, & Leger, 2017), which may, for instance, drive beach body-related behaviours. This may go as far as to increase their willingness to undergo some form of body modification, cosmetic surgery included (Calogero, Pina, & Sutton, 2013). The myriad consequences aligned to self-objectification support the relevance to understand how beach body experiences in different environments relate to self-objectification as a potential contributor to appearance concerns.

4.1.2 Social Comparison Theory

The second theory found suitable to study the beach body is the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954). This theory serves to explaining people's tendency to spontaneously engage into comparisons between themselves and others during their everyday life in order to evaluate their own standing and to gain knowledge about themselves. That is whenever they are confronted with fundamental questions about their own being such as "How am I?" or "What can I do?", especially, when no objective measurement criteria are available (Corcoran, Crusius, & Mussweiler, 2011). Natural part of this are questions regarding beauty, aesthetics and appearance, which people seek to answer by comparing to other people's looks. It can be presumed that the beach body, owing to its natural characteristics, i.e., being a semi-naked figure that covers no more than the body's most intimate parts, may likely encourage appearance comparisons; because it is doubtlessly easier to compare against another woman's belly, her thighs, breasts, bottom, skin, etc. when those details are exposed and accentuated rather than covered and concealed.

Appearance comparisons might differ depending on the situational context, i.e., the physical and social environment, in which they occur (Krayer, Ingledew, & Iphofen, 2008). Festinger (1954) initially believed that individuals would seek to compare against similar others to obtain the most accurate self-evaluation and that they would avoid comparison processes that could harm or damage their self-image. But a large body of research now suggests otherwise, implying that women routinely compare their outward appearance against self-perceived better-looking others such as beach body images of models, women athletes and (micro-)celebrities conveyed through the mass media (Myers & Crowther, 2009). Because normative beach body depictions are routinely staged, idealised and sexualised, the potential comparison targets in natural beach and media environments may differ considerably, leading to various outcomes that may affect an individuals' body image and their subjective wellbeing.

Festinger (1954) initially suggested two directions of social comparison: *Upward* and *downward*. Upward comparison takes place when people compare to others whom they perceive as superior to them. As opposed, whenever individuals compare to others whom they believe are inferior to them, a process of downward comparison occurs.
Upward comparison has been connected to increases in self-dissatisfaction given that individuals perceive they fall short as compared to their superior comparison target. Women are particularly likely to experience this (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004).
In contrast, downward comparison might increase and protect a person's self-esteem and self-worth as they may come to feel more attractive and better-looking than their inferior comparison target. Individuals tend to employ these kinds of comparison processes in order to maintain or enhance positive views about themselves (Krayer et al., 2008), and ageing women have been found particularly likely to engage into these kinds of appearance comparisons (Bedford & Johnson, 2006).

However, not all studies have consistently link upward comparisons to negative shifts in self-evaluation. According to the selective accessibility model (Mussweiler & Strack, 1999), the reactions depend on whether an individual's accessible self-knowledge is consistent or inconsistent with the comparison target. In other words, by comparing to others, individuals assess how similar they are to them. Perceived similarity then typically results in the activation of consistent self-knowledge, whereas perceived differences may trigger the opposite effect. This selective comparison process results in an individual's evaluation of how (well) they compete with others, for instance in terms of body shape (Krayer et al., 2008), which may then trigger positive or negative responses.

Upward comparison processes, accordingly, may result in an individual's motivation to perform better by measuring up with the comparison target; put differently, they engage in some kind of benchmarking process, which is driven by the need to become better and better, which Festinger (1954) initially referred to as "unidirectional drive upward". By comparing against a better-looking beach body, individuals may feel momentarily inspired to optimise their own body, i.e., to get beach body ready. Although this may entail immediate positive effects (e.g., healthier eating, self-care, and increased physical activity), Krayer et al. (2008) rightly warned that over the long run, these kind of self-improvement appraisals might lead to health-opposing effects. For instance, when individuals end up in obsessive-compulsive and extremely competitive behaviours directed at accomplishing an ideal beach body at any price.

Complementary to Festinger's (1954) initial conceptualisation, Wheeler and Miyake (1992) suggested that individuals might also compare themselves to others at eye level; that is, to people whom they believe are equal to them in a particular field such as appearance. Wheeler and Miyake (1992) referred to this as *lateral comparison*. Just as downward comparison, lateral comparison has been linked more to positive bodily sensations (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992).

Some have suggested though that, independent of the direction of comparison, individuals' general tendency to compare their appearance against others' might link to negative body image outcomes (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015) . In line with that, meta-Analyses such as by Myers and Crowther (2009) have identified appearance-focused social comparisons as drivers for body dissatisfaction, a risk factor in the development of negative psychological consequences such as eating pathology.

While many studies have studied individuals' appearance comparison tendency when exposed to mass media depictions under laboratory conditions, research on in-vivo, i.e., real life contexts, is rare. These are, however, important given that there might be large discrepancies between people's natural beach bodies and media images, and women may psychologically process those differently (Kleim et al., 2019). Of the few existing studies, Fardouly, Pinkus and Vartanian (2017) observed that in-person upward appearance comparisons took place most frequently in women's everyday life; they even outnumbered appearance comparisons made in social media contexts and were associated with self-improvement motives and more positive body image than comparing against media images. This is in line with a study by Leahey and Crowther (2008) who suggested that comparing against peers related

more to body satisfaction than comparing against media images. Yet there is also anecdotal evidence that comparing against seemingly better-looking peers in real-life contexts might foster body image concerns (Krones, Stice, Batres, & Orjada, 2005). Given the ambivalent findings, it seems especially relevant to explore how appearance comparison theory relates to beach body exposure in both natural beach and media contexts.

That notwithstanding, it should be noted that, given the multiplicity of appearance-related cues an average person is exposed to every day, it seems rather unlikely that each beach body stimulus affects them consciously. Some might be processed in nonconscious (Henderson-King, Henderson-King, & Hoffmann, 2001), automatic and non-deliberative manners (Want, 2009). Nonconscious perception might even go as far as to encourage individuals to compare against someone who is not physically present, i.e., an *imagined* other person (Mussweiler, Rüter, & Epstude, 2004). This imaginary facet of appearance comparison theory aligns to objectification theory and thin-ideal internalisation as an overarching construct that affects what beauty standards individuals have adopted for themselves, which may be greatly based on the popular understanding of the culture they inhabit.

4.2 (Potential) Effects of Mass-Mediated Beach Body Discourse

Chapter 3 uncovered the homogeneity and overall perfection, with which women in swimwear have been normatively and rather ubiquitously displayed across mass media channels. Although the rise of the body positivity movement has broadened the focus on diversity and inclusion, thin-idealised and sexualised beach body images seem to dominate the concurrent media landscape. Therefore, a central question is how the consumption of these messages may affect women's body image, especially in comparison to body-positive ones and to natural bodies at the beach. Outcome changes that are "due to mass media influence following exposure to a mass media message or series of messages" (Potter, 2011, p. 903) are referred to as media effects.

Media effects on body image have been studied extensively for almost four decades and throughout the past decade, appearance researchers have begun to turn their attention increasingly to social media and to the effects of non-normative, body-positive appearance content (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2012). Although much is known about media effects and body image, the literature presents mixed, sometimes contradictory findings and the concrete role of beach body-specific messages has been neglected. How mass-mediated beach body messages affect women's body image, therefore, is largely subject to speculation. A review of the general body image and media literature might nevertheless be useful because (1) many experimental studies on traditional media and body image have routinely used images of swimwear-clad models to assess changes in body image outcomes post-exposure; (2) the normative beach body ideal complies with the features of the general body perfect; and (3) much beach body content posted onto social media can be categorised as fitspiration, thinspiration or body positivity content whose media effects have been studied profoundly.

Appearance researchers should explore the specific effects of beach body media messages on individuals' body image in the future. However, the existing literature, for these reasons, may already offer a preliminary evidence-base as a foundation for this PhD thesis.

In the following, a general overview of the empirical evidence gathered in the field of media and body image will thus be presented and discussed in light of the female beach body construct. Because women have generally been found to attend more to visual rather than textual information (Ju & Johnson, 2010) emphasis will be on exploring the potential effects of normative versus non-normative beach body images. Textual elements will be occasionally commented on though. The section will start with reviewing the literature on the effects of traditional media (magazines, TV, etc.) on body image before discussing how social media messages have been connected to appearance concerns in women.

4.2.1 Traditional Media Effects on Body Image

The literature reviewed in this section most notably draws upon meta-analyses carried out by Grabe, Hyde and Ward (2008), Groesz et al. (2002), Hausenblas, Campbell, Menzel, Doughty, Levine and Thompson (2013), Holmstrom (2014), Ferguson (2013), and Want (2009). In order to discuss, underpin and possibly complete these, a series of individual studies are considered that employed images of thin-idealised, attractive models in swimsuits and bikinis (Betz, Sabik, & Ramsey, 2019; Daniels, 2009; Engeln–Maddox, 2005; Mulgrew, Schulz, Norton, & Tiggemann, 2020; Mulgrew & Tiggemann, 2018; Ogden et al., 2020).

Groesz et al. (2002) and Grabe et al. (2008) report of robust empirical evidence that viewing thin-idealised media images contributes to women's body dissatisfaction. Reviews by Dittmar (2009), Levine and Harrison (2009), Halliwell and Diedrichs (2012) and Tiggemann (2014) have largely supported that view. Holmstrom (2014), Want (2009) and Ferguson (2013) confirmed small-to-moderate adverse effects of experimental media exposure to thin and attractive media portrayals on females' body image, i.e., their appearance satisfaction and eating disorder symptoms. However, correlational and longitudinal studies, in their analyses, showed much weaker effect sizes indicating that not everybody was equally affected.

These somewhat ambivalent findings must be considered under the notion that different methodological approaches were applied; not only within the individual studies included in each of the analyses, but also in the meta-analyses themselves. That is, different numbers and kinds of investigations were included in the analyses and different key areas of body image emphasised. To give some examples, Groesz et al. (2002) focused on 25, Want (2009) on 47, and Hausenblas et al. (2013) on 33 purely experimental studies. Of those, Groesz et al. (2002) delivered the first statistical review on media effects on girls' and women's body image; Want (2009) looked specifically into the impact of moderators, discussing social comparison processes during women's exposure to thin-idealised media portrayals; and Hausenblas and associates (2013) investigated the immediate effects of media exposure on

women's and men's eating disorder symptoms. Of the meta-analyses that included experimental, correlational, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, Holmstrom (2014) analysed 34, Grabe et al. (2008) 77 and Ferguson (2013) 204 studies. Thereby, Grabe et al. (2008) and Holmstrom (2014) included exclusively studies on women, whereas Ferguson (2013) analysed studies on both women and men.

While the estimated proportion of females *strongly* affected might be relatively small (Ferguson, 2013), particular susceptibility has been ascribed to individuals with pre-existing appearance dissatisfaction[10], low self-esteem, a lack of a clearly defined sense of self, traditional attitudes toward gender roles, to Caucasian women as opposed to women of colour, and to women with high internalisation of sociocultural attitudes toward appearance (Ferguson, 2013; Lennon & Rudd, 1994; Vartanian, 2009; Want, 2009).

The latter relies on the extent to which individuals adopt the mass media as a source of information about attractiveness and fashionability, which has been referred to as "media awareness" by Myers and Crowther (2007). It may increase the frequency with which women engage into appearance comparison processes as a media processing mechanism (Groesz et al., 2002) and also affect their level of self-objectification (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2015).

As previously discussed, normative idealised media depictions of young, thin, toned and tanned swimwear-clad models, athletes, and celebrities may trigger upward comparisons; this has been confirmed by the literature. For example, in an experimental study by Engeln-Maddox (2005, p. 1127), "the vast majority of participants listed at least one negative outcome social comparison in response to viewing an ad featuring an attractive model in swimwear". Sexualised representations, moreover, have been linked to heightened self-objectification in women (for a review, see Karsay et al., 2018).

Because celebrity beach bodies are typically held as benchmarks for women to measure up against, it is noteworthy that celebrity influence has been linked to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders in women (for a review, see Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2021). Unlike unknown fashion models, much of their privacy is shared in direct, unmediated ways resulting in some fans creating personal relationships, or "parasocial interactions" (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In this "celebrity worship" (Maltby et al., 2005), thin, young and sexy celebrity beach bodies may be particularly associated with success and admiration, but also perceived as realistically obtainable and normative.

Smith Kilpela et al. (2015) discussed the underrepresentation of ageing female bodies in celebrity-centred media discourse. Referring to Helen Mirren's aforementioned bikini photo (Appendix A), they noted, "Western culture not only promotes the thin-young-ideal via direct association of youth with beauty, acceptability, fame, and value in the media and advertisements, but also indirectly by providing ubiquitous youthful prototypes which provide ample opportunities for upward comparisons by ageing women" (Smith Kilpela et al., 2015, p. 150).

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[10] According to Ferguson's (2013) meta-analysis, an estimated proportion of 2,2% - 15,8% of women could be identified who had pre-existing appearance concerns and were more vulnerable toward media images than others.

Furthermore, both young mothers (B. M. Williams et al., 2017) and non-mothers (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015) have been found routinely comparing against media images of slender, bikini-ready celebrity mothers. This is unsurprising given that women who just experienced massive bodily changes during pregnancy are displayed closer to the thin-ideal in a bikini as compared to most never-pregnant women. Thereby, as little as five minutes of exposure may trigger immediate negative body image outcomes (Coyne et al., 2018) such as negative feelings about one's own body, increased pressure to comply and look sexier (B. M. Williams et al., 2017). Interestingly, headshots rather than full-body-portraits of bikini-clad celebrity mothers in combination with appearance-related captions were associated with high scores in self-objectification amongst never-pregnant women; presumably, women completed the missing details in their minds based on their predisposed knowledge of how postpartum bikini bodies ought to look and this conscious processing triggered negative sensations (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015). Equally, self-objectification scored higher than in the control condition when bikini mum images were accompanied by weight loss appraisal (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015).

Few studies have considered body tan. Of those, Dixon et al. (2011) looked into girls' and women's exposure to tanned models in popular women's magazines. They found that greater exposure correlated with positive attitudes and cognitions about tanning, for instance the belief that a tanned body made it easier to enjoy summer. This was particularly likely amongst teenage girls. Complementary, Pritchard, Kneebone, Hutchinson and Wilson (2014) reported of a correlation between media influence and skin tone dissatisfaction amongst Australian undergraduate women, which was partially mediated by internalisation of a tanned beauty ideal. These insights have been discussed regarding concerns about an increased risk for skin cancer in women with a positive attitude about tanning. Collectively, the findings imply that exposure to popular homogenised, sexualised beach body photos, embedded within a powerful one-sided beach body narrative, may trigger negative body image outcomes in many women, which constitutes a risk factor to develop and manifest myriad physical and mental health issues as described previously.

Some women, however, may not be affected by normative beach body discourse or even experience positive sensations post-exposure (Holmstrom, 2014; Levine & Harrison, 2004). The literature delivers some insights into why, when and under which circumstances women may actively choose to reject, resist, avoid and manage unrealistic or one-sided media messages (Gill, 2007).
First, Tiggemann, Polivy and Hargreaves (2009) suggested that instead of measuring up and focusing on the perceived differences between the displayed person and one's own body, women may as well identify with "being" the other person; something that they termed "fantasy processing". This can, at least in short-term, trigger positive emotions. Some scholars have, however, warned that in the long-run exposure to unrealistic ideals might entail negative effects as the individual's attempt to measure up with an unachievable ideal is condemned to fail (Tiggemann et al., 2009; Halliwell & Diedrichs, 2012). It appears relevant to explore how this relates to the ideal beach body, which, at least in traditional media, is a seasonally dominating theme that plays a subordinate role during the rest of the year.

Second, exposure to larger-than-usual, healthy-looking models has been linked to more positive appearance outcomes compared to exposure to thin models or nonhuman objects. This included fewer perceived pressure to lose weight (Martin & Xavier, 2010), increased self-esteem (Smeesters & Mandel, 2006), reduced self-objectification (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2006), reduced body-focused anxiety and more positive state body image (Diedrichs & Lee, 2011; Dittmar & Howard, 2004; E. Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). These „relief effects" were linked to models' body size given that all models had initially been ranked as equally attractive. Clayton, Ridgway and Hendrickse (2017), Hendrickse, Clayton, Ray, Ridgway, and Secharan (2021) and Mulgrew et al. (2020) replicated this finding. Research evidence suggests that the effect of the model's body shape on female viewers' body image might remain unchanged even when accompanied by sexually empowering rather than objectifying textual messages (Hendrickse et al., 2021). More so, exposure to diverse beach body models might protect women from potentially harmful effects of thin-idealised ones. For instance, although initially exposed to a female white bikini model, participants in Ogden, Gosling, Hazelwood and Atkins's (2020) study showed increases in body compassion, body kindness as well as body and face satisfaction after interventions with diverse bodies. In addition, some have argued that women may per se engage into fewer social comparison processes when exposed to physically larger models (Clayton et al., 2017). The display of diverse models, as is, for instance, encouraged through the voluntary industry code of conduct in Australia, and realised through several body-positive beach body campaigns might contribute to that.

Third, anecdotal evidence suggests that exposure to physically active rather than sexualised-passive models might positively affect women's body image; this is of relevance most notably regarding swimwear in its function as sports attire. To give a few examples, Daniels (2009), Reichart Smith (2015) and Linder and Daniels (2018) found that female viewers were less likely to self-objectify after being exposed to images of women athletes-in-action that had been taken from sports media such as *Sport Illustrated* swimsuit issues. In contrast, images in which athletes posing in bikinis were sexualised caused opposite effects. Exploring functionality-focused advertising campaigns featuring diverse bodies, immediate increases in state body appreciation (Williamson & Karazsia, 2018), state appearance satisfaction and improved exercise intentions post-exposure (Mulgrew & Tiggemann, 2018) have been noted. Body appreciation in Williamson and Karazsia's (2018) study was independent of the model's pose which once again confirms the primary impact of body shape.

Notwithstanding this, participants in the aforementioned studies were consistently exposed to athletes of rather homogeneous, fit-ideal body shape, such as swimmer Amanda Beard, surfer Alana Blanchard and tennis player Daniela Hantuchová. Scholars such as Boepple et al. (2016) and Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2018) have warned that repeated exposure to fit-ideal bodies in the long-term might be equally or even more damaging when maintaining a one-sided focus on muscularity in combination with thinness. Given that fit-ideal bodies are now pervasively communicated, this potential long-term effect should be born in mind. Also, subsequent exposure to idealised model images (both posed and active) might block the positive effects as suggested in an experiment by Mulgrew, McCulloch, Farren, Prichard and Lim (2018). Normative beach body campaigns, as they continue to dominate in the mass media,

may thus mitigate the potential positive effect of body-positive campaigns. This underpins the necessity for repeated and normalised exposure toward aesthetically diverse, non-idealised and active beach body models. Another potential limitation is that both the athletes' body shape and their amount of skin exposed may shift focus more on their bodies rather than their performance. As Bissell and Zhou (2004, p. 18) proposed, "it is possible that when women actually see the athlete's body shape via leotards or swimsuits, that impression may trigger negative reactions".

Fourth, Want (2009) linked processing instructions and contextual situations to more positive body image outcomes; he implied that women who were explicitly encouraged to engage into social comparison and to focus on appearance whilst being experimentally exposed to media portrayals were more likely to psychologically react toward these images, possibly through the activation of a defence mechanism. To give an example, in an individual experiment by Henderson-King et al. (2001) female participants reacted differently toward thin-idealised or neutral images depending on a) whether any men were in the room, and b) whether these men made comments on the pictures. More concretely, the researchers could not observe any media effects when there were no people in the room except for the participant herself. However, participants' body dissatisfaction increased when two silent males were in the room with them, looking at the pictures, but saying nothing. If those males, however, made short sexist comments about the desirable beauty of the models portrayed, women activated a resistance mechanism and experienced increases in body satisfaction.

Henderson-King et al.'s (2001) findings imply that the potential harm caused by thin-idealised images such as of the ideal female beach body might be mitigated or even undone when women choose to consciously resist them. The defence mechanism, in this case, was activated through the conscious processing of vocal sexist comments. Want (2009, p. 267) concluded that "defensive thinking prompted from appearance-processing may therefore simply make the effects of viewing idealised media portrayals smaller than they might otherwise be".

But it may not be as simple as that in real life situations. Given that women are routinely exposed to great numbers of idealised images every day, beach body images included, the likelihood to overhear a male person making sexist or otherwise judgmental comments on a model's appearance is comparably low. Women may more frequently *imagine or anticipate* them doing this, thereby, presuming their (negative) judgment whereas comments about a beach body photograph may also stem from peers and/or (unknown) others and be processed in various ways.

Presumably, the immediate environment, women are surrounded by during media exposure might play another role. While much appearance research has been carried out under laboratory conditions, women may deal with media images differently in real life situations. For instance, they may be more attentive and receptive toward sexualised-idealised beach body messages when shopping for swimwear. Scholars have sufficiently explored the potentially damaging effect of in-shop advertising and the use of extremely thin female mannequins in fashion stores that are commonly employed to promote swimwear and beach fashion (Robinson & Aveyard, 2017). These appearance-related cues

can lead to negative swimwear shopping experiences, especially in women with higher self-reported weight (Tiggemann & Lacey, 2009).

It also seems plausible that women may generally be more receptive toward beach body messages prior to and during summer; an aspect that links to Griffiths et al.'s (2021) proposed concept of seasonal body image. It is thinkable, for instance, that sensory stimuli such as sunshine, warm temperatures, smells and sounds related to the sea may trigger psychological and physical (i.e., neurological) arousal in individuals that may affect media exposure effects.

These findings support the preliminary assumption that homogenised and sexualised beach body discourse might trigger immediate negative body image outcomes, especially in women with strong thin-ideal internalisation and predisposed appearance concerns. As opposed, beach body images featuring models of non-normative body shapes and in active poses seem to have the potential to contribute to reducing body image concerns in women, especially when promoted in consistent and normalised ways.

However, as previously noted, women are surrounded by complex and oftentimes ambivalent or contradictory appearance messages that may diminish those positive effects, especially when enforcing physical and psychological transformation (Budgeon, 2011; Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill, 2007; Leboeuf, 2019). In response, women may feel social pressure to change, and changing mentally thereby might be perceived an even more complicated task than changing one's body. Women may thus be at risk to either engage in intense and extensive self-surveillance to meet the goal or pretend to be happy and confident regardless of how they actually feel (Betz et al., 2019; Gill, 2007). Therefore, Gill and Elias (2014, p. 180) argue that non-normative LYB discourse did "not represent a straightforward liberation from tyrannical beauty standards, and may in fact instantiate new, more pernicious forms of power that engender a shift from bodily to psychic regulation". The effects of allegedly empowering beach body messages in the media should thus be carefully and critically discussed.

It should, moreover, be noted that people are able to process beach body messages both positively and negatively at the same time. As a result of the complex, often contradictory nature of human psychology, women might continue to be attracted by normative representations despite the risk of feeling more negatively about themselves afterwards. For instance, exposure to a thin-idealised swimsuit model in Engeln-Maddox' (2005, p. 1127) study led to both upward comparisons (e.g., "I wish I had a perfect flat stomach like hers") and counterarguments (e.g., "Everything seems fake. A fake tan. Fake eyes. Maybe even a fake body with all the airbrushing") amongst college women.

Because researchers and marketers are only beginning to understand the effects of body-positive messages, ongoing research is imperative to understand how various forms of beach body discourse affect women. In line with Ferguson's (2013) meta-analysis, it appears especially relevant to further explore female subpopulations in this; most notably minority groups (e.g., ethnical/sexual minority groups and people with visible differences) and those who have experienced physical changes that have moved them away from the normative beach body ideal, such as ageing females and those in perinatal periods.

In critical reflection of this section, it can be noted that the consumption of print media such as magazines and newspapers has substantially declined in recent years. For instance, from 2011 till 2018, the consumption of printed newspapers decreased by 45% and print magazine consumption by 56% (Zenith, 2018). Although traditional media channels, according to these findings, may become less relevant for contemporary media studies, it can be acknowledged that many consumers now access newspapers and magazines digitally and may thus continue to consume the same kinds of journalistic content online. Appearance researchers have thus concentrated on studying the effects of digital, most notably, social media channels.

Despite the noticeable shift toward digital media, traditional media channels should not be completely neglected because not everybody may use and access digital media in the same way. For instance, in spite of the growing popularity of at-home streaming entertainment such as Netflix, HBO Now and Disney Plus (Alexander, 2020), TV consumption remained relatively stable between 2011 and 2018 with a small decline of 3%; cinema consumption even rose by 3% (Zenith, 2018). As previously noted, these media channels have been found lacking body shape diversity. Consumers might thus continue to be exposed by relatively homogeneous body types in movies and TV series.

Moreover, the advertising literature makes it clear that repeated exposure to advertising images may strengthen advertising effectiveness (for a meta-analysis, see Schmidt & Eisend, 2015). In other words, by being exposed to certain media messages such as a beach body advert multiple times, consumers may start recognising and responding to it. It is thereby irrelevant *where* exposure takes places because, in times of omnichannel marketing[11], advertising messages are typically seamlessly conveyed through various traditional and digital media channels; therein often endorsed through (micro-) celebrities and online communities.

Arguably, given the multiplicity of images and texts consumers are exposed to on a daily basis, they cannot process all data consciously; but repetition may create recognition. In other words, pervasively communicated homogenised beach body messages may enforce internalisation, especially if corresponding to information retrieved from other key influential sources such as family and peers. Moreover, as demonstrated at the example of Protein World's beach body ready advert, traditional marketing campaigns may trigger online reactions. It thus seems apt to not only consider media sources individually but also collectively, as highly interrelated and embedded within a wider, dynamic social and historical context.

4.2.2 Social Media Effects on Body Image

Concordant to the previous section, the following paragraphs engage with the question, how active and passive exposure of and to beach body images on social media as part of online embodiment may affect the way women relate to their bodies.

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[11] "Omnichannel marketing is using digital and/or traditional marketing channels to send a relevant message to a brand's customers regardless of the customer engaging with the brand, nor the channels used to engage" (Blankenship, 2019).

Scholars such as McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, and Masters (2015) and Cohen and Blaszczynski (2015) have argued that social media engagement predicted greater self-scrutiny and appearance dissatisfaction than engagement with traditional media sources because of its interactive nature and because content is generated by allegedly trustworthy sources such as peers. Passive exposure is of particular relevance because young people have been found spending more time online on SNS observing others than actively posting content (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009).

This section draws specifically on the recent meta-analyses provided by Saiphoo and Vahedi (2019) and Mingoia et al. (2017) as well as the systematic reviews offered by Holland and Tiggemann (2016) and Fardouly and Vartanian (2016). Individual studies will be reviewed, too.

Similar to the meta-analyses and reviews presented in the previous section, methodological variations can be revealed: Saiphoo and Vahedi's (2019) meta-analysis is the latest and to date, the most comprehensive quantitative review of the literature on social media and body image. They included 63 independent, cross-sectional studies; that is compared to Mingoia and colleagues (2017) who included six studies and considered thin-ideal internalisation as one component of the multidimensional body image construct.

Of the two reviews, Holland and Tiggemann (2016) focused specifically on the impact of social media on eating pathology; Fardouly and Vartanian (2016), more broadly and based upon purely qualitative studies, considered general social media usage and body image concerns. Owing to the relatively small - albeit steadily increasing - number of studies on social media and body image, the research foundation is less robust relative to the previous meta-analyses on traditional media and body image. Notwithstanding this, the existing literature offers a comprehensive overview of the research status quo and may thus offer insight to the effects of social media-generated beach body messages.

Although social media usage has been linked to a multiplicity of different, oftentimes contradictory body image outcomes (J. W. Kim & Chock, 2015; Pagani, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 2011), meta-analyses and reviews consistently suggest a positive relationship between social media use and body image disturbance. Similar to the meta-analyses on traditional media and body image, the overall effect sizes indicate a relatively small, yet significant relationship.

Saiphoo and Vahedi (2019), in the latest analysis, identify four significant moderators: (1) age, such that body image disturbances decreased along with growing age; (2) country grouping, such that Australian participants seemed to experience stronger body image disturbances than their European, North American and Asian counterparts; (3) type of social media use, such that appearance-focused social media use related more strongly to body image disturbances as compared to general social media use; (4) body image dimension, such that studies on body image cognition showed stronger effect sizes as compared to those on body image evaluation, general body image and body image behaviour.

The third aspect is of specific relevance. Individual studies suggest that overall time spent on SNS positively correlated with body image disturbance (Eckler, Kalyango, & Paasch, 2017; Hicks & Brown,

2016) and that social media users felt more concerned about their appearance than non-users (Meier & Gray, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013), but a growing body of research implies that *what* we engage with on social media rather than how much time we spend online has the greatest impact on body image (Meier & Gray, 2014). There is growing evidence that photo-based social media activities, such as posting, viewing, liking, sharing and commenting on appearance-related content link to negative body image outcomes (Meier & Gray, 2014; Mingoia et al. 2017; Tiggemann & Holland, 2016), including body dissatisfaction, thin-ideal internalisation, dietary restraint, drive for thinness and self-objectification (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Grogan, Rothery, Cole, & Hall, 2018; Lindner, Tantleff-Dunn, & Jentsch, 2012; McLean et al., 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014).

Further, Mingoia et al. (2017) observed that photo-based social media activities were significantly associated with skin tone dissatisfaction, increasing sun exposure and decreasing sun protection in Australian adolescents. In contrast, engaging with appearance-unrelated or irrelevant content may not significantly affect how individuals inhabit their bodies (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019).

To explain the effects of general social media usage on body image and of photo-based activities in particular, social comparison theory has been applied; another (connected) role has been attributed to the objectification theory. For instance, Grogan and associates (2018, p. 21f.) observed, "women objectified their own and other women's bodies in selfies, and social comparisons with hypothetical "ideal" bodies influenced how they evaluated their own bodies"; and Drenten and Gurrieri (2018, p. 58) remarked that trends such as the bikini bridge were "nurtured by an existing culture of comparison, objectification, and body image issues".

As previously argued, beach body photographs - regardless of the subject's look - may activate appearance comparisons more than images of a fully dressed person because they reveal and accentuate a woman's body at a socially accepted maximum level of nudity, oftentimes enforced by sexually suggestive posing and surrounded by a beautiful beach scenery. While the latter seems to play a relatively subordinate role, the focus is usually directed onto the comparison target's outward appearance, their femininity and physical attractiveness as they pose on the beach in a revealing outfit. This turns the exposed body into a passive sexual object of gaze whose validation depends on and is measured upon the likes and positive commentary of other users. In the following, I am going to discuss the potential effects of posting and consuming beach body messages on SNS.

Relative to traditional media, body image outcomes have been ascribed more to visual rather than textual elements posted on SNS (Hendrickse et al., 2021; Mingoia et al., 2017) and Caucasian girls and women might be more strongly affected compared to males and to females from other ethnicities (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Howard, Heron, MacIntyre, Myers, & Everhart, 2017), especially when they act as both active content creators and passive recipients of appearance-related image-centric content.

Selfie-sharing does play an important role as regards social media users' experiences of embodiment. The study of this facet of social media usage is of particular relevance given that there are sometimes

major discrepancies between individuals' online and offline identities (Grogan et al., 2018), with potential impacts on their self-concept, identity and behaviour outside the virtual world (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011).

The taking and posting of beach body selfies might constitute a means for female users to gain attention, gratification and validation of their social and physical attractiveness. These have been identified as common motives and predictors for selfie-posting across cultures, especially in women with high appearance and eating concerns (Howard et al., 2017; Perloff, 2014). Receiving approval or witnessing others receiving approval for their selfies may be another driving force (Tiidenberg, 2014).

The literature presents inconsistent findings on how women's selfie-activities (i.e., photo investment and manipulation, such as carefully taking, selecting, editing and sharing photographs) relate to body image, and regarding the frequency with which female users post sexualising content. Many studies have linked selfie activities to heightened appearance concerns - body weight and shape concerns, body dissatisfaction, internalisation of the thin beauty ideal, dietary restraint and eating disorder symptomatology included (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2017; McLean et al., 2015). Different body image outcomes have been observed relative to the quality and quantity of selfie activities. Cohen et al. (2017) found that women who posted selfies infrequently, but put lots of efforts into photo investment, scored higher in body dissatisfaction; those who posted selfies frequently were associated with greater body satisfaction.

In addition to that, the taking and posting of beach body selfies, especially sexually suggestive selfies, that typically depict more than a woman's face, e.g., her upper body or singularised body parts (e.g., "lelfies"/ "belfies") in swimwear, has been linked to self-objectification; indeed, there seems to be a mutual relationship between SNS use, self-objectification and body image, in which self-objectification serves both as a motivator and a potential outcome (Veldhuis, Alleva, Bij de Vaate, Keijer, & Konijn, 2020). Women scoring high in self-objectification and for whom appearance is central to self-worth have been found most likely to engage into selfie activities and to post sexualised content (Bell et al., 2018; Ramsay & Horan, 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2020).

Women's self-sexualising behaviour on SNS has been sufficiently explored (for a review, see Johnson & Yu, 2021) and because the posting of sexually suggestive swimwear-selfies relates to that, some findings are summarised in the following.

There is anecdotal evidence that women do not self-sexualise very often (Baumgartner, Sumter, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2015; Ramsey & Horan, 2018). This includes the posting of beach body selfies (Kleim et al., 2019). Contrary to this, about one third of young women in Bell, Cassarly, and Dunbar's (2018) study had posted sexually suggestive selfies including swimwear ones. Because sexualised photographs typically attract more attention than ordinary photographs (Ramsay & Horan, 2018), those who measure self-worth through likes, followers/friends and comments on social media may feel particularly encouraged to do so. Positive feedback from other users then might increase the frequency with which they post self-sexualising content (Bell et al., 2018).

Moreover, the decision to post sexualised swimwear selfies might be moderated by age. According to Daniels and Zurbriggen (2016) teenage girls were relatively open toward posting a swimsuit photograph of themselves, whereas more than half of young women expressed clear disapproval, oftentimes because of privacy concerns and lacking body confidence. In line with that, in an exploratory study about selfie-posting behaviour and body image by Grogan and associates (2018), young adult women emphasised that bodies should be covered in selfies and not be displayed in sexualised ways.

In order to gain positive feedback, women may try and present themselves as ideally as possible and invest into their beach body photographs by posing, carefully selecting and manipulating them. This oftentimes involves critically scrutinising and judging the body from an observer's perspective and appearance preoccupation (Veldhuis et al., 2020). Online self-sexualisation has thus been associated with self-objectification, self-surveillance and understanding sex as a source of power[12] (Ramsay & Horan, 2018). Because swimwear selfies typically expose more of the body than a fully clothed picture, they may encompass a particularly intense confrontation with one's appearance, depending on what and how much is exposed. For instance, an upper- or full-body shoot may direct the subject's (and other people's) attention to other areas of the body than a close-up of the face or of another singularised part of the body, for instance, of one's bikini bridge. Different types of selfies may thus entail different body image outcomes, whereas a person's body image may affect also the type of selfie they choose to post. For instance, young social media users in Grogan et al.'s (2018) qualitative study, who showed high indices of self-objectification and social comparison, preferred selfies of their faces over full-body ones, while they also preferred clothed and nonsexual photographs.

Contrary, the literature has shown that body positive activists were more likely to disclose their full bodies in swimwear (Cohen et al., 2019). A key motive typically is to inspire others and show what "normal" bodies look like in a bikini. Both active bodily exposure and receiving positive feedback in return has been linked to increased self-confidence, positive embodiment and feelings of solidarity and togetherness, a relational, performing aspect of online embodiment that Boero and Pascoe (2012) referred to as "enacting embodiment". This has been observed amongst postpartum mothers (Singh, 2019), in the fat acceptance and body positivity movement (Marcus, 2016), but also amongst LGBTQ+ students with disabilities (R. A. Miller, 2017). Self-sexualisation might thus, to a certain degree, operate as a form of female empowerment, self-affirmation, confidence and sexual agency with a somewhat therapeutic effect on some women that helps them build and maintain their inner body positivity and confidence (Tiidenberg, 2014). But even body-positive selfie posters may self-objectify (Veldhuis et al., 2020).

Posting sexy beach body selfies holds another social tension because inappropriate self-sexualisation might be understood as actively encouraging sex and lead to negative reactions and perceptions

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[12] Note, sexual agency seemed to limit to women's online rather than offline identity. Put differently, posting sexy selfies did not make them more sexually confident (Ramsey and Horan, 2018).

especially from same-sex peers (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016; Kleim et al., 2019; Manago et al. 2008; Mascheroni, Vincent, & Jimenez, 2015).

Although a clear distinction between "sexy" and "too sexy" might not always be easy, the literature indicates that women seem very aware of what is and what is not socially accepted. As a result, they might try and avoid posting selfies that others may consider provocative and inapt (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Grogan et al., 2018). To give an example, posting a swimsuit photograph from water-based locations such as beaches was considered appropriate as opposed to "posing" at home (e.g., bathroom or bedroom) in revealing swimwear, which especially younger women linked to perceived character indictments such as being slutty and (sexual) attention seeking (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016). Although swimwear photographs are generally more accepted than underwear photographs (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016), a risk remains that female users who post sexy swimwear selfies as a response to sociocultural or peer pressure might be punished for doing so (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016; Mascheroni et al. 2015).

It is important to remark that there is also a risk of girls being exposed on social media by others, e.g., when peers post photos from social events online. "Opting out of being in photos could result in being labeled a prude, self-conscious about one's body, or other negative attention. Thus, decisions about how one is portrayed on social media may be tightly tied to peer dynamics" (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016, p. 957). Female users may thus feel they have no choice but to conform and allow the sexualising act.

A similar loss of control happens when great numbers of users get to see beach body photos. As opposed to situations on the beach, viewers may look at the images as long and as intensely as they wish (Kleim et al., 2019). They may even save those to their personal devices and use them in other (sexualising) contexts without the individual's knowledge and perhaps against their will, as for instance discussed in light of some social media applications.

Self-objectification may not only drive certain SNS behaviours, but also be a result of SNS use (Veldhuis et al., 2020). The disclosure of fragmented, sexualised body parts links strongly to swimwear selfies posted in thinspiration and fitspiration contexts including body image trends such as the bikini bridge. These kinds of selfies may not only entail an alienation of a woman from her body (Lebeouf, 2018); they also tend to promote features that are physically unobtainable for many women. Health experts have thus been quoted warning that they may link to psychopathological consequences including negative body image, poor self-esteem, stress and depression in women (Miller, 2018; Molina, 2018).

The potential physiological consequences of malnutrition, excessive exercising and overall appearance obsession related to fitspiration trends such as bikini bridge and Toblerone tunnel should not be neglected. For instance, Holland and Tiggemann (2016) observed that posters of fitspiration content on Instagram scored significantly higher in drive for thinness and muscularity, compulsive exercising and disordered eating as compared to those who posted travel images.

Moreover, albeit unrelated to a certain body shape, participation in the sunburn art trend related to deliberate sun exposure and sunburn on the beach. Sunburn art has been a rather extreme trend. But

tanned skin continues to remain an undisputed feature of an attractive beach body, which, normalised in mass media discourse, may prompt further consequences on women's physical and mental health including an increased risk for skin cancer and skin tone dissatisfaction (Mingoia et al., 2017).

These findings suggest that actively taking and posting beach body photographs on SNS may lead to myriad, oftentimes contradictory body image outcomes. The inconsistency of the findings is not only reflected in the existing meta-analyses of social media and body image, but also in a recent literature review on self-sexualisation provided by Johnson and Yu (2021). Within the relative paucity of research considering women who actively generate selfies of themselves in swimwear, links to Jordan's (2007) concepts of the homogenised, the sexualised and the disciplined beach body are particularly warranted in order to understand women's motivations and individual experiences of online embodiment profoundly, compared to exposing their bodies on the beach. Heightened attention should be put onto female minority groups and subpopulations as defined previously, of which social media research is yet rare.

Because female users, on average, consume appearance messages more regularly than actively produce them (Pempek et al., 2009), it is imperative to discuss exposure effects either. Much of those have been explained using social comparison theory and indeed, social media users have been found to make more frequent appearance comparisons than non-users (Meier & Gray, 2014). Comparison targets and directions might be rather diverse given that every single user views different contents on their social media newsfeed as posted by different social media actors including businesses, celebrities, and peers (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019).

As regards businesses, it is important to note that social media users may be occasionally exposed to the same beach body advertisements online as conveyed through other mass media channels including magazines, billboards, and TV. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these might affect them as observed in traditional media contexts. To give an example, Tran and Belul (2017) reported that participants had felt more negatively about themselves after being exposed to thin-idealised or, as they called it, "stereotyped" swimwear and lingerie models on SNS, even though most respondents believed that they were comparing against them rather unconsciously. Because this aligns to previous findings, advertising effects will not be further discussed at this point.

Of greater relevance is beach body discourse generated by (micro-)celebrities who regularly endorse beach body trends, workouts, diet challenges and other beach-body-ready-behaviours. Exposure toward celebrity-produced social media content has been associated with negative body image outcomes (for a review, see Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2022) and this might be moderated by celebrity worship[13] (see also Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). This has been confirmed also with regards to quickly slender, bikini-ready celebrity mum content, even when participants showed great awareness of those images being retouched and altered (Singh, 2019).

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[13] Because the content, unlike traditional media channels, is produced by celebrities themselves, observers may establish what they perceive as a social relationship and increased worship.

But exposure toward peer-generated content might trigger equally detrimental body image outcomes (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). At times, it may even affect women more strongly than celebrity postings (Ho, Lee, & Liao, 2016) and in parts, this can be explained by the fact that unlike traditional media, social media users may perceive the content posted by peers as more personally relevant, relatable, credible and realistic than that produced by professional marketers or celebrities. But because many ordinary users routinely post idealised and staged beach body images onto SNS (Kleim et al., 2019), the direction of comparison may as well be upward (Fardouly et al., 2017), hence, result in appearance dissatisfaction and desires to change their bodies or body parts post-exposure (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Given that many beach body images on social media are sexualising, it is also noteworthy that time spent on SNS that contained sexualising content has been associated with self-objectification (Fardouly et al., 2015), body surveillance (Manago et al., 2015), or both (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012); direct exposure to sexualising images has further been linked to decreases in appearance satisfaction (Tiggemann & Holland, 2016; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

Sexually suggestive bikini/beach babe photos, as they are routinely shared by (micro-)celebrities, female athletes and ordinary users (e.g., college sites as analysed by Davis, 2018, or nonprofessional surfers as analysed by Olive, 2015), resultantly, might further reinforce appearance concerns in women. Because even selfies shared by body-positive advocates with non-normative bodies often show them in sexualising poses, future research should explore how the exposed women's aesthetics negotiate the psychological processing of those images; relative to those that show them physically active, as discussed in the section on traditional media effects.

Based on the findings retrieved from traditional media and body image research, it seems plausible that image-centric fitness- and thinness-related beach body content on SNS might predict negative body image outcomes. Research indicates that female social media users are frequently exposed to thinspiration and fitspiration content as they engage with photographs on social media (Carrotte, Prichard, & Lim, 2017; Griffiths et al., 2018).

Griffiths et al. (2018) observed correlations between exposure to this type of content and eating disorder symptom severity amongst Australian, Canadian, American and British females with clinically diagnosed eating disorders. The relationship was mediated by physical appearance comparisons. Although both fitspiration and thinspiration content was associated with body image disturbance, the authors reasoned that thinness- and weight loss-idealising postings might be most harmful. Those might be reinforced by textual elements. While these are particularly prominent in thinspiration contexts, they may as well appear in fitspiration contexts that disseminate one-sided body ideals in combination with messages that celebrate weight loss and thinness, as is, for instance, the case in social media crazes such as the bikini bridge and the Toblerone tunnel.

The literature reveals mixed findings when it comes to viewing fitspiration content on SNS. Slater et al. (2017) in an experimental study observed no differences in body image amongst those who were

exposed to fitspiration images and those exposed to neutral images. Others reported of both positive and negative outcomes; positive outcomes included inspiration and motivation to eat healthy and exercise (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Negative outcomes encompassed negative mood, decreased appearance satisfaction and self-esteem (Talbot et al., 2017); feelings of frustration, guilt, jealousy, disordered eating, and addiction to engaging with fitspiration postings (Easton, Morton, Tappy, Francis, & Dennison, 2018). This was mediated by appearance comparison frequency (Talbot et al. 2017; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015). In an in-depth qualitative study, Easton and associates (2018) found that negative outcomes persisted even when participants proofed critical and cautious toward fitspiration content and thought they were unaffected. Also, it has been suggested that, although individuals may feel instantly inspired by fitspiration postings, they may not actually change their behaviours in the long run.

What is more, the public sharing of beach body parameters through self-tracking apps may foster online social comparison and competitive pressure and encompass objectifying treatment. As Lupton (2015, p. 445) explained, "users of these technologies can 'watch each other 'constantly and record and then share their observations with many others". Thereby, it is important to note that online embodiment may not always relate to community approval and support, but also entail negative reactions such as shame and guilt.

As opposed, decreases in body dissatisfaction have been observed after exposure to body-positive social media content. Because potential comparison targets posted under body-positive hashtags differentiate from normative body ideals (Fardouly et al., 2015), they may encourage women to engage in downward or lateral comparison. Put differently, women may either feel like "one of them" or superior to the flawed body images presented.

A growing body of research on social media and body image confirms that comparing against naturally flawed images, e.g., women of diverse body shapes with visible wrinkles, stretch marks or cellulite, might reduce appearance concerns and increase self-esteem and confidence (Alentola, 2017; Fardouly & Rapee, 2019; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). Hashtag activism such as #summerofcellulite, #mermaidthighs, #fatkini, #beachbodyforeverybody and the likes may contribute to this.

Cohen et al. (2019) observed that even very short exposure to body-positive bikini-clad women on Instagram linked to reduced body dissatisfaction, improved mood and increased body appreciation, relative to exposure to thin-idealised images. Hicks and Brown (2016) found that exposure to bodies that mothers perceived as similar or inferior to their own bodies (e.g., flawed, with stretch marks, wrinkles) made them feel good. Even when accompanied by objectifying rather than empowering messages, the display of non-normative bodies in swimwear may still trigger immediate improvements in body image (Hendrickse et al., 2021). Controversial body-positive bikini postings such as Townsend's ostomy selfie may thus trigger immediate positive effects in those who view them.

Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that exposure to appearance content on SNS may activate self-objectification processes regardless of the displayed women's body shape (Cohen et al., 2019). While self-objectification, just as in selfie activities, may not necessarily constitute a negative thing then,

some have argued for an emphasis on body neutrality that focuses on other things than appearance. For instance, several experimental studies used nature images in the control condition finding that those led to increases in body appreciation (Cohen et al., 2019; Williamson & Karaszia, 2018). This is of relevance because just as in traditional media contexts, polarising Love Your Body messages may add pressure and complicate subjectivity, thus lead to unfavourable boomerang effects in those who view them; and the body positivity movement is not without critics. Especially so when women receive a multiplicity of ambiguous, oftentimes contradictory beach body messages about appearance, health, food, fitness and the likes on their newsfeeds. As Kiefer (2020) argued, "at the same time that women are being told by advertisers to love their bodies and embrace "inner beauty", they are also receiving an onslaught of messages about alternative diets, fitness and wellness that, if not managed responsibly, could feed a damaging mindset of comparison and control". Just as in traditional media, consistency is needed to prevent those negative effects; however, this is difficult to realise given that social media users can control much, but by far not everything they are exposed to. It is thus of continuing relevance to work on individual users' media literacy, that is, to increasing their competency to critically assess and deal with media content that may contribute to appearance concerns.

In summary, social media effects on body image have been extensively demonstrated. Although effect sizes are relatively small, according to Saiphoo and Vahedi's (2019) meta-analysis, it can be acknowledged that the authors only reviewed cross-sectional studies and that research on social media and body image is a steadily evolving and highly dynamic field; respectively, continuous and longitudinal analyses are needed in order to fully grasp its impact on individuals' body image. Thus far, findings suggest that media effects may be similar on traditional as well as social media, although both environments differ.

More profound explorations of the body positivity and body neutrality movement are without doubt needed to increase our understanding of how photo-based activities with non-normative bodies in swimwear affect women's body image, especially in the long-run.

That notwithstanding, it must be acknowledged that the media alone cannot be blamed for the normative bodily discontent found in many parts of the world (Ferguson, 2013; Holmstrom, 2014; Want, 2009). As previously noted, sociocultural models such as Thompson et al.'s (1999) Tripartite Influence Model have emphasised the impact of family and peers, while others have emphasised the impact of often overlooked aspects such as religion and employment (Wykes & Gunter, 2010).

How women experience their own and other people's bodies at the beach might play another significant role on how they perceive, feel, think, and behave with regards to their (beach) bodies during the summer. Therefore, the subsequent section reviews what is known about women's experiences of embodiment at textile beaches.

4.3 Experiences of Embodiment at the Beach

Chapter 3.1 has shown that the beach, as one of the few public places where it is socially accepted to expose one's (semi-)naked body to others (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008), has been historically embedded

in complex debates about moral, sexuality, gender, race, and looks; about what is appropriate and "normal" enough to be displayed and what should be hidden from public views. It discussed how human beings went to the beach to temporarily escape the city dirt, noise and speed of the industrialised world, to reconnect with nature, find relaxation, restore their health and move their bodies. When going to the seaside turned into a popular leisure activity, bodies in swimwear became of increasing political and social relevance, which changed how people experienced embodiment. Social and political discourse contributed to constructing a rather ambiguous image of the beach as a place for sexual possibility, enjoyment, adventure, transgression, and illicit pleasure on the one hand (Cover, 2003; A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012) and of social order, bodily control and appearance norms on the other hand (Metusela & Waitt, 2009; Daley, 2003).

Contemporary beach body discourse in the mass media has been identified just as ambiguous and complex. Given that it might greatly affect individuals' experiences of embodiment at the beach (Urry, 1990, 1992), the question arises as to what is known about how women experience their own and other women's bodies in this space. The following sections attend to that question under specific consideration of objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954).

4.3.1 Negative Embodiment at the Beach

As outlined previously, objectification theory serves to explore how women in swimwear have been socially constructed as (sexualised) objects to be looked at and judged, which might consequent in processes of self-objectification; for instance, when a woman considers her beach body as a controllable object that should be surveyed and transformed according to internalised ideal standards. Research finds self-objectification to be connected to body image concerns and potentially health-risking behaviours such as disordered eating.

Objectification, in past beach body research, is commonly theorised through Urry's concept of the "tourist gaze" (Urry, 1990). In his original work, Urry (1990) established a link between visual tourism experiences and Foucault's (1977) concept of power relations, in which the philosopher argued that people in the nineteenth century and beyond were disciplined not by physical punishment, but by social surveillance and self-surveillance, thereby, producing "docile bodies", i.e. subjected and normalised ones. Given that the tourist gaze serves to describe how women, as a result of observed or experienced objectifying treatment in their social environment, distance from their physical selves and turn to look at their bodies as isolated, inferior, and disciplined objects, its core ideas are transferable to Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory, with the latter enabling a deeper look into the psychology of self-objectification.

Researchers such as Urry (1990) have attributed the surveillant gaze at the beach primarily to heterosexual men looking upon, evaluating, and potentially sexualising women's bared bodies. One participant in Field et al.'s (2019, p. 434) study confirms, "the strongest gaze is the male gaze at the

beach, and […] a lot of women shape their experiences at the beach around that". Looks received from prospective heterosexual partners might trigger specific associations with the sexualised beach babe theme as enforced by the mass media. As a consequence, women may feel it is normal or even expected of them to attract and please men when displaying their bodies at the beach.

Whenever a woman's value is measured on nothing but her outward appearance, gendered power relations, objectifying treatment and, potentially, sexualisation occur. Several studies indicate that women may routinely experience this when exposing their swimwear-clad bodies at Western beaches such as in Italy and Australia (Abramovici, 2007; Field et al., 2019; Small, 2007, 2016, 2021) and at beaches in Muslim cultures (Small, 2021).

Researchers should nevertheless refrain from considering objectifying treatment and power relations at the beach exclusively as a male-dominated issue given that the surveillant gaze might as well be imagined, anticipated and/or stem from same-sex individuals (Small, 2016).

The imagination to be looked upon when in swimwear has been demonstrated through Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) and Hebl et al.'s (2004) swimsuit experiments. They observed that the experience of putting on and wearing a swimsuit triggered self-objectification in women even under laboratory conditions. Offering one explanation, Blood (2005, p. 38) remarked, "there are parallels between the self-surveillance practised by many women in their daily lives and the self-surveillance re-enacted in the laboratory under the instruction and the gaze of body image researchers".

The impact of other female beachgoers has been observed, too (Abramovici, 2007; Field et al., 2019; Small, 2016, 2021). Abramovici (2007, p. 121), in her qualitative study on Italian women's beach experiences, describes: "They [the women] will also take in the women's appearances on the beach, their bikinis, tans and body shapes, with a competitive eye for the incoming women, and an appreciative eye for the men". When women, as suggested in this extract, turn to look at other women and themselves at the beach, objectification and social comparison processes blend.

Small (2016), thus far, has been the only one to connect her data concretely with social comparison theory; however, other studies (Abramovici, 2007; Field et al., 2019) report of women comparing their beach bodies to other women's bodies as well. Both Small (2016) and Field et al. (2019) observed body image concerns and overall negative holiday memories amongst women after comparing to other women's bodies at the beach, whom they perceived as better looking; that is, after engaging in upward comparisons to evaluate their own standing. Participants in Field et al.'s (2019) study linked this explicitly to situations, in which beaches were used as outdoor gyms. This supports Devienne's (2019) notion that Californian muscle beaches might have a particular impact on women's beach body image as they basically constitute sites, where fitspiration is carried out by actually "tangible" people in an unmediated natural space. Although arguably, watching other beachgoers actively transforming their bodies might at least temporarily motivate women to improve themselves and engage in allegedly healthier behaviours (Small, 2016), the literature has sufficiently shown that in long-term, this may shift into negative body image (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

In their 2003 Australian health report, Quine, Bernard and Booth (2003) suggested that the proximity with which individuals lived to the beach might affect their body image such that frequent exposure to beautiful bodies at the beach might increase appearance concerns. While this hypothesis has not yet been supported, there is evidence to suggest that much frequented beaches exert specific pressure on women to display an ideal beach body. For instance, Italian women in Abramovici's (2007) study described their excessive tanning behaviour amidst some busy beaches in Italy as a "game" amongst female beachgoers that was tied to clear rules and rituals in order to present a perfectly tanned body[14]. Relatedly, Australian participants in Small's (2021) study reminisced about worrying much about the perfect beach look (matching bikini, bag and sandals from a certain brand) when going to popular beaches in Brazil and Australia, but less so at quiet beaches.

While this indicates that beach cultures may play a role in women's (dis-)comfort at the beach, much of how they are psychologically affected relates to the extent, to which they have internalised the idea of a homogenised, sexualised and disciplined ideal beach body and the beliefs and assumptions they hold about their own bodies.

Qualitative studies suggest that being unclothed at the beach "when not in possession of the requisite 'beach body'" links to experiencing difficulties in women (Jordan, 2007, p. 102). Small (2016, p. 23) reports that young women reminisced negatively about their beach holidays when "feeling fat, exposed (in swimmers), ugly, unfit/untoned, bloated, having pale or blotchy skin and inappropriate/ attractive clothes". At later life-stages, a common concern amongst women was exposing their flawed postpartum bodies in swimwear at the beach as it differentiated from the "yummy mummy" and bikini-ready celebrity mum image presented in the media (Small, 2021).

Women have been found responding to beach body-related concerns through distress, anxiety, embarrassment, self-consciousness and body shame (Field et al., 2019; Jordan, 2007; A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2010); sensations, thereby, can be so intense that they may damage women's overall holiday and summer experiences (Small, 2016, 2021; Field et al., 2019). Under these circumstances, the beach turns into an uncomfortable zone for women to experience embodiment in (A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2012) and the swimsuit into a problematic clothing item (Small, 2021).

Appearance researchers have observed women engaging in cognitive strategies and behaviours in order to (temporarily) cope with, reduce, regulate or prevent negative self-evaluations such as the beach body concerns mentioned previously.

One strategy is avoidance. A study of 52,677 heterosexual adults (thereof 26,983 women) aged 18-65 by Frederick, Peplau, and Lever (2006) confirms that many women may worry about prospective

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[14] First, in preparation for the actual tanning ritual, a good spot on the beach was to be chosen. Then, sun cream needed to be applied. Head hair should be tied back to avoid an (unattractive) white neck. "The tanning may now begin, tanning being considered an activity in its own right […] The lying down position engages all women to pull up the bottom part of the bikini in order to tan the buttocks when lying on their tummies. This ensures that when parading along the beach at a later time, if the bikini shifts a little with the walking movement, there will be no visible white, or untanned, skin. In much the same way, when lying on their backs, women will detach the straps of the top of the bikini so as not to have white marks when wearing a dress or light top at a later time in the day. It is also essential to lie at some point in a fetal position so as to ensure no white lines at the back of the legs where these meet the buttocks" (Abramovici, 2007, p. 122).

situations, in which their bodies might be exposed in swimwear. Almost one third (31%) said they felt so uncomfortable that they avoided wearing a swimsuit in public. This is a relevant finding as it emphasises the need to consider beach body concerns within studies on body image and avoidance behaviours.

Coping strategies might as well include adjustive processes and appearance fixing behaviours directed at "altering [one's] appearance by covering, camouflaging, or correcting the perceived defect" (Cash, Santos, & Williams, 2005, p. 192). While covering and camouflaging may take place directly at the beach, the latter might relate to beach body ready behaviours carried out *prior to* a beach visit. Both strategies have been observed. Behaviours carried out prior to a planned beach visit include practices such as dieting, exercising or hair removal that individuals engage in to prepare their bodies for public display in swimwear at the beach (Kleim et al., 2019). Investigations on body hair and body image confirm the prospect of wearing a swimsuit or a bikini as a common motive for hair removal in women. The experience or prospect of being hairy in public environments such as the beach has been described as distressing because female body hair is widely negatively connoted as unattractive or even disgusting in Western cultures (Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004). One female participant in Braun, Tricklebank and Clarke's (2013, p. 7) qualitative study on pubic hair removal pointed out that having "hair hanging out your [bikinis] on the beach is way bad!!". The authors reasoned that body hair concerns regarding the beach body might be particularly salient amongst women living in countries with strong beach cultures, but this is yet to be validated.

Jordan's (2007) content and critical discourse analysis suggested that the ideal time span to physically prepare for summer, as promoted by lifestyle magazines amounted up to six weeks. The literature occasionally reports of lengthier periods, depending on the context of a beach visit, i.e., beach culture, underlying motive and acquaintances (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2021). For instance, a participant in Field et al.'s (2019) study described that she had started to exercise six months before a planned beach holiday with her boyfriend. This suggests that beach body concerns might exceed the warm season if individuals place a lot of importance and pressure into presenting their best self in swimwear. As opposed, Small (2021) observed decreased concerns when women were joined by family and close friends.

Those who do not feel satisfied with displaying their swimwear-clad bodies during a beach visit may additionally engage in short-term strategies to manage their discomfort and feel better about the way they look.

Girls and women have been found covering up their bodies in public swimming pools (K. James, 2000), at textile beaches (Abramovici, 2007; Field et al., 2019; Small, 2021) and in warm temperatures in general (Clarke, Griffin, & Maliha, 2009). Older women have been found feeling particularly uneasy about exposing "bat wings", i.e., the sagging skin of their arms stating that even in "uncomfortably hot weather" they would rather wear long sleeves than reveal too much skin (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 171). This makes it relevant to explore experiences of embodiment at the beach in women of different ages.

Women with low body image satisfaction, low self-esteem, high BMI/self-classified overweight and those who felt fat and non-compliant to the young, thin and hairless ideal have been found particularly likely to do this (Abramovici, 2007; Field et al., 2019; Frith & Gleeson, 2008; Rudd & Lennon, 1994; Tiggemann & Andrew, 2012; Tiggemann & Lacey, 2009). To give a few examples, Italian women reported covering their buttocks when walking along the beach (Abramovici, 2007) and young women in Australia said they preferred to wear boy leg-style bikini bottoms to conceal their pubic hair (Field et al., 2019). Small (2021) observed that hiding self-perceived flaws (e.g., by wearing a kaftan at the beach) related to more positive overall holiday memories in adult women. Moreover, young women reported more positive experiences of embodiment at the beach when they had previously exercised and eaten light food (Small, 2016).

Appearance fixing behaviour can, under circumstances, help women to change into more positive state body image (Melnyk, Cash, & Janda, 2004). However, this sensation may only be of a temporary nature and not serve to prevent or reduce concerns about exposing one's bodies in swimwear just as it is.

4.3.2 Positive Embodiment at the Beach

While beach body ready behaviour is oftentimes accepted as something that all women do, they may as well choose to accept and present their body as it is. Cash (2002) refers to this as "rational positive acceptance". More recently, self-acceptance has been identified as a central component in building and maintaining a positive body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). The decision to accept their body may help women to confidently expose their swimwear-clad bodies and enjoy themselves. A body-positive advocate quoted in Alentola (2017, p. 39) remarks: "One of the biggest ways I feel empowered is that I can put on a bikini and go to the beach, be surrounded by the people and feel great. Before I would have spent the whole day miserable and hiding under t-shirt and towels and do everything I could to minimise myself and disappear and not draw any attention on myself." Other studies confirm that wearing a bikini might be perceived as an empowering way to resist normative gendered discourse (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2007). This view not only is in line with beach body history; it is also common in the body positivity movement, where exposing one's body in a bikini oftentimes is treated as an ultimate proof of body confidence for those who post and consume body-positive content.

The literature suggests that positive experiences of embodiment at the beach may be possible even if individuals have not (yet) established a positive relationship to their body. This notion is of relevance because bodily discontent continues to affect many women and while exposing one's semi-naked body in public may seem particularly challenging, being at the beach may in fact be beneficial for our mental health and body image in some ways.

First, just as some beach environments might encourage state self-objectification responsive to the environment, women may feel protected and safe to expose their bodies in others, no matter their look (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2011; Moradi, 2011). In the literature, positive experiences of embodiment are reported more in nude rather than textile beach contexts. Interactions at nude beaches, thereby, have

not only been contrasted to textile beach experiences, but also been linked to reduced self-consciousness (Green, 2001, 2003), greater self-esteem, higher overall life satisfaction and positive body image in beachgoers (West, 2017). To re-call, nude beaches are advertising-free zones that are frequented by nudist/naturist subcultures rather than the broad population who expose their all-naked bodies (West, 2017). As typical in subcultures, group members usually feel a strong sense of belongingness to like-minded others with whom they share the same values and ideas of what going to the beach encompasses. Group conformity amongst nudists/naturists is expressed through an all-naked look, ideally with an all-over suntan (also referred to as *bona fides),* whereas physical perfection does not matter (Green, 2001)*.* Nudity symbolises liberation and bodily freedom at nude beaches and is approached in a non-sexualising way (Green, 2001; West, 2017).

These fundamental aspects of nudism serve to explaining why women report feeling less sexualised and more comfortable to expose their bodies at nude beaches rather than textile ones. A participant in Barcan's (Barcan, 2001) qualitative study reported: "I just felt that people who shed their clothes obviously are not going to be judgmental of other people. They're comfortable with where they're at; they don't need to be looking or judging other people." (Barcan, 2001, p. 306). Somewhat aligned to this is Field et al.'s (2019) observation that women had felt less pressure about hiding pubic hair when displaying their bodies in bathers at quiet, less frequented textile beaches. Complementary, Small (2016, 2021) found evidence that women placed fewer importance onto physical appearance when being surrounded by family and close friends. Reducing the feeling of being looked at, judged and potentially sexualised by unknown others, resultantly, seems to play an integral role for women to confidently expose their bodies at the beach.

More than that, Green (2001, p. 4) described how she had felt empowered through the very act of stripping because it disabled men from undressing women with their looks, or as she put it: "She is there for her pleasure, not for the pleasure of the other". The suggestion that women might feel more empowered, agent and confident when exposing more intimate details of their body than at textile beaches testifies to how female swimwear - and those who wear it - have been socio-historically sexualised and how this has been extended onto textile beaches. Only through shifting paradigms, especially a de-sexualisation of the way in which the beach environment in general and swimwear-clad women specifically are socially constructed and treated, may this be changed.

Positive embodiment at the beach has further been connected to body diversity. Participants in several studies emphasised the diversity of "normal", "not perfect" and flawed bodies they had seen at the beach (Barcan, 2001; Green, 2001; West, 2017). Although this view seems to dominate in nudism studies, the same experience may doubtlessly be gathered at textile beaches with a diversity of individuals of the general population habitually displaying their bodies in bathers during the warm season. As opposed to staged beach body photographs in the media, they are presented in many different poses and fluid movements, whether aesthetically advantageous or not. Joye (2013) argues that the beach is "perhaps the last bastion of body reality. A place that provides an honest depiction of what women's bodies actually look like […] the beach just tells it like it is". The discrepancy between

natural bodies displayed at the beach to those constructed by the mass media yields implications with regards to women's body image.

Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) have emphasised the importance to conceptualise beauty in broader and more inclusive ways in order to develop and sustain inner positivity; viewing lots of different bodies in beachwear might facilitate this and help individuals to obtain a more realistic and nuanced understanding of actual bodies. Scholars such as Green (2001) and Barcan (2010) moreover observed that exposure to other beachgoers' visible flaws triggered women's interest in their life stories. War-related entry and exit wounds, bypass- and Caesarian scars, crutches, prosthetic limbs, and mastectomies were perceived as markers of a lived life rather than character flaws and seemed to create social bonds between people. This implies that looking at naked, flawed bodies in non-sexualising and non-judgmental ways may encourage individuals to look beyond the surface of outward appearance when getting to know people.

According to social comparison theory, comparing against bodies that we consider on eye-level or worse-looking than our own body, i.e. lateral or downward appearance comparison, may increase body satisfaction and self-enhancement (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). In congruence, participants in Small's (2016) study reported feelings of empowerment, pleasure, and pride when perceiving their appearances superior as compared to other women and after receiving positive feedback from others. The resulting self-enhancement might serve as a defence mechanism through which women - at least momentarily - abide in more positive feelings about themselves.

Alongside, downward appearance comparisons may also serve as a cross-motivational factor in women to expose their bodies with less concerns. The literature suggests that this refers to both natural beach environments and social media.

For instance, a participant in Barcan's (2001, p. 306) study about women's nude beach experiences put: "If she can do it, so can I". A body-positive social media user in Alentola's (2017, p. 36) study described: "When I post these things [body-positive content] online, just like going to the beach in a bikini, people write me long emails about how after I posted my picture, they feel a little more confident to go to a beach as well". These examples once again demonstrate the connectedness of women's online and offline experiences: while being confronted with idealised, staged beach body images and appeals to get beach body ready might increase women's fears to expose their non-normative bodies, seeing other women's flawed bodies might be helpful in reducing these concerns.

Two things must be taken in account when individuals compare their beach bodies against others: first, body dissatisfaction might be so habitual and deeply rooted that women may perceive any other woman at the beach as more attractive. Second, the focus remains on outward appearance and may continue to drive body dissatisfaction and the wish to change. In support, Small (2016) observed that young women who were "not unhappy" with their bodies in the first place felt more negatively about themselves after comparing to other women whom they perceived as more attractive. Comparing against other beachgoers' bodies resultantly constitutes a less sustainable and stable strategy for building and

maintaining a peaceful relationship to one's body (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

Approaches such as body neutrality that seek to shift individuals' focus away from appearance onto things other than appearance may be more purposive. Great relevance has been ascribed to the engagement with natural environments and practicing mindfulness, both of which connect to the beach. Engaging with nature has been linked to stress recovery (Ashbullby, Pahl, Webley, & White, 2013; Grahn & Stigsdotter, 2010; Stigsdotter et al., 2011), vitality and positive emotions (Zelenski & Nisbet, 2014), the collection and reminiscence of happy childhood memories (Ashbullby et al., 2013), enjoyment (Ashbullby et al., 2013), increased social interaction (Ashbullby et al., 2013) and overall quality of life (O. Douglas, Russell, & Scott, 2019).

Lately, links have been made between nature exposure and positive body image (Stieger, Aichinger, & Swami, 2022; Swami, Barron, Todd, Horne, & Furnham, 2020). Even exposure to nature through photos and videos has been connected to positive body image outcomes (Swami, Barron, & Furnham, 2018) Researchers in the realm of blue mind research find that individuals tend to experience a meditative, relaxed state of mind when spending time in natural "blue environments" (Nichols, 2014) or "aquatic recreational landscapes" (Alac, 2012), that is, when close by, in or underwater (Nichols, 2014). Blue mind forms an antidote to the over-stimulated, over-connected and stressed so-called "red mind" that often dominates in our dynamic everyday life and thus reconnects to the initial motives of middle-class workers for going to the beach during industrialisation. By focusing on how we feel rather than how we - or other individuals - look at the beach, blue mind research constitutes a strong ally to the concept of body neutrality and may add fresh knowledge about the reduction and prevention of body image concerns and the development and maintenance of positive body image in a specific unmediated environment.

A growing body of literature connects the beach to a host of physical and mental health benefits. A large-size study exploring the relationship between individuals' momentary subjective wellbeing and their immediate geographic environment by MacKerron and Mourato (2013) with more than 20,000 participants in the UK proposed that people were significantly and substantially happier when being outdoors in natural environments, especially in blue environments. Notably settings associated with relaxation, the sound of water, wind, silence, people talking, birds, ferry boats, and splashing fish, and the smells of food and water have been identified as places where people feel calm, happy and at ease (O'Brien, 2012). This is relevant given that happiness, good mood and relaxation are important contributors to people's overall health and wellbeing and central to the construct of positive embodiment (Piran, 2016).

While negative self-evaluation may make women more hesitant toward swimwear activities (Liechty, 2009; Small, 2021), a review by Tucker and Gilliland (2007) connects the beach with an increased motivation amongst people of all ages to engage in physical activity. This is relevant given that moderate physical activity may contribute to preventing and healing a range of physical and mental health issues,

including depression and obesity and it may help potentially vulnerable individuals such as mothers build and maintain positive relationships to their bodies (Raspovic, Prichard, Yager, & Hart, 2020). Observing that parents and children had engaged in various physical activities at the beach, Ashbullby et al. (2013) characterize the beach as an environment for families' health promotion and Small (2007, p. 75) explains that "through physical activity, the body can be liberated". She argues that by moving, women may assert self-control and by so doing reject the unwanted external control of the (male) gaze at the beach. Complementary, appreciating what the body is capable of doing may contribute to strengthening women's resilience against socially prescribed ideal appearance norms such as the ideal beach body (Alleva et al., 2015; Alleva & Tylka, 2021). This has been observed by Small (2021) in a recent memory-based study with 33 women aged 30-64.

Related to that, scholars such as Piran (2006), Greenleaf and Hauff (2019), and Mahlo and Tiggemann (2016) have emphasised mindful physical movement such as yoga as a driver for positive embodiment through an intense connection between body, mind and nature. Carried out nearby the water, the meditative state of the mind may be reinforced through beach-specific sensory stimuli such as the sight of the blue sea, the smell of salty air, the touch of sand under the body and the sound of waves (Nichols, 2018; O'Brien, 2006). The same goes for sunshine and warm temperatures. Although these are naturally not granted in all coastal regions during summer, they may intensify the "feel-good factor" of the beach. To give an example, Italian participants in Abramovici's (2007, p. 121) study associated sunbathing at the beach with "the feeling of being touched, the sun stroking their body […] the wonderful feeling of the whole body relaxing and the brain functioning in slow mode […] [and] as areward for all the stress and tensions of everyday life". The extract confirms the core assumptions of blue mind research that individuals may experience a meditation-like state of mind when nearby the water, which might be comparable to that experienced through mindfulness practices. In the example above, sunshine and warm temperatures contributed greatly to the positive sensations. What some people experience in sunny beach environments may consequently be contrasted to the so-called "winter blues", a seasonal affective disorder that individuals experience in recurring terms during the winter months and that has been linked to depression, low energy levels, withdrawal from social situations and food cravings (Melrose, 2015).

Taken together, the findings presented in the previous paragraphs showed that however women feel with respect to exposing their swimwear-clad bodies at the beach must be read in a sociocultural and personal context. Although embodiment at the beach might differ greatly from beach body-related mass media interactions, it might be equally complex and multi-faceted, thereby varying from person to person. Thus far, no studies have measured the strength, with which being at the beach relates to women's body image and neither has the idea of blue mind research, i.e., that women might psychologically benefit from relaxing at the beach, been studied from an appearance research perspective. These research gaps are attempted to be filled in the remainder of this PhD thesis, which aims to scientifically explore how exposure to different kinds of beach body experiences of embodiment at the beach and on social media relate to women's body image during summer.

CHAPTER 5: Research Methodology

The following chapter introduces to the empirical part of this PhD thesis with an outline of the research questions and hypotheses addressed in this work. It will then move on to elaborate why a combination of multiple methods and paradigms under the philosophical umbrella of pragmatism was considered purposive to generate meaningful and multi-faceted insights into women and their beach body experiences of embodiment in different mediated and unmediated contexts of their everyday life. Both the qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative (survey) research strand will be specified with regards to participants, measures and approaches to analyses.

Arguably, conducting research using multiple methods is not without challenges and concerns have been raised regarding the overall quality and validity of mixed methods research (Fabregues, Escalante-Barrios, Molina-Azorin, Hong, & Verd, 2021). In an attempt to address these concerns, a checklist of primary and secondary design dimensions provided by Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) will be applied. This framework assists scholars in presenting a profound and transparent outline of the overall quality of their research design by addressing important aspects such as aims, procedures and underlying social scientific theory. A research design can be described as a "plan or proposal to conduct research, [which] involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods" (Creswell, 2008, p. 5). The chapter will be followed by a discussion of research findings.

5.1 Research Questions and Hypotheses

As suggested by Fàbregues et al. (2021, p. 12), "what really determines the suitability of an approach, or a design is the research question of a study" and not a possible misconception of mixed methods as a superior approach that "everybody should apply". Therefore, the research questions and hypotheses addressed in the empirical part of this PhD thesis will be outlined in the following.

The preceding chapters identified the beach body as an under-researched topic. A series of research gaps arose alongside the general need to deliver more nuanced up-to-date findings.
Addressing all of them would have exceeded the scope of this doctoral project. Emphasis was thus put on understanding how women's beach body experiences on social networking sites and at the beach related to their body image during summer. The mixed methods study was guided by the following overarching research question:

> *How do women's beach body experiences in different mediated and unmediated contexts relate to their body image?*

This question was approached with two sequential mixed-methods research studies: a qualitative focus groups study conducted in June 2017 and a quantitative survey carried out in Australia and the UK in April and September 2019, respectively.

The previously identified paucity of data about women's beach body experiences on social media raised the need to collect qualitative data as a first step. Focus groups were chosen to identify patterns and topics relevant to women who had engaged with beach bodies online and at the beach. Research questions that were explored in the focus groups included:

- *RQ1:* How do women experience their own and other women's beach bodies both online on SNS and at the beach?
- *RQ2:* What cross-cultural differences and similarities can be observed with regards to women's beach body experiences?

The subsequent online survey aimed to address the following question:

- *RQ3:* How strongly do women's beach body experiences on SNS and at the beach relate to women's body image during summer?

Hypotheses were created for that purpose. Those will be elaborated subsequently. They are structured by (1) correlations, (2) subpopulations, (3) mediations, and (4) moderations.

(1) Correlations

H1: Based on studies such as by Eckler et al. (2017) and Hicks and Brown (2017), it was hypothesized that time spent on social networking sites (SNS) would link to high appearance concerns during summer, such that women who spent more time on SNS will score lower in appearance evaluation and higher in thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification. In contrast, time spent at the beach was assumed to link to more positive body image outcomes during summer, such that women who spent more time at the beach will score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification. This was based on the growing body of literature that connect engaging with natural environments such as the beach to better mental health and more positive body image (Stieger et al., 2022).

H2: Focus groups had suggested a link between women's beach body satisfaction and their overall body image during summer. Therefore, it was hypothesised that global subjective beach body satisfaction would link to low appearance concerns during summer, such that women who felt more satisfied with their beach body would score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification.

H3: Based on the overall literature on body image and social media (e.g., Holland and Tiggemann, 2016; Mingoia et al., 2017) and blue mind research (Nichols, 2018), it was further hypothesised that exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS would link to high appearance concerns (low appearance evaluation, high thin-ideal internalisation, high self-objectification) during summer whereas exposure to

non-normative beach bodies at the beach would negatively correlate with appearance concerns (high appearance evaluation, low thin-ideal internalisation, low self-objectification).

H4/H5: Based on the literature that connects physical activity and experiences of mindfulness and connectedness with nature exposure to more positive body image outcomes (e.g., Greenleaf & Hauff, 2019; Small, 2007), it was assumed in Hypothesis 4 that subjective wellbeing and in Hypothesis 5 that physical activity at the beach would link to low appearance concerns, such that women with a high ability to feel good at the beach and those who moved their bodies more frequently at the beach would score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation.

(2) Subpopulations

H6: The literature on selfie posting and body image presents mixed findings. Given that selfie posting has been repeatedly linked to self-objectification and the attempt to present one's best possible self (Veldhuis et al., 2020), it was hypothesised that beach body selfie-posting would link to higher thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification. Given that someone who thinks entirely negatively about their body may not choose to share beach body self-portraits online, it was further assumed that selfie posters would score higher in appearance evaluation.

H7: Congruent with Hypotheses 6, it was further hypothesised that women who posted photos of their beach bodies on SNS would report of higher appearance evaluation, but also of higher self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation compared to passive users.

H8: The literature review identified mothers as an important subpopulation of women given the prevalence of normative discourse about bikini-ready and "yummy mummy" postpartum bodies (Nash, 2018; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). Following studies such as by Coyne et al. (2018), Williams et al. (2017) and Aubrey and Hopper (2015), it was hypothesized that mothers would be more negatively affected by normative beach body images on SNS. As opposed, the literature provides evidence that mothers might experiences increases in body satisfaction after engaging in healthful physical activity (Raspovic et al., 2020), mindfulness practices (Wallis, Prichard, Hart, & Yager, 2021) and in the context of exposure to non-normative bodies (Singh, 2019). Therefore, it was further hypothesized that they might show stronger positive body image outcomes in connection to engaging with the beach, that is, when being exposed to non-normative beach bodies, when engaging in physical activity and when they score high in subjective wellbeing at the beach.

H9: Related to Hypothesis 8 and informed by studies such as by Gjerdingen (2009), it was further assumed that mothers would report of higher appearance concerns compared to non-mothers, such that they would score lower in appearance evaluation and higher in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation.

H10: Connecting to Hypothesis 2, the beach body experiences of women with low, medium and high beach body satisfaction sought to be explored. It was hypothesised that women who felt dissatisfied with their beach bodies would have stronger negative body image reactions when being exposed to and posting beach body content on SNS and stronger positive body image reactions when being exposed to non-normative beach bodies at the beach, engaging in physical activity at the beach and feeling good at the beach compared to women who felt neutral or satisfied with their beach bodies.

(3) Mediators

H11: Extrapolating from previous research on appearance comparisons and body image (Thompson et al., 1999), it was hypothesised that women's appearance comparison tendency would mediate the relationship between appearance concerns and exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and non-normative beach bodies at the beach, respectively, such that women with a greater tendency to compare their bodies against normative beach body images on SNS would score lower in appearance evaluation and higher in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation. As opposed, women with a greater tendency to compare their bodies against other women's non-normative bodies at the beach were presumed to score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation.

H12: Again, based on blue mind research, it was hypothesised that the relationship between time spent at the beach and appearance evaluation would be mediated by subjective wellbeing at the beach, such that the relationship would be stronger the more women were able to feel good at the beach.

(4) Moderators

H13: Based on meta-analyses such as by Mingoia et al. (2017), it was hypothesised that age would moderate the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS and appearance concerns during summer, such that older women would be less likely to be affected by normative beach body images on SNS. As a result, they would score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation than younger women

H14: Informed by the focus groups and past research (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002), it was further assumed that women's self-perceived beach body discrepancy would moderate the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS and exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach and appearance concerns; such that women with more self-perceived discrepancies between their own and other women's beach body photos will score lower in appearance evaluation and higher in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation than women with lower self-perceived discrepancies. As opposed, women with fewer self-perceived discrepancies between their own and other women's bodies at the beach were assumed to score higher in appearance evaluation and

lower in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation than women with more self-perceived discrepancies.

H15: Finally, connecting to H4 and H12, it was hypothesised that subjective wellbeing at the beach will moderate the relationship between global subjective beach body satisfaction and appearance concerns during summer, such that women with a greater ability to feel good at the beach will score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation than women with a reduced ability to feel good at the beach.

In the following, the mixed methods research carried out in this PhD thesis will be specified. It starts with a description of epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions underlying this research before an outline of the chosen mixed methods design is given.

5.2 Underlying Philosophical Approach

Any research is considerably affected by epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions, that is, underlying beliefs and assumptions regarding knowledge, nature and reality as well as value and ethics of a study that a researcher or team of researchers hold (Creswell, 2008). By familiarising with different philosophies, paradigms or "worldviews" (Creswell, 2008) provided in the literature and reflecting upon one's own viewpoints, scholars may increase the quality of their research project considerably; especially by making choices and processes more transparent, thus better understandable to others (Creswell, Klassen, Plano Clark, & Smith, 2011; M. Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011).

As shown in the literature review, female bodies in swimwear have been discussed and interpreted using different paradigms. This included post-structuralist and postmodern views (e.g., Jordan, 2007; Metusela & Waitt, 2012) as well as neoliberal and (post-)feminist stances (Budgeon, 2011; Daniels, 2009; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Olive, 2015; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). To contextualise the complexities and ambivalences that have been ascribed to women's beach body experiences in different contexts of their everyday lives, a combination of different paradigms or "ideological drives" (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017) was considered purposive to respond to the research questions addressed in this PhD thesis.

A paradigmatic "umbrella" that allows mixed methods researchers to integrate and bundle pluralistic viewpoints is pragmatism (Dures, 2012; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). "Pragmatists recognise that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research, that no single point of view can ever give the entire picture and that there may be multiple realities". (M. Saunders et al. 2015, p. 144).

Because some have criticised pragmatism as a "what works" approach and confused it with "eclectisim" or "practicalism" (Fàbregues et al., 2021), it is necessary to briefly engage with its philosophical roots and understand how pragmatism meets the overall objectives of mixed methods research. Espoused by philosophers such as John Dewey, Charles Sanders Pierce and William James, pragmatism was introduced as a mediating philosophy to overcome "metaphysical disputes" in traditional philosophy about the seeming incompatibility of objectivist and subjectivist research methods (W. James, 2013). Rather than understanding knowledge as a result, pragmatist epistemology strove to concentrate on the process of knowledge-*seeking* and how to improve it, a concept referred to as "inquiry".

Rejecting dichotomous "either/or" conditions, pragmatist researchers made the case for applying a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, as is the case in mixed methods research. This process of *abduction* allows for a dynamic connection to bridge theory and practice, whereby attention is placed onto identifying shared meanings and joint action (M. Saunders et al., 2015). Taking an *intersubjective* approach, pragmatist researchers typically "work back and forth between various frames of reference" (Morgan, 2007, p. 71). Different perspectives are combined to contribute practicable solutions and to clarify the potential consequences arising from one or multiple research question(s) or problem(s). Relative to sequential mixed methods approaches, preceding qualitative data collections may inform quantitative research, or vice versa (Morgan, 2007). By so doing, pragmatist researchers attempt to transfer the knowledge gained through one research component on to another. For those reasons, pragmatism has been highlighted as a suitable philosophy to support mixed methods research.

Saunders and colleagues (2015, p. 124) emphasise that a credible research philosophy is marked by "a well thought-out and consistent set of assumptions". The epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions underlying this work are therefore outlined in the following.

Overall, this research was greatly affected by the initially proposed body-positive definition of the beach body as any swimwear-clad body exposed in a beach environment. This relied on the researcher's motivation to contribute to de-stigmatising a social phenomenon that has been historically constructed in one-sided, idealised ways with myriad consequences for individuals and society. The researcher believed that the diversity, with which beach bodies of all kinds appear and are negotiated in our contemporary consumer culture legitimated different types of knowledge and complex perceptions of nature and reality. This referred specifically to natural and idealised, i.e., non-normative and normative beach bodies and to the multiple mediated and unmediated contexts in which they appear. For instance, individuals may perceive beach body images displayed in the media as trustworthy and real, even if those have been digitally enhanced (Gill & Elias, 2014), whereas others may perceive natural beaches as one of the last places of body reality (Joye, 2013).

Divergent views may also reveal with regards to body-positive photographs of women in swimwear, which some may find empowering and inspiring (Alentola, 2017) while others may feel offended and respond with body shaming people (Cohen et al., 2019; Scholz & Weijo, 2016). In order to adequately deal with these complex and sometimes divergent viewpoints, or what Scholz and Weijo (2016, p. 513)

refer to as "hyper-polarisations", truth, in this research, was not considered as either subjective or objective, but as highly context dependent. This overall attitude allowed the doctoral researcher to capture a multiplicity of cross-cultural viewpoints in order to create a rich picture of how women experience their own and other women's bodies in swimwear as they engage with the world around them.

5.3 Mixed Methods Research Design

Researchers have long been expected to position as either quantitatively or qualitatively oriented and to embrace conventional research paradigms that were ascribed to a respective method. Both approaches yield multiple benefits but used alone may deliver less meaningful knowledge in response to a question, a set of questions or a complex social phenomenon than a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

Research, in which at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component are mixed for the general purpose of contributing insightful, broad and fundamental knowledge is referred to as mixed methods research (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Mixed methods design has grown and institutionalised since the 1990s (Fàbregues et al., 2021) and has been encouraged in appearance research as well (Dures, 2012) as it may contribute to increasing integrity, usefulness, illustration, and diversity of findings (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In the following paragraphs, the qualitative and quantitative research strand conducted as part of this PhD project will be outlined.

Engaging with questions of "what" and "how", a key strength of qualitative field research is to explore complex social phenomena and to illustrate a variety of viewpoints based on relatively small, but purposively selected samples (Babbie, 2015; Dures, 2012).

With the overall objective to compare the viewpoints and experiences of women from various cultural backgrounds, focus groups were seen as a particularly useful method of qualitative data collection because of the social interaction and group dynamics they typically involve. As opposed to, for instance, face-to-face interviews, efficient group dynamics may encourage even reluctant participants to share their views and by so doing, help generate unique insights to cross-cultural differences, similarities and various social contexts that a certain target population might consider relevant (Babbie, 2015; Dures, 2012). This was considered advantageous not only to gain profound insights to female social media users' beach body experiences on social media; but also, to explore how the concept of the beach body was internalised and accepted - or rejected - cross-culturally, especially in countries that do not constitute typical beach nations and that have been neglected in past studies.

Despite the advantages that focus groups held with regards to the overall purpose of this PhD project, weaknesses and limitations are naturally ascribed to it and must be acknowledged. An overview of the strengths and weaknesses is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF FOCUS GROUP AND SURVEY RESEARCH AS BY KITZINGER AND BARBOUR (1999), BABBIE (2015), AND GUNDUMOGULA (2020)

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus Groups	- allows researchers to "be there", i.e., collect real life data - enables purposive/theoretical sampling - in-depth results/ illustrations to complex phenomena may be produced through social interaction between participants - efficient group dynamics may encourage even reluctant participants to share their views - flexibility (design modification possible at any time) - quick results - normally relatively inexpensive (except for recording/subscription equipment etc.) - superior validity in comparison with surveys and experiments	- domination of certain participants increases the risk for bias and manipulation - individual views may not be distinguishable from group views —> difficult to analyse - findings not representative/ generalisable - researchers have less control than in individual interviews - moderators should possess specific skills - conducive research environment needed - subjective interpretation of data —> might be largely affected by personal views - potential ethical concerns - limited reliability
Online surveys	- help to make refined descriptive assertions about a large population - high levels of accuracy - flexibility (many questions can be asked and analysed) - help develop concepts and definitions based on actual observations - strong reliability	- standardised questionnaire items/ stimuli may not fit all purposes - subject to artificiality (study may not be amenable to measurement through questionnaires) - cannot sufficiently display contexts of social life or social action, e.g. personal circumstances and experiences —> difficult for researchers to develop a feel for participants' life situation unexpected results/ new variables might remain undetected weak validity

As illustrated, a major weakness is that focus group findings are by no means representative or reliable, thus cannot substitute and should not be handled as a "back door" survey technique (Barbour, 2018). As a consequence, qualitative research alone was an insufficient technique to address the question of how strongly exposure to different kinds of normative and non-normative beach bodies related to women's body image. Exploring this, however, was a key purpose of this PhD thesis and necessary to manifest the overall relevance of the beach body phenomenon with respect to appearance psychology; especially with the absence of quantitative data constituting another major research gap identified in the literature review.

Scholars such as Babbie (2015) proposed that a combination of focus groups and surveys may deliver a balanced, insightful research approach, in which the weaknesses of one method might be reduced by the strengths of the other. Given that quantitative survey research is typically used to measure, predict or correlate numeric data, seeking to respond to questions of "how many" or "how strong" (Dures, 2012), it offered the best suited complementation to the focus groups in order to address the research questions. The details of both research strands are outlined subsequently.

5.3.1 Study 1: Focus Groups

The qualitative research study was conducted in June 2017. Focus groups were employed to explore women's beach body experiences on social media with the overall aim to develop knowledge in preparation for the survey. Alongside, the researcher was interested to study how the beach body affected adult women beyond archetypical beach nations and outside classical beach holiday contexts. Using convenience sampling, international exchange students were recruited who spent their spring term 2017 at the University of Cologne, Germany. The different cultural backgrounds of participants were considered purposive to stimulate discussions and obtain meaningful cross-cultural results about the beach body (Barbour, 2018). Given that the study was conducted in June, i.e., at the beginning of summer in the Northern hemisphere, there was a high probability that participants had recently interacted with beach body content. The study was conducted during an English-taught lecture on the subject "Consumer Behaviour and Body Image in the Digital Age" held by the doctoral researcher. Participants were deemed eligible to participate as they had a strong language proficiency and were active social media users. Ethical approval to conduct the study was acquired by the University of Strathclyde's School of Humanities 'Ethics Committee.

5.3.1.1 Participants

In total, 25 international students agreed to take part in the study, comprising of 19 females and 6 males. Students were assigned to four same-sex focus groups (three female groups, one male group) of 6-8 participants from at least five different countries. This criterium sought to create sufficient cultural heterogeneity within groups to encourage dynamic, insightful discussions, while also ensuring comparability between all groups in the analysis (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). The gender composition was applied because it was believed that young women would feel more comfortable to disclose personal thoughts and feelings about a sensitive topic such as the beach body if they were amongst students of the same sex. Because this research focuses on women's beach body experiences, the all-male group will be excluded from the analysis and hereby only the data from the 19 females is reported.

As Barbour (2018) suggests, it can be useful for researchers to collect standard data by means of a short pro forma to strengthen the accuracy of the obtained data and save transcription time. Participants

were thus asked to complete an anonymous one-page questionnaire to collect individual data regarding demographics, beach- and media usage.

The questionnaire revealed that all participants fit the previously defined selection criteria (adult; identifying as women; active social media usage). The average age of the 19 female participants was 21.17 years (*SD = 1.11*). All of them identified as active social media users with 94.7% using Facebook and 78.9% using Instagram several times a day.

Table 2 shows that cultural diversity was achieved. Participants came from 14 different countries: Poland, France, UK, Spain, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, USA/India, Mexico and Brazil, which ensured that diverse cultural views could be exchanged on the subject.

TABLE 2: LIST OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

	Participant pseudonym	Home country
Group 1 - all female	Jekaterina	Russia
	Ewa	Russia
	Madeleine	France
	Leyla	Azerbaijan
	Natalie	Poland
	Sumi	South Korea
Group 2 - all female	Mary	New Zealand
	Kelsey	USA/India
	Charlotte	New Zealand
	Tereza	Czech Republic
	Zuzanna	Poland
	Aiko	Japan
Group 3 - all female	Valentina	Mexico
	Seren	UK
	Carmen	Spain
	Laurine	France
	Océane	France
	Maria	Brazil
	Daria	Ukraine

Participants lived on average in 1-2 hours distance to the beach in their home countries. More than one quarter (26.3%) lived in direct proximity (less than 30 minutes distance) to the beach; another 10.5% lived between 30 and 60 minutes away and 21.1% between 60 and 120 minutes away from the beach. The remaining 42.1% of participants lived more than two hours away from the beach.

5.3.1.2 Procedure

Prior to the study, participants were provided with an information sheet about background, ethics and procedure of the research (Appendix C). They all signed informed consent, upon which they could proceed with the study.

The research was conducted in one of the final lecture sessions of the term to make sure that students had familiarised with each other and had participated in regular in-class interactions so that they did not feel as if they had to talk to strangers. The study took place in the classroom, which was considered a convenient and well accessible venue for all participants (Gundumogula, 2020). Each group received six guiding questions, such as "What does the ideal beach body look like to you?" and "How do you receive most beach body information in everyday life?" that ought to be discussed within 60 minutes (Appendix D). To ensure each question was addressed thoroughly and that all students were sufficiently involved in the discussion, one student per group was selected by the researcher as a moderator. Moderators were carefully chosen based on criteria such as friendliness, communication, ability to listen proactively, time management and the ability to motivate others to actively participate. They received thorough instructions from the researcher in advance to make sure each discussion was effective and successful. The researcher herself stayed available in the same room to supervise the focus groups and address questions and queries where needed. Discussions were recorded electronically and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

5.3.1.3 Approach to Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is subjective given that researchers typically interpret the contributions of participants according to their personal position and values (Blair, 2015).

Pre-established coding systems offer useful guidelines to transform transcribed qualitative data into analysable and interpretable meaningful categories. For instance, researchers may code the data as they emerge from the text. This system is referred to as "open coding" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Or they may identify literature-based templates/constructs *a priori* to fit and frame the data in. This approach is referred to as "template coding" (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Given their oppositional nature, both coding systems have been described as "prototypical extremes" (Blair, 2015, p. 17) and researchers may struggle to code their data according to either one. In that case they are best advised to choose their coding system in alignment with their individual research methodology and their pursued philosophical approach (Blair, 2015).

A critical reflection of the epistemological, ontological and axiological foundation of the mixed methods approach of this research identified the need for a framework that was compatible with different theories and research paradigms while allowing for a combination of open and template coding. The search for an eligible coding system revealed Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for theoretical thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a commonly applied method used to identify and analyse patterns within a data set. It has been described as "a foundational method" and as "the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Importantly, it has proved useful in past qualitative body image research (e.g., Raspovic et al., 2020). Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines encompass six steps as illustrated in Table 3.

TABLE 3: PHASES OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006, P. 87)

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

The researcher began with highlighting individual quotes deemed fitting to address the research questions and identified six initial codes during the data transcription (Table 4). Data were systematically coded with a collation of data relevant to each code.

Extract examples and notes about audible social interactions (e.g., laughter, (dis-)agreements, sarcasm) were analysed for each theme under thorough re-consideration of the research questions and the literature reviewed up to this point. Social interactions were considered following the work of scholars such as Morgan (2012) who made the case for a combination of content-oriented (i.e., what is said) and conversation-oriented (i.e., how it is said) approaches to focus group analyses. Doing so enables researchers to make purposive connections between participants' contributions and obtain an overall feel for group dynamics and context rather than treating individual statements separately. Morgan (2012, p. 174) summarises, "every conversation is about something, and that "something" is the core of focus groups". Given that beach body understandings are embedded within a social, cultural and historic context, latent and constructionist thematic analyses were carried out; that is, the responses were interpreted according to the literature.

In a next step, the initial codes were put together into repeated patterns, reviewed and refined into four meaningful and cohesive overarching themes (bold) with subthemes: (1) beach body internalisation, (2) beach body experiences on social media, (3) beach body behaviours prior to summer, and (4) experiences of embodiment at the beach. The final themes are rank ordered chronologically: theme 1-3 refer to participants' thoughts, feelings and behaviours *prior* to a beach visit, whereas theme 4 sought to capture their experiences *during* a beach visit.

TABLE 4: INITIAL CODES AND FINAL THEMES OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Initial codes	Final themes (bold) and subthemes
Beach body understandings	**Theme 1: Beach body internalisation** The beach body as a summer appearance ideal The beach body as a year-round ideal
Body work	**Theme 2: Beach body experiences on social media** Viewing of normative beach body content on SNS Selfie-posting
Active beach body exposure on SNS	**Theme 3: Beach body behaviours prior to summer** Stimuli triggering beach body-related concerns Behavioural decision-making process Body image outcomes
Passive beach body exposure on SNS	**Theme 4: Experiences of embodiment at the beach** Viewing of swimwear-clad bodies at the beach Experiences of embodiment at non-Western beaches
Beach body exposure at the beach	
Seasonality and temporariness of beach body concerns	

As proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the terms that initially emerged as being significant were reviewed and refined for several times under thorough consideration of the research questions and the literature until resulting in the final themes and subthemes. The development and meaning of each theme are briefly outlined in the following paragraphs. Examples of the coding process are provided in Appendix E.

The first theme "beach body internalisation" was informed by the body image literature on thin-ideal internalisation. As initially described, this concept has been applied to explain how individuals, as a result of internalising a certain appearance norm experience body discontent (Dittmar, 2008). Theme 1 accordingly sought to identify areas of the subscribed text, where participants shared their views of the ideal female beach body, which had initially been termed as "beach body understandings". Internalisation did, however, offer a better fit to the literature. The code was considered important to assess how the concept of the ideal beach body was internalised across cultures and how much women

felt affected by it. This was with specific regards to the definition and conceptualisation proposed in this PhD thesis. Given that participants had discussed the beach body as a summer and a year-round appearance ideal, the initially defined code "seasonality and temporariness of beach body concerns" could then be integrated within that theme.

As for the second theme, the body image literature has emphasised social media users' role as both active producers and passive recipients of appearance content (Meier & Gray, 2014). All kinds of beach body-related social media activities were thus captured under the umbrella "beach body experiences on social media". The theme sought to identify relevant contexts, in which participants had experienced the beach body theme on social networking sites, and how they had responded to those. Given that the viewing of normative beach body postings linked to the internalisation of a thin beach body ideal, but was also associated with changing beach body behaviours, this theme bridged theme 1 and theme 3.

Next, although the beach body literature has repeatedly considered body work (e.g., engaging in bikini workouts or beach body dieting) as something that women routinely engage in before summer, the study found participants' decision of whether and how much to engage in body work embedded in complex psychological processes that encompassed more than just body work. The initial code, therefore, was rephrased into "beach body behaviours prior to summer" and sought to capture findings to enhance and extend existing notions on "body work strategies" by scholars such as Field et al. (2019) and Small (2021).

The last theme "experiences of embodiment at the beach" was informed by existing beach body studies in the field of tourism and leisure that have described the experience of being at the beach as embodied (A. Pritchard & Morgan, 2007). In congruence with the definition and conceptualisation underlying this PhD thesis, it aims to express a connection to the embodiment construct (Piran, 2016), thereby integrating psychological and sociological aspects in order to create a detailed picture of how women experience their (beach) bodies as they engage with the world around them. The viewing of swimwear-clad bodies at (Western) beaches emerged as a central subtheme in the discussion. Because they offered a unique sociocultural context of embodiment, experiences at non-Western beaches were captured under a separate subtheme.

5.3.2 Study 2: Survey

In addition to the focus groups, the quantitative strand of the mixed methods sought to assess how beach body exposure (on SNS and at the beach) correlated with women's body image.
Contrary to the multi-country focus group sample, the survey was carried out amongst adult women in Australia and the UK. The geographical limitation was imposed for several reasons: first, the survey sought to explore women's beach body experiences with regards to social media and the beach. Content and critical discourse analyses in the literature review showed the persistence and homogeneity of beach body content in British and Australian mass media. Given the relative parity of empirical evidence surrounding the beach body in these studies, both countries could be identified as

apt countries for a larger-sized, quantitative follow-up study as it could be assumed that individuals were sufficiently familiar with the concept of the ideal beach body. Alongside, the survey sought to contribute original quantitative insights to existing qualitative beach body studies on Australian women such as by Small (2016, 21) and Field et al. (2019). Further, to explore experiences at the beach, it was deemed purposive to select countries, in which going to the beach is an established leisure activity during summer that is not exclusively limited to holiday contexts. The socio-historical review confirmed this for both Australia and the UK who both played important roles in the history of the female beach body.

Then, both nations, although located in different hemispheres, share several similarities that offer a solid cross-cultural comparison base. This not only includes language and culture (see, for instance, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, as displayed in Appendix F); also, the 2016 Dove Global Beauty and Confidence Report revealed comparable levels of body satisfaction amongst women in both countries; that is, only 20% of Australian and British females in the study had felt satisfied with their bodies (Dove, 2016).

The survey (Appendix G) was carried out online through the platform *Qualtrics.* Word of mouth snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants. The link to the survey was shared through personal contacts of the researcher, and via announcements on Facebook and Twitter. Participants received a short instruction and provided written consent to their participation before completing the survey at their own convenience, which took about 20 minutes. After completion, they were incentivised with a lottery for several 10GBP/15AUD Amazon vouchers which were sponsored through the John and Anne Benson Prize awarded to the PhD researcher in February 2019.

Ethical approval to conduct the survey was provided by the University of Strathclyde's School of Humanities 'Ethics Committee.

5.3.2.1 Participants

In order to take part in the survey, participants had to

1) identify as adult women
2) have spent the preceding summer of 2019 in the UK or Australia
3) have spent a minimum of one day in swimwear at the beach (in their home country or elsewhere) over the past summer
4) identify as active social media users.

The initial sample included 1,157 British and Australian adult women who agreed to participate in the study. Self-identified men, participants below the age of 18 years, participants who had not spent the past summer in the UK nor in Australia; those who did not have a social media account and responses with more than two missing main scores were excluded to create consistency in the data. This resulted in a final sample of N=659 participants, thereof, 263 Australian and 396 British women.

Fitting the overall objective to study a possibly heterogeneous sample, the age of participants in the overall sample ranged from 18 to 70 years ($M = 31.15, SD = 12.4$). Not all participants felt comfortable enough to disclose their body weight and height. Of the 634 who did, the average reported body mass index (BMI) ranged from a minimum value of 15.3, which the World Health Organisation (2022) classifies as underweight, through to a maximum value of 52.08, which is classified as Obesity class III (ibid.). The average BMI was 25.76 ($SD=6.28$). These numbers indicate that women of different body shape were integrated in the study.

Almost a third (31.1%) of participants reported they had suffered from an eating disorder or disordered eating behaviour; another 26.9% reported having some kind of visual disfigurement such that disabilities, congenital conditions (e.g., birth marks), burns or scars would become visible when they were dressed in swimwear. Some 29.6% identified as mothers and 1.1% were pregnant at the time of the study.

Most participants (83.9%) identified as heterosexual, with others reporting to be bisexual (10.2%), lesbian (2.9%) and of an otherwise specified sexuality (1.2%). More than a third (39.2%) were in a relationship, 28.2% were married, 30% were single, and small shares preferred not to disclose their relationship status (0.9%) or described it as other (1.4%).

Limited heterogeneity was achieved in terms of ethnicity, where 93.6% claimed to be Caucasian. Ethnical minority groups in the Australian sample consisted of 3.4% Asian, 1.1% Aboriginal/Pacific Islander and 3% other ethnicities. In the British sample, 1.8% were either of Asian/Asian British or of mixed/multiple ethnical backgrounds, 1% were of Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and 0.5% of other ethnicities.

Participants had lived on average 50 minutes from a beach ($SD = 51.65$), whereby 80% had lived no more than 60 minutes away from the beach. They had spent between one hour and 552 hours ($M = 59.22$ hours, $SD = 69.26$) at the beach during the previous 3-months-summer period (max. 93 days). Some Australian participants from regions with extended beach seasons had spent even more time at the beach outside summer, which led to an extended average beach time of 76.4 hours ($SD = 133.74$) in the overall sample.

Some female participants reported that they had spent no days at the beach over the past summer and were not eligible to complete the survey; however, they were asked, in an open-ended question, why they had not gone to the beach. The question was raised to develop a feel for the prevalence of appearance reasons in beach avoidance behaviours, a question that was addressed in addition to the hypotheses (see also chapter 7.6). A final sample of N = 74 qualitative responses were analysed herein.

5.3.2.2 Measures

Demographics
Participants were asked to report age, ethnicity, relationship status, sexuality, height, and weight. Height and weight were used to calculate the Body Mass Index (kg/m2), which, although debated, is a common

indicator in appearance research. Moreover, participants were asked whether they had an eating disorder history, if they had any visible differences, and if they were mothers or currently pregnant.

(Social) Media usage

Although the study sought to focus exclusively on beach body exposure on social networking sites, the literature review argued not to neglect other mass media channels completely, as those may still contribute to creating repetition and recognition of certain messages. Responses were deemed helpful in contextualising the potential impact of beach body messages in traditional media as identified by past content and critical discourse analyses (e.g., Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017); especially in relation to social media usage.

Participants were thus asked how much time they had spent engaging with TV and print media during the summer and how frequently they had been exposed to images of swimwear-clad women on these channels and public adverts in comparison to SNS. Answers were recorded on 5-point Likert scales ranging from (1) never to (5) always*.*

Rather than considering certain sites, the subsequent scales used to explore beach body (inter-)actions on SNS were generic because, as argued by McLean et al. (2015), users may change their personal preferences, especially when considering a lengthier period such as summer. Moreover, participants may view or post beach body images more frequently on some sites than others and it was important in this research to capture all.

Time spent on SNS

It was measured in an open-ended question how much time participants had spent using social media on a typical day. Answers were recorded on a 12-point-scale, as proposed by Cohen et al. (2018): (1) 0-15min, (2) 15-30min, (3) 1-2 h, (4) 2-3 h, (5) 3-4 h, (6) 4-5h, (7) 5-6 h, (8) 6-7 h, (9) 7-8 h, (10) 8-9 h, (11) 10-11 h, (12) 10 or more hours.

Beach body selfie-posting (SNS)

The active beach body posting scale aimed to assess how participants, who had posted beach body self-portraits ("selfies") on social media, had presented their bodies. A two-items scale was developed, in which participants were asked how much of their body they had usually exposed in their selfies (1 = just my face, 2 = face to shoulders, 3 = I don't know, 4 = face to waist, 5 = my full body) and what they had usually worn (1= fully dressed with long sleeves/trousers, 2 = light summer clothes, 3 = beachwear, but with a scarf/towel/shirt wrapped around my body,

4 = a one-piece, 5 = a bikini or less). Items were summed and averaged to form a combined beach body self-exposure (SNS) score with higher scores indicating greater bodily exposure online. Cronbach's alpha was .804.

Exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS)

To measure the extent to which participants had consumed normative beach body images as they had engaged with SNS during summer, they were exposed to a bipolar 5-point scale featuring five typical beach body attributes (thin/fat; muscular/flabby; tanned/pale; hairless/hairy; flawless/with visible imperfections), as identified in the literature review and by the focus groups. Participants were asked to assess the beach body images they had viewed on their newsfeeds based on that scale, whereby higher scales indicated greater compliance to the normative Western-centric beach body ideal. To obtain a combined measure, all items were summed and averaged with higher scores indicating greater exposure to images coming close to the socially constructed "ideal" beach body. In this study, the scale showed good reliability and internal consistency (*alpha* = .841).

Time spent at the beach

Equivalent to time spent on social media, participants were asked to indicate how many days they had approximately spent at the beach this past summer, and how long a typical beach visit had typically lasted. Both items were multiplied to achieve an overall *time spent at the beach* score. This was recoded using 10th percentiles, resulting in (1) 0-8; (2) 9-14; (3) 15-20; (4) 21-28; (5) 29-38; (6) 39-50; (7) 51-75; (8) 76-101; (9) 102-160; (10) 161 minutes or more.

Subjective wellbeing at the beach

In line with blue mind research, participants were asked on a 5-point scale (1= not at all, 5 = very much), how much they had been able to relax/feel good at the beach.

Physical activity at the beach

Participants were asked on a 5-point scale anchored by 1 = "never" and 5 = "always" how often they had engaged in physical activity (e.g., swimming, playing ball, yoga) at the beach.

Exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach)

To measure the extent to which participants had been exposed to non-normative female bodies in swimwear at the beach, they were asked to assess other women's beach bodies on the same bipolar scale as applied in the social media context (thin/fat; muscular/flabby; tanned/pale; hairless/hairy; flawless/with visible imperfections). To reduce research fatigue, order and positions of "ideal" and "non-ideal" beach body features were shifted in the survey but re-positioned and re-coded during the analysis. Items were summed and averaged to create a combined scale score with higher values indicating fewer compliance with the normative beach body ideal. The scale showed acceptable reliability and internal consistency with alpha = .764.

Global subjective beach body satisfaction

The extent to which participants had felt satisfied about their beach body during the past summer season was measured through three items: "how satisfied have you felt about their beach body during the past summer season?" (1 = very unsatisfied, 5 = very satisfied), "how would you rate your beach

body in terms of attractiveness?" (1 = unattractive, 5 = attractive), and (reversely coded) "this past summer, how often have you avoided going to the beach because of the way you felt about your look?" (1= never, 5 = all the time). Items were summed and average to obtain an overall global subjective beach body satisfaction score. The scale showed acceptable reliability and internal consistency with alpha .774.

Appearance evaluation

Appearance evaluation, i.e., body satisfaction was measured using the 7-item Appearance Evaluation Subscale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire – Appearance Scales (Cash, 1990). On a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "definitely disagree" to 5 = "definitely agree", participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with statements about their appearance. To make the measure fit better into the context of this study, statements were slightly adapted: e.g., instead of "My body is sexually appealing" they survey suggested, "*This past summer*, my body *was* sexually appealing" and instead of "I disliked my physique" it said "*This past summer*, I disliked my physique". For analysis, items were summed up. Positive items were reversely coded in this study with higher scores indicating a more negative appearance evaluation. Cash's (1990) scale showed excellent reliability in this study (*alpha = .906*).

Self-objectification

Self-objectification was measured based on McKinley and Hyde's (1996) Objectified Body Consciousness Scale, specifically using its 8-item body surveillance subscale, which is a commonly applied measure for the manifestation of self-objectifying behaviour. Participants rated how much they agreed with eight statements like "I rarely think about how I look" and "I think more about how my body feels than how my body looks". Again, the scale was adapted into the summer context, e.g. "*During the past summer season,* I rarely thought about how I looked" and "*During the past summer season*, I thought more about how my body felt than how my body looked". Participants were asked how much they agreed on another 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". Positive statements such as the latter were reversely coded before the items were averaged with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-surveillance. McKinley and Hyde's (1996) body surveillance subscale demonstrated very good reliability with Cronbach's alpha = .889.

Thin-ideal internalisation

To what extent participants had internalised sociocultural standards to own a thin beach body was measured using the internalisation: thin/low body fat subscale from the Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire 4 (SATAQ-4) by Schaefer et al. (2015). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with five statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "definitely disagree" to 5 = "definitely agree". Again, the statements were adapted to fit the overall theme, e.g. "*During the past summer season,* I wanted my body to look very thin" and "*During the past summer season*, I thought a lot about having very little body fat". Consistent with Appearance Evaluation and

Self-Objectification scales, higher values indicated greater internalisation of thin/low body fat beach body ideal. The thin/low body fat internalisation subscales of SATAQ-4 demonstrated good internal consistency and convergent validity in this study (*alpha* = .861).

Appearance comparison tendency

Appearance comparison tendency in both social media and beach contexts was measured using two items of Thompson, Heinberg and Tantleff-Dunn's (1991) Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS). These items have proved useful in the past to investigate context-specific appearance comparisons, which Thompson and associates (1991) initially termed as "parties or social events".

Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)

Some have adjusted the "parties or social events" items to Instagram (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton, & Ridgway, 2017) and Facebook (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015) alone. However, as aforementioned, this study aimed to consider the overall exposure to beach body images on *all* social networking sites generically; therefore, the umbrella term "social media" was applied: "When *using social media*, I compared my *beach* body to the *beach* body of others" and "*When using social media*, I sometimes compared my *beach* figure to the *beach* figure of other *users*".

Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never to (5) always, and responses were summed and averaged to obtain a combined measure of appearance comparison tendency on social networking sites. Cronbach's alpha showed excellent reliability (*alpha* = .936).

Appearance comparison tendency (beach)

To measure appearance comparison tendency at the beach, wording was modified accordingly: "When *at the beach*, I sometimes compare my figure to the figures of *other beachgoers*" and "*When at the beach*, I compared my *beach* body to the *beach* body of others". Again, Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never to (5) always, and responses were summed and averaged to obtain a combined appearance comparison tendency at the beach score. The scale showed excellent reliability (*alpha* = .929).

Beach body discrepancy

The previously mentioned bipolar scales, in which participants were asked to assess their own and other women's beach bodies based on five typical beach body attributes (thin/fat; muscular/flabby; tanned/pale; hairless/hairy; flawless/with visible imperfections) was applied to measure women's self-perceived beach body discrepancies. Attractiveness (1 = very unattractive, 5 = very attractive) was added as an additional feature as it served to illustrate women's subjective rating of their own and other women's bodies.

Beach body discrepancy (SNS)

Appearance discrepancies were calculated by subtracting the average ratings that participants had given other women's beach bodies on SNS from the ratings they had given their own beach bodies.

This resulted in a single beach body discrepancy score, which expressed the self-perceived discrepancy between women's own beach body and other women's beach body images they had viewed on SNS.

Beach body discrepancy (beach)
To measure the self-perceived discrepancy between women's own beach body and other women's bodies on the beach, the average ratings that participants had given other women's beach bodies on the beach from the ratings they had given their own beach bodies.

<u>*Additional items*</u>
Beach body selfie-posting frequency
Participants were asked on a 5-point scale anchored at 1 = never and 5 = daily, how often they had shared beach body selfies on SNS.

Photo manipulation
Those who had posted beach body selfies were asked on a 5-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always), how often they had edited their photographs before uploading them online.

Beach dress
To assess how participants had presented themselves at the beach, the question of how they had been dressed during a typical beach visit (1 = fully dressed in long sleeves/trousers, 2 = light summer clothes, 3 = beachwear, but with a scarf/towel/shirt wrapped around my body, 4 = a one-piece, 5 = a bikini or less) was considered.

Seasonality of appearance concerns
To further contextualise the findings of the survey, it was also explored how participants had felt about their bodies during summer as compared to the rest of the year, i.e., "more positively", "more negatively", "indifferent" or "I don't know".

Beach avoidance motives
Those who had spent zero days at the beach and were thus not eligible to complete the survey were asked in an open question why they had not been at the beach more often.

5.3.2.3 Approach to Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 23. The analyses began with descriptives that were conducted, where needed, to form single items.

Pilot-test

Data from the pilot test (N = 31) were analysed to gain a first impression of the reliability and internal consistency of the main scores. Validated body image measures such as Thompson et al.'s (1991) Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (PACS) and Schaefer et al.'s (2015) SATAQ-4 showed excellent reliability. A preliminary assessment of self-designed items to measure women's beach body experiences at the beach and on social media was conducted using exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha.

Main Study

Analyses were repeated with data from the main sample (N = 659). All body image measures (appearance evaluation, self-objectification, thin-ideal internalisation, appearance comparison tendency at the beach/ on SNS) showed very good reliability and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values are provided in chapter 5.3.2.2).

Just as in the pilot-test, exploratory factor analysis, using a Varimax rotation method, was repeated to evaluate the factor structure of 28 self-designed items in the survey. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square (351) = 1520.44, p < .001) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO = .733) indicated that the data were suited for this.

Loading criteria included at least a .30 on the primary factor. After excluding one item ("How important is the beach for your leisure life?") that did not meet the factor loading criteria, the screeplot and eigenvalue resulted in a 7-factor solution. Each factor offered a combination of beach- and social media-related items (e.g., exposure to swimwear-clad bodies at the beach and on social media), which, upon reflection of the underlying theoretical and empirical underpinnings of this PhD thesis, did not appear purposive in response to the research questions. Therefore, two separate factor analyses were conducted: one including beach-related (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-Square (28) = 1404.08, p < .001, KMO = .795) the other including social media-related items (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-Square (21) = 1351.68, p < .001; KMO = .811).

Analyses of screeplots, eigenvalues and theory resulted in a two-factor solution to assess women's beach body experiences at the beach, which served to explaining 46.13% of the variance: (1) exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach) and (2) global subjective beach body satisfaction, and in a two-factor solution for the social media context, which served to explaining 47.81% of the variance: (1) beach body selfie-posting (SNS), and (2) exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS). With Cronbach's alpha ranging between .764 and .841, all constructs showed acceptable reliability and internal consistency.

As previously remarked, some survey items were eliminated when factor-, reliability and internal consistency analyses indicated an insufficient fit. In order to be sure that relevant information would not

be lost, some of those were reconsidered in the analyses to provide context. To give an example, beach body selfie-posting in mothers was strongly associated with high appearance evaluation and low self-objectification. This finding is oppositional to what many body image and social media studies propose (Grogan et al., 2018; McLean et al., 2015; Veldhuis et al., 2020) and raised the question as to why that was. An additional group-wise consideration of individual survey items, such as how often had mothers, in comparison to non-mothers, edited their beach body selfies, how often had they posted these, and how had they presented themselves online indicated that mothers might have put emphasis on posting body-positive content. This offered one explanation of the positive body image outcomes observed in the analysis.

Furthermore, chapter 4.3 demonstrated the relevance of subjective wellbeing and physical activity for women's experiences of embodiment at the beach. Therefore, these questions were assessed as single items.

To test Hypotheses 1, correlations between time spent on SNS and at the beach were calculated using Spearman's rho. This method allows the inclusion of non-parametric measures, as applied in the time scales. Variables in the remaining correlations (H2-H6, H8, H10) included only parametric measures, so that Pearson's correlations could be applied to calculate those. To examine how correlation coefficients differed amongst subpopulations (i.e., mothers/non-mothers; individuals with low/medium/high beach body satisfaction), the data file was split by groups and correlations were calculated group-wise.

Independent t-tests were conducted to compare appearance concerns amongst active beach body selfie posters and those who had only consumed and/or interacted with beach body images, and between mothers and non-mothers (H7+H9). As suggested elsewhere (Herzog, Francis, & Clarke, 2019) the Welch test was considered for analysis as it has been found delivering robust and statistically powerful results independent of homoscedasticity (the assumption of equal variances between groups) and normal distribution of data.

Mediation analyses were performed using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2021) to explore whether women's tendency to compare against other women's bodies at the beach and on social media mediated the direct path between beach body exposure (beach/SNS) and appearance concerns and whether women's subjective wellbeing at the beach mediated the relationship between time spent at the beach and appearance evaluation (H11-H12).

Baron and Kenny (1986) initially identified three preconditions for testing mediation: (1) the predictor variable must be significantly related to the criterion variable; (2) there must be a significant relationship between predictor variable and mediator, and (3) the mediator must be significantly correlated with the outcome variable. These conditions were consistently fulfilled. The macro uses ordinary least squares regression, thereby yielding unstandardised coefficients for total, direct and indirect effects. Bootstrapping with 5000 samples together with heteroscedasticity consistent standard errors (HC3;

Davidson & MacKinnon, 1993) were employed to compute 95% confidence intervals and inferential statistics for the indirect effect. The mediation was considered significant if the confidence interval did not include 0.

The PROCESS macro by Hayes (2021) was also applied to explore age and beach body discrepancy as moderators in the relationship between beach body exposure and body image, and subjective wellbeing as a moderator in the relationship between global subjective beach body satisfaction and body image (H13-15).

Equivalent to mediation, moderation analyses are linked to certain assumptions. This includes that there should be a linear relationship between all variables involved in the moderation analysis. This was assessed through visual inspection of the scatterplots after LOESS smoothing. Then, just as in the previous analyses, bootstrapping analyses with 5000 resamples were used with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC3; Davidson & MacKinnon, 1993) to produce 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect. Means were centred as none of the scales included zero. As proposed by Preacher, Rucker and Hayes (2007), moderation occurred if the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the conditional effects did not include zero. Where no moderation could be observed, simple effects models were additionally performed (A. F. Hayes, 2018). The interaction term was then dropped to re-estimate the significance of the relationships between predictor and criterion variable(s).

5.4 Study Details and Quality Assurance

Although focus groups and survey data, each on their own, may contribute to responding to parts of the research questions, an advantage of mixed methods research is the generation of unique and insightful "meta-inferences" through meaningful integration of both research strands (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Conducting a complex study of two or more research components using multiple methods is not without challenges though, which is why mixed methods researchers need to demonstrate the quality and validity of their research. Different approaches have been proposed for this including Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) subsequent list of primary and secondary design dimensions (Table 5).

TABLE 5: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DIMENSIONS AS IN SCHOONENBOOM AND JOHNSON (2017)

Primary Dimensions	Secondary Dimensions
1. Purpose	8. Phenomenon
2. Theoretical drive	9. Social scientific theory
3. Timing (simultaneity and dependence)	10. Ideological drive
4. Point of integration	11. Combination of sampling methods
5. Typological vs. interactive design approach	12. Degree to which the research participants will be similar or different
6. Planned vs. emergent design	13. Degree to which the researchers on the research team will be similar or different

7. Complexity	14. Type of implementation setting
	15. Degree to which the methods will be similar or different
	16. Validity criteria and strategies
	17. Full study vs. multiple studies

Although responding to all dimensions may not guarantee a strong study, the authors suggest that "the more one knows and thinks about the primary and secondary dimensions of mixed methods design the better equipped one will be to pursue mixed methods research" (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017, p. 128). This framework was considered suitable to provide a detailed, inclusive and transparent report of the quality of the conducted study and is therefore applied in the following. To further reduce potential methodological weaknesses and contradictions that could diminish the quality of the study, criticism on mixed methods research, as for instance summarised in a recent study by Fàbregues and colleagues (2021), will be addressed. Alongside, validity will be discussed in greater detail.

5.4.1 Purpose

The first dimension in Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) framework emphasises the need for scholars to communicate clearly why a mixed methods approach was deemed suitable as compared to other approaches.

In this doctoral research, a mixing of qualitative and quantitative data was considered useful for the general purpose to contribute original cross-cultural insights about women's beach body experiences of embodiment. In line with the previously identified research questions, particular emphasis was put on exploring how women's beach body understanding and experiences were affected by social media and culture, and then to numerically measure how strongly beach body exposure on SNS related to women's body image, as compared to natural bodies at the beach. This approach was deemed suitable to enhance the overall integrity, clarification and utility of findings. Moreover, mixing different viewpoints and findings about women and their beach body experiences was considered purposive in order to produce value for individuals outside and inside of academia.

5.4.2 Theoretical Drive

The second dimension in Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) list seeks to clarify whether priority is given to any one of the combined data sets (Dures, 2012); that is, whether a research design is following a predominantly inductive/qualitative (indicated as QUAL) or a predominantly deductive/quantitative approach (QUAN). Assuming that qualitative and quantitative research were incompatible, the literature historically labelled the dominant research component with capital letters and the other, supplemental component with lowercase letters (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Criticism has recently been raised within the mixed methods research community stating that qualitative data were more often considered

supplement to the quantitative component than the other way round (Fàbregues et al., 2021). The domination of one method may, however, diminish the unique contribution and discourse that a considerate combination of two seemingly oppositional components may bring (Fàbregues et al., 2021). Adding an equal-status approach (QUAL —>/+ QUAN) to the mix, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) proposed that the studies integrated within mixed methods research might as well be of equal value and weight. This relates to earlier thinking by Hall and Howard (2008). In this, Hall and Howard (2008) appealed for a synergistic approach, which Creswell (2009, p. 104) summarises as "the sum of quantitative and qualitative is greater than either approach alone". Rather than focusing on the seemingly incompatible differences between two or more components, researchers might thus try and develop a shared, balanced approach that emphasises interaction and synergy. This perspective was adopted in this PhD thesis and is highlighted through capitalised letters (QUAL and QUAN) in Figure 6. Given that the strengths of qualitative research might make up for the weaknesses of quantitative research and vice versa (Babbie, 2015), both studies were considered of equal value and weight in response to the research questions.

5.4.3 Timing

The timing dimension in Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) framework differentiates between concurrent, i.e. (almost) simultaneously occurring, and sequential studies. In this doctoral research, qualitative data were collected in June 2017 followed by quantitative data collections in April and September of 2019. This chronology is typical of sequential mixed methods research. Figure 6 presents a visualisation of the study design and flow of the procedures.
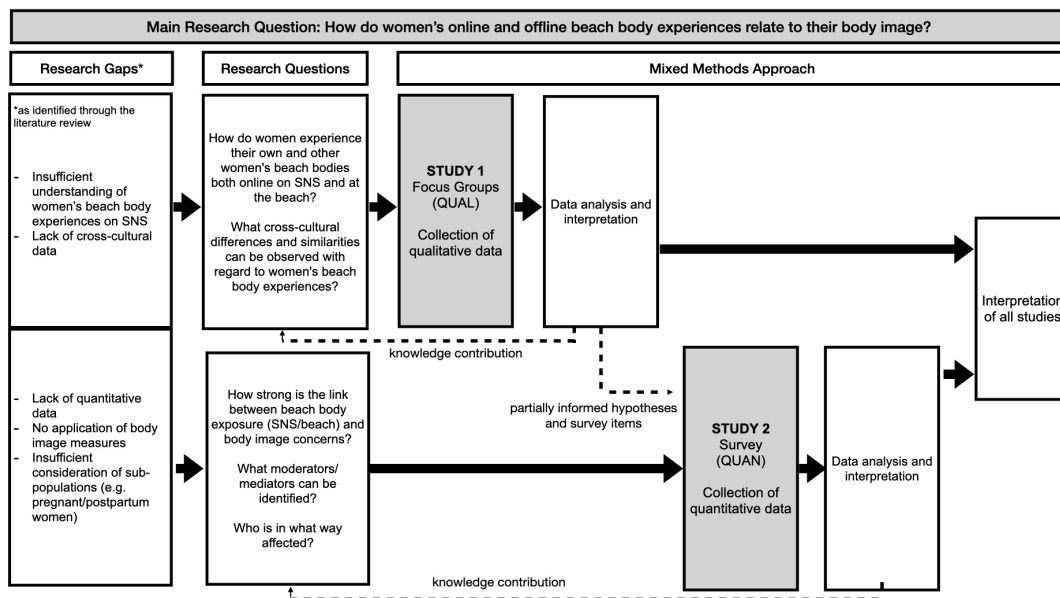

FIGURE 6: CHOSEN MIXED METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

The literature proposes that the implementation of the second research component in sequential studies typically relies on the findings, i.e., themes or categories, generated through the first component. Both

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strands are then considered dependent on each other (Creswell et al., 2011). Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) offer a more nuanced interpretation of this. Linking simultaneity/sequence to data *collection* and (in)dependence to data *analysis* rather than an entire study, they argue that data analyses might as well be carried out independently within sequential studies if that matches the overall research purpose.

A forward arrow leading from the qualitative data analysis and interpretation to the quantitative data collection stage indicate interaction in the above research design. However, not all findings retrieved from the focus groups served to inform elements of the subsequent survey in this mixed methods approach. To give an example, focus groups indicated that viewing normative beach body images on social media linked to increased appearance concerns during summer, whereas exposure to non-normative bodies at natural beaches linked to more positive outcomes. These findings informed some main hypotheses of the survey. Others were, however, formulated based on the literature reviewed in this thesis, for instance, that appearance comparison tendency might mediate the relationship between body image and beach body exposure (Thompson et al., 1999) and that mothers will have a stronger negative reaction to normative beach body images than non-mothers (B. Watson, Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, Broadbent, & Skouteris, 2015). Equally, individual qualitative findings informed individual survey items (e.g., the six-item bipolar beach body scale with features such as thin/fat, muscular/flabby and tanned/pale), whereas others were primarily informed by past body image research (e.g., concrete body image measures).

Several qualitative and quantitative findings were handled as independent standalone insights, too. As will be shown later, one example of a qualitative standalone finding is that family and peers were identified as influential factors alongside the mass media on women's beach body-related concerns and behaviours. This finding is supportive of the general body image literature, especially the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999; Cash, 2002; Mills & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2016) and served to illustrate the overall complexity with which the beach body topic was found linking to women's body image. However, because this PhD thesis sought to focus predominantly on the impact of the mass media, this finding was not further pursued within the correlational study. Contrary, relevant subpopulations such as selfie posters, mothers and ageing women were exclusively explored in the survey.

It is also noteworthy that minor adjustments were performed between the first and the second quantitative data collection. After running the survey in Australia in April 2019, the question emerged of how often participants had avoided the beach because of the way they had felt about their beach body. Therefore, participants from the UK who had spent null days at the beach and who were thus not eligible to complete the survey, were asked for their motives for not going more often in an open-ended question.

5.4.4 Point(s) of integration

As noted previously, bringing qualitative and quantitative research strands together to produce qualitative meta-inferences is one key characteristic of mixed methods research that distinguishes it from mono-method approaches. Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) suggest that there should be at least one "point of integration" or "point of interface" (Morse & Niehaus, 2009) within simple mixed methods research; however, multiple points of integration may enrich the complexity and overall diversity of results. Scholars have proposed different integration points, for instance, when discussing the results of two studies (Morse & Niehaus, 2009) or at different stages of the research process (Teddlie & Tashakkari, 2009; Creswell et al., 2011). However, the points of integration in each study might be unique and sometimes emerge spontaneously (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Rather than adhering to the literature, researchers are therefore best advised to connect their qualitative and quantitative research components in a purposeful and meaningful way as deemed suitable in their individual study. In this thesis, integration took place both in the collection and analysis of data. As previously described, the analysis of the preceding qualitative strand informed some individual items and hypotheses of the survey. The analysis of the survey results then necessitated a re-consideration of focus group data. Going back and forth between two data strands has been referred to as an interactive approach (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In the final stage of the study, all findings were merged, triangulated, and together discussed in response to the research questions.

5.4.5 Typological vs. Interactive Design Approach

The fifth primary dimension deals with the design typology utilisation. Plano Clark, Huddleston-Casas, Churchill, O'Neil Green and Garrett (2008) have illustrated the most common designs as follows:
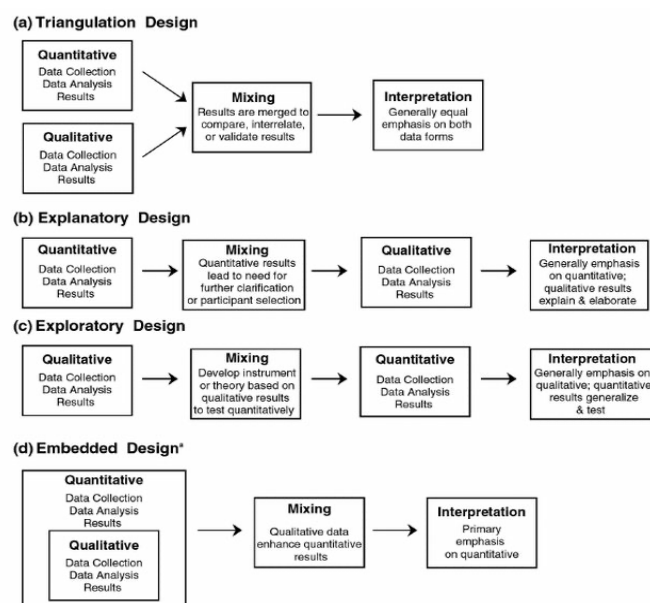

FIGURE 7: FOUR MAJOR MIXED METHODS DESIGNS (PLANO CLARK ET AL., 2008, P. 1551)

Some have applied existing classifications of methodological features from the literature and specified those approaches using Morse and Niehaus' (2009) aforementioned labels to differentiate between core and supplemental research components (e.g., QUAL —> quan or qual —> QUAN for sequential exploratory designs). But this procedure has been contested. One criticism is that although the literature provides a list of typologies, those have been criticised for being "too extensive" and not sufficiently acknowledging equal-status approaches (Fàbregues et al., 2021; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Moreover, existing typologies often constitute ideal designs that may not adequately capture the complexity given in practice. Especially early-career researchers may resultantly struggle to pick a workable approach (Fàbregues et al., 2021). Alongside, "the typologies may curtail the creativity of researchers by restricting them to a series of predefined models that are considered the "correct" ways of combining quantitative and qualitative methods" (Fàbregues et al., 2021, p. 11). In that case, researchers might choose to create their own designs and, if necessary, combine several design types into one "hybrid" and interactive form (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

As previously remarked, the approach pursued in this mixed methods research most closely resembles the sequential exploratory design type. This design type has been emphasised to explore research areas with little empirical knowledge and/or a lack of research instruments and variables as was the case with regards to measuring women's beach body experiences on SNS and at the beach (Plano Clark et al., 2008). However, with the purposive selection of different samples, the generation of qualitative and quantitative standalone findings, the development of survey items and hypotheses based on the literature, equal weighing of both data strands, and interactive procedures, it would be inaccurate to fit the applied approach solely into that design. Therefore, it is best characterised as an adaptation of a sequential exploratory design.

5.4.6 Planned vs. Emergent Design

The sixth dimension of Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) framework expresses whether a mixed methods research design is thought out in advance (planned design) or emerges during the research process (emergent design). As previously described, the lack of data on women's beach body experiences on social media made it necessary to start with a qualitative exploration of the subject. The order of the chosen sequential design, therefore, was planned. A re-consideration of qualitative data following the analysis of the survey findings, however, emerged spontaneously.

Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) remark that while planned designs may be convenient in helping researchers to structure their methodology and perhaps rely on given, validated structures, they may lack in flexibility and interactiveness. This may decrease the strength of mixed methods approaches to reveal meaningful and diverse findings. Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) therefore recommend researchers to be flexible and to adjust, erase or replace research variables along the way where needed. This guidance was adopted.

5.4.7 Complexity

As previously remarked, simple mixed methods design characterises through one point of integration, whereas complexity may be increased through multiple integration points and interdependence between two or more research components within a study. The last primary dimension of Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) framework deals with that matter. Arguably, simple designs with a single point of integration may offer better quality than a complex, yet not well thought through study. Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) thus advise researchers to make the complexity of their methodology dependent from their research question(s) and the theoretical drive pursued in their study. As outlined previously, the studies conducted as part of this mixed methods approach had multiple integrations points both within the research process and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of findings. This testifies to the overall complexity of the mixed methods approach applied in this PhD thesis.

5.4.8 Phenomenon

The first secondary dimension in Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) list deals with an accurate description of the nature of a studied phenomenon or different phenomena; for instance, whether it is a unique or a regular/predictable phenomenon, or a mix of these.

Although beach body content might be shared onto SNS throughout the entire year, the beach body has previously been characterised as a social phenomenon that takes a dominating role prior to and during summer. It thus seems accurate to describe it as a seasonally emerging, annually recurring phenomenon.

5.4.9 Social Scientific Theory and Ideological Drive

Second, researchers should clarify to what extent and how their approach builds upon an existing or aims to generate a new theory.

As the previous chapters have shown, objectification and social comparison theory together were viewed as providing a solid theoretical foundation to explore women's beach body experiences from an appearance research perspective. They were used to interpret the qualitative data and informed central body image measures in the survey.

Relative to the theoretical drive, ideological drive seeks to clarify the underlying paradigmatic and interpretative nature of a study. This research was approached using pragmatist philosophy, as elaborated previously.

5.4.10 Combination of Sampling Methods

The fourth secondary dimension seeks to specify the nature of quantitative and qualitative sampling methods and how these are combined or linked. As previously described, convenience sampling was

performed for the focus groups and voluntary and snowball word-of-mouth sampling were used to recruit survey participants. Although mixed methods researchers often purposively connect the samples of both data strands, this was not intended in this study. Rather, the focus groups sought to discuss and compare as many diverse cultural viewpoints as possible, whereas the survey aimed to explore the experiences of adult women in two culturally comparable countries profoundly. Encompassing too many and diverse cultures within the quantitative strand would have brought a risk of dilution; the survey did, however, complement the focus group sample through a greater heterogeneity of participants in terms of age and BMI, and by including mothers, individuals with visual disfigurements and those with an eating disorder history, which allowed for an exploration of relevant subpopulations in the study.

5.4.11 Similarities/Differences of Participants/ Researchers on the Research Team

The fifth secondary dimension seeks to specify the characteristics of research participants. The details of the participants of both studies have been provided previously. They showed that both studies investigated heterogeneous samples of adult women from different cultures.

Correspondingly, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) appeal to enclose the skills and backgrounds of the researcher(s) involved in a mixed methods study. The research was carried out by the doctoral researcher, though she was supported by her team of supervisors throughout the process. The doctoral researcher was deemed eligible to conduct this research as she provided an array of theoretical and practical expertise in marketing, media and body image research by the time of the first study. Her supervisors completed these skills through their backgrounds in health communications, media and marketing.

5.4.12 Implementation Setting

This dimension describes whether a phenomenon is studied naturalistically or experimentally, or both. Based on experimental studies by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and others, it was believed that women may relate to their semi-naked, swimwear-clad bodies differently when alone in a laboratory setting than at a public beach. Therefore, women's beach body experiences were attempted to be studied as naturalistically as possible. Nevertheless, it was, for several reasons, not deemed practicable to carry out the studies in a beach environment. For once because participants should memorise about the beach bodies, they had been aware of both at the beach and as they had engaged with social media. Then, based on the finding that different beaches may evoke different body image outcomes (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2016), participants were encouraged to reflect on their individual accumulated experiences rather than be distracted by their immediate surrounding. Apart from that, neither the recording of focus groups nor the conduction of a large-size cross-cultural survey was considered practical or cost-effective at the beach.

5.4.13 Similarities/Differences of Methods

This dimension seeks to describe similarities and differences between different methods applied in a project. As outlined previously, focus groups and surveys are two methodologically distinct methods whose complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses have been addressed before.

5.4.14 Validity Criteria and Strategies

Because of oppositional, seemingly incompatible interpretations and approaches toward validity in qualitative and quantitative research, validity has been extensively discussed and contested as a potentially vulnerable aspect in mixed methods research (Onwuegbuzie & Burke Johnson, 2006). For instance, qualitative as opposed to quantitative research, usually accepts multiple subjective realities and understands these as context-dependent (e.g., on languages, a certain worldview etc.) and interpretive. This is in stark contrast to the correspondence theory of truth traditionally underlying quantitative research, according to which the truth or falsity of a statement is determined by the accuracy with which it describes "the real world or part of it" (Rasmussen, 2014). To express methodological differences, qualitative researchers have rejected and replaced quantitative quality descriptions such as objectivity, reliability and internal/external validity with alternative terms such as confirmability, dependability, and credibility/authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Speaking of validity in terms of mixed methods may thus not accurately reflect the interests of the qualitative research strand. Therefore, Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) propose to use the overarching term "legitimation", which is applied in the remainder of this thesis. They suggested to view legitimation in mixed methods research as a continuous, dynamic, and interactive process. Other than in mono-method approaches, scholars should establish validity at different research stages to ensure that the meta-inferences generated from the qualitative and quantitative methods in the study are of sufficient quality (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Mixed methods researchers including Creswell et al. (2011), Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) and Teddlie and Tashakkari (2009) recommend using separate procedures to assess legitimation of both research strands separately and in combination to achieve a multiple validities legitimation.

Qualitative research
Legitimation in qualitative research is typically ensured through peer-reviews and inter-coding practices to diminish the subjectivity of a single researcher, but it may as well be established through processes of reflection, reflexivity and revision by the researcher to ensure that the coding is done meaningfully with regards to the research question(s) and in alignment with the researcher's paradigmatic angle (Blair, 2015). Legitimation, in the focus groups, was established at different research stages, which are described subsequently.

1) Prior to the study

The discussion schedule was derived from the literature review in attempting to gather insights about how young women across cultures had experienced the beach body online and offline. Following Cash's (2012) conceptualisation of body image as described in chapter 2.1, body image was operationalized as a person's body-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The first question "What does the ideal beach body look like to you?" followed Morgan's (2012, p. 169) basic principles for discussion starter questions: (1) something that is easy for each of the participants to answer; (2) something that makes them want to hear what the other participants have to say, and (3) something that creates the opportunity to express a diverse range of views.

Acknowledging that not everyone might feel equally comfortable to talk about their feelings and personal satisfaction regarding their beach body in a group, emphasis was put on the cognitive and behavioural components of the body image construct. This allowed participants to keep personal affections to themselves. To give an example, the question "What (changing) behaviours have you observed amongst your female peers when it came to achieving a beach body?" enabled participants to share beach body behaviours they had observed in their immediate social environment without any pressure to disclose how they had dealt with their own (beach) bodies.

Prior to the study, questions were spell-checked and reviewed by the supervisors of this doctoral project and two independent doctoral researchers and piloted with two student assistants who were of the same age as focus group participants. Based on their feedback, little adjustments were performed to make sure all questions were easily understandable and purposive to respond to the research questions. For example, "both online and offline" was added to the aforementioned question "What (changing) behaviours have you observed amongst your female peers when it came to achieving a beach body?" as it was believed that participants might otherwise instinctively refer more to common offline behaviours such as dieting and exercising, and not consider any online behaviours such as photo manipulation, which are equally relevant to create a detailed and timely picture of the theme. A copy of the schedule is provided in Appendix D.

2) During the data analysis

The qualitative data of the focus groups were coded and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis (for details, see chapter 5.3.1.3). The approach requires researchers to engage in re-reading and reviewing the data several times with the research questions in mind, which, as previously argued, serves for a single researcher to increase legitimation.

Themes and subthemes were mainly derived from the data, but using latent and constructionist thematic analysis, they were also connected to the literature and embedded in sociocultural contexts. Doing so adds an objective element to the subjective interpretation of data and therefore serves as another means to reduce confirmatory bias (Blair, 2015). Transcripts, codes and analyses were reviewed by the supervisors of this doctoral project to allow for second opinions.

Quantitative research

The quality of the quantitative research component was evaluated as follows:

1) Pilot test

Pretests serve "to pinpoints problem areas, reduce management error, reduce respondent burden, determine whether or not respondents are interpreting questions correctly, and ensure that the order of questions is not influencing the way a respondent answers" (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016, p. 101). The survey was pilot tested on N = 31 British and Australian female acquaintances of the doctoral researcher. This was based on Perneger, Courvoisier, Hudelson, and Gayet-Ageron's (2015, p. 151) recommendation to use a default sample size of 30 for pre-tests of psychometric questionnaires to "achieve a reasonably high power (about 80%) to detect a problem that occurs in 5% of the population, and to detect a repeat occurrence of a problem that affects 10% of the respondents". Given that expert-driven pretests have been found useful in enhancing the overall quality of a quantitative research instrument (Ruel et al., 2016), this included the supervisors of this PhD project and six further academics who were asked to put particular emphasis on assessing the survey in terms of face and construct validity.

The other respondents were asked to critically evaluate whether the beach body topic was addressed sensitively in the survey, that all questions were expressed in easily understandable and concise manners, and to check the length and technical fit of the computer-based questionnaire. Feedbacks were reported within individual debriefings.

2) (Preliminary) Analyses

As elaborated in chapter 5.3.2.3, internal consistency and stability of survey items were measured using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability was generally found to be satisfactory both in the pre-test and in the main sample. Exploratory factor analyses were additionally conducted to assess the overall construct validity of newly designed scales. Hypotheses were tested in order to assess correlations, mediating and moderating variables.

Meta-inferences

The quality of meta-inferences produced by the integration of all data was reflected in orientation to Onwuegbuzie and Johnson's (2006) legitimation typology. Although arguably, the conduction of non-probability sampling methods somewhat limits the generalisability of the overall study, methodological weaknesses were sought to be minimised using the complementary strengths of focus groups and survey research as outlined previously (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Beyond, the thoughtful corroboration of multiple data sets and viewpoints under the philosophical umbrella of pragmatism and moving back and forth between qualitative and quantitative methods resulted in a balanced presentation and utilisation of insider's and the outsider's perspectives as well as the generation of multiple integration points to obtain well-informed, diverse viewpoints about women's beach body experiences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006). Concerns raised by anyone involved in the research project were addressed seriously and with great focus on problem-solving.

To create a rich picture about women's beach body experiences, the doctoral researcher handled the analysis and interpretation of the generated data with care, reflection, sensitivity and the necessary amount of flexibility. Although conceptualising the beach body regardless of body shape, context of exposure, type of swimsuit and aesthetics, she tried to stay open-minded and react flexibly toward other perspectives to avoid researcher bias. In line with Creswell et al. (2011), specific attention was paid to reporting contradictory, inconsistent and divergent findings as those may serve as important implications for future research.

It can be concluded that mixed methods research, when carried out properly, holds numerous advantages that eventually outnumber the challenges. This includes the generation of unique, insightful findings of both numbers, words, images, and narratives that might be missed within a single-method approach.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that carrying out both qualitative and quantitative research not only requires time, energy, and oftentimes a research budget, but also specific research skills; that is, especially when done by a single researcher rather than a team of experts (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More so, mixing different data sets, paradigms and perspectives might be methodologically challenging and lead to criticism and drawbacks.

The doctoral researcher took these challenges seriously and tried to diminish those by putting extensive thought into her research projects and by constantly working on developing her research skills. For instance, she engaged into a series of seminars, lectures and conferences, and actively participated into three independent research groups to enhance both her theoretical and practical research expertise in preparation for the primary investigations. This intense preparation was possible within the time span of the overall doctoral project, which encompassed several years. Throughout this time, she was additionally supported by a team of supervisors and mentors.

5.4.15 Full study

The last secondary dimension in Schoonenboom and Johnson's (2017) summarises how many research studies are involved in a project. The mixed methods approach conducted as part of this PhD thesis consisted of one qualitative and one quantitative strand; the latter encompassed two independent phases of data collection.

CHAPTER 6: Research Findings – Focus Groups

The mixed methods approach started with collecting qualitative data through focus groups. This served the overall objective to increase our understanding of the beach body information social media users interact with online, in comparison to experiences at natural beaches. To recall, the focus groups study addressed the following research questions:

- *RQ1:* How do women experience their own and other women's beach bodies both online on SNS and at the beach?
- *RQ2:* What cross-cultural differences and similarities can be observed with regards to women's beach body experiences?

To note, a small portion of the data retrieved from this focus group study has been analysed from a deception theory perspective and published in Kleim et al. (2019). This publication will occasionally be referenced to complete the analysis. With both the application of a different theoretical angle (appearance research) and analysis of the remaining data set, there will be no further overlap between the two distinct works.

6.1 Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

As Cash and Pruszinski (2002, p. 10) note, "a comprehensive understanding of body image requires a deep appreciation of cultural diversity and personal contexts of embodiment". Therefore, the following findings are discussed with an explicit focus on participants' individual sociocultural context. The unique cross-cultural composition of the sample was considered a core strength and standalone characteristic of the study.

6.1.1 Theme 1: Beach Body Internalisation

The data revealed that young women across cultures had internalised the concept of the ideal beach body; that is, regardless of where they came from, whether or not they had lived close to the sea, and regardless of whether they had planned a beach holiday during summer.
Ideas about the ideal beach body were rather homogeneous cross-culturally although slight variations appeared in body shape, such that some described the figure of a typical plus-size model as ideal, whereas others agreed that the ideal beach body had to be slim. Divergent views also revealed in terms of body tan. While especially individuals from Western cultures expressed agreement that the ideal beach body was tanned, participants from South Korea, Japan, and India said their cultures preferred a pale Caucasian beauty ideal throughout the entire year (e.g., "I don't know why, but South Korea has some kind of admiration for white colours and skinniness." Sumi, South Korea). This could link to the fact that the beach body ideal, although tanned, is prominently displayed as Caucasian. Accomplishing

a possibly Western look might thus be a superior objective in non-Western cultures, independent of season.

No differences were discovered with regards to other typical features of the ideal beach body. Thinness, body tone, hairlessness, flawlessness, and overall physical attractiveness seemed to equally matter to young Asian women when exposing their bodies in swimwear at the beach. Participants' ideas of how an ideal beach body ought to look corresponded greatly to existing content and critical discourse analyses (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017; Wykes and Gunter, 2010), thereby confirming previous assumptions of this thesis that the beach body might be a global social phenomenon.

While women's beach body experiences have been traditionally studied in beach (holiday) contexts (Abramovici, 2007; Small, 2007, 2021), there was consensus amongst participants in this study that the ideal beach body sets appearance standards beyond the beach. Two main viewpoints were revealed: the idea of the beach body as a summer appearance ideal and the idea of the beach body as a year-round body perfect. Both are subsequently elaborated and discussed with respect to the initially proposed beach body definition of this PhD thesis.

The beach body as a summer appearance ideal

The view of the beach body as a summer appearance ideal was most common among participants from regions with distinct seasonal changes, e.g., those from Europe, Russia and USA. Wide temperature ranges between summer and winter had brought an association of bodily exposure with summer and of concealment with winter. Participants agreed that the beach body set social standards for how women should look throughout summer, independent of the environment, in which they exposed their bodies. For instance, participants who lived farther away from the sea emphasised the importance of displaying an ideal beach body when exposing the body in green environments such as city parks that are commonly used as beach substitutes for relaxation and sunbathing.

> *Like in Russia for example, you're getting prepared not for the beach, but for the summer! Because you're wearing less clothes, so it's still influential. As you [other participant] said, you're going to the park and you're not going to the beach, but you still have to get prepared because there is an ideal perception of the beach body and you have to fit it. (Ewa, Russia)*
>
> *- Which is like an off-the-water beach body. (Jekaterina, Russia)*
>
> *- Yeah, little-clothes-ready. (Natalie, Poland)*
>
> *- Yes, like wear as little as you can. Get as tanned as you can. Impress everyone else. (Ewa, Russia)*

The dialogue confirms that the term "beach body" is oftentimes used interchangeably with the summer body. As a result, individuals had ascribed the same meanings to both concepts.

Importantly, the wish to attain an ideal beach body was associated with rising concerns and behavioural changes prior to summer that participants had themselves experienced and/or observed amongst family members and peers and that were considered distinct from anything they typically experienced throughout the rest of the year. Details are discussed in Theme 3.

The internalisation of the beach body as a summer appearance ideal corresponds with Griffiths et al.'s (2021) argumentation that individuals might be more susceptible toward appearance-related cues and content prior to and during summer, and as a result worry more about how they look during this season. The data lend preliminary evidence that young women's knowledge of how a female body in swimwear should ideally look might somewhat infiltrate their experiences of embodiment not only when in swimwear at the beach, but throughout the entire summer season.

The beach body as a year-round ideal

Although less common, some participants across focus groups had internalised the beach body as an appearance norm beyond summer. This view was shared especially by participants from regions, where sunbathing and going to the beach were possible beyond summer owing to warmer climate and/or smaller temperature ranges. For instance, a participant from Spain described how women in her region started to get beach body ready right after Christmas because it was usually warm enough to display the body by April or May.

Others reported worrying about their beach body throughout the entire year:

> In Brazil, we do [try and be beach body ready] like almost the whole year because it's always summer for us. But especially when there is Carnival, which is the most important event in Brazil; so, before Carnival, the girls go crazy, like "My God, I have to have this perfect body, the perfect bikini to go to the beach". Because we like going to the beach at Carnival. We have like a whole week free and it's really important for us. So, I think this is the occasion when we care the most about our beach body. (Maria, Brazil)

Within warm regions, changing behaviours and appearance transformation were considered inseparable because "when it's always warm, you always need to be beach body ready" (Ewa, Russia). While Jordan (2007) expressed concerns that beach body concerns may negatively affect women's overall summer holiday experiences, these findings suggest that those may even stretch out over the entire summer season. Even more, some participants from regions with distinct temperature changes had internalised the ideal beach body as a year-round ideal.

> I don't think that you need like a real beach to feel like you need to own a beach body. Like, still, we go to all those swimming pools and… (Tereza, Czech Republic)
>
> - And like Spas and stuff… (Charlotte, New Zealand)
>
> - Yeah. (Kelsey, USA)

Maybe the ideal beach body does influence a lot the way you want to look anyway, regardless of season… (Other woman: Yes, that's what I'm saying!) Because when you recall the beach body you just realise that this person is without clothes basically, just in underwear, let's say, and that is the way a body should look, regardless of season, regardless of time. So, I don't think it affects only people who plan to go to the beach, but just anyone who wants to show their figure anyhow. Like wearing a slim t-shirt or wearing a dress or a short skirt or whatever. (Jekaterina, Russia)

It is not only at the beach, where you want to be perfect, but everywhere. Also, during parties, when you just want to be fancy, like wear a fancy dress. You want to have a beautiful body, just like at the beach. So, it's everywhere. (Daria, Ukraine)

Despite the persistence with which the beach body seemed to affect young women whenever they planned to expose or somewhat accentuate their bodies, participants identified several annually recurring peaks apart from summer, in which they worried more than usual about transforming their bodies according to ideal beach body standards. These findings are described subsequently, and they may add insightful knowledge to the concept of seasonal body image.

First, as implied in Maria's statement, increased concerns and heightened pressure to put work into transforming the beach body for public display related to the prospect of appearance-focused annually recurring cultural events such as the Carnival in Brazil.

Second, regardless of where they came from, participants consented that they worried more about their bodies around New Year's - a time that is popularly used for resolutions underlying the wish to "do better" in the new year. Scholars may strive to explore body image fluctuations around New Year's, especially given that Christmas and New Year's, in many cultures, are associated with indulgence and unrestricted eating, which may then, basically overnight, come to an abrupt end. Ewa from Russia described this as follows:

So, from tomorrow. Today, I will eat all the salads with mayonnaise, drink champagne and so on. But tomorrow, the 1st of January, everything will change! A new year - a new life! But it never works. (Ewa, Russia)

Following Griffiths et al.'s (2021) example, it would be interesting to compare this matter at samples from different hemispheres given that New Year's in the southern hemisphere collides with summer, i.e., a time, when women may already pay heightened attention to their bodies; whereas individuals from regions, where summer does not start before June or July may relate to their bodies differently at this time. Although Griffiths et al. (2021) did notice fewer appearance concerns in sexual minority men during winter, the period around New Year's might differ in individuals from the northern hemisphere and should be considered separately from the rest of the cold season.

Participants shared the view that people with predisposed appearance concerns would be particularly vulnerable to internalise the beach body as a year-round appearance ideal and to respond to the perceived pressure with concealment and avoidance behaviours.

> It affects people who are insecure. No matter if there is summer or winter or if they want to go to the beach. I have friends who don't wear shorts because they feel too fat. Or they don't wear dresses. And it's really hot in Prague, so you really have to wear less clothes. But they don't do that. (Tereza, Czech Republic)

This extends the existing literature on girls' and women's swimwear experiences (Abramovici, 2007; James, 2000) by suggesting that avoidance and concealment strategies might apply to any contexts, in which the body is at risk to be exposed and/or accentuated. Supporting studies such as by Abramovici (2007), Clarke et al. (2009), James (2000), and Small (2021) on women's concealment behaviours at the beach and during summer in general, this finding raised the necessity to consider avoidance and beach dress in the survey. These aspects were considered especially useful in assessing women's overall attitude toward exposing their swimwear-clad bodies in a public environment such as the beach.

Taken together, although participants, regardless of culture, had shared relatively homogenised, Western-centric ideas of how women in swimwear should look, divergent views surfaced with regards to the scope, i.e., when, for how long and in what intensity the concept of the ideal beach body affected young women and their peers. Much of the observed variations were affected by geography and climate, but also by cultural events that were connected to bodily exposure and self-optimisation. This suggests that notions of body image fluctuations at certain times of the year may be explained by more than season. Our knowledge about body image fluctuations might thus be enhanced through an integration of diverse cultures and climate zones.

6.1.2 Theme 2: Beach Body Experiences on Social Media

Participants agreed that of all mass media channels, social media had by far the greatest impact on their own and their peers' beach body behaviour. This testified to the importance to study the beach body with regards to social media and emphasised the relevance of this research.

Viewing of normative beach body content on SNS
Most of the beach body content participants had been exposed to prior and during summer conformed to the homogenised, young, thin, toned, tanned, hairless, and sexually attractive Western ideal identified in Jordan's (2007) and Small's (2017) content analyses.
Contemporary social media-endorsed appearance trends such as the thigh gap, leg selfies ("lelfies"), and ribcage bragging were noted across focus groups as well as beach body challenges (e.g., 30 days bikini challenges), as the following conversation from group 3 suggests:

Have you seen that new trend that they are posting about on Facebook now? The protruding rip trend? It's like you're taking a picture of your ribcage. So, it's like you're lying down in a bikini at the beach or something, you know… and your ribs pop out! Or like only skinny legs… (Maria, Brazil)

- Yeah, you just like arch your back and your ribs are like this… (Seren, UK)

- Yeah, that's the thing to do that! (Maria, Brazil)

- You just look tiny! (Seren, UK)

The overall emotion, with which participants exchanged about body image trends on social media topics suggests that they shared similar critical attitudes and lack of comprehension as to why women would try and join these unrealistic and potentially unhealthy trends.

Although thinspiration was not directly addressed in any of the focus groups, photographs shared under appearance trends such as ribcage bragging routinely depict severely thin bodies and sexualised-objectified, dismembered body parts, as proposed previously (Drenten & Gurrieri, 2018; Lupton, 2017). This implies that exposure to this kind of content was a rather normal part of women's overall social media experiences during summer.

(Micro-)celebrities were mentioned consistently not only as endorsers of certain appearance trends (e.g., the "Kardashian butt") through swimwear selfies; but also, as promoters of beach body products (detox teas, supplements, special creams, swimwear etc.) and behaviours (e.g., exercising regimens). It is noteworthy that participants, regardless of culture, demonstrated profound knowledge of the same celebrities (e.g., Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner) and the products and procedures they recommended to get beach body ready. Realising this, one participant expressed how sad it was that they were all so familiar with a certain type of detox tea that was commonly promoted before summer. Others agreed, but unfollowing celebrities was not mentioned as an option to minimise the risk of being exposed to this kind of content. Rather, following (micro-)celebrities seemed important for young women and they showed great willingness to accept certain contents in return, even if seeing those produced discomfort.

Furthermore, participants were regularly exposed to fitness- and dieting-related beach body content, including fitness adverts and fitspiration postings (e.g., before-and-after photographs). Being promoted as a lifestyle and embedded within a broader discourse of health and wellness, this theme had significant impact on young women's offline behaviour as will be discussed in theme 3. Some confirmed that they were persistently surrounded by advertising appeals to get beach body ready, even when not actively searching for them.

Sometimes when I scroll the Facebook news, there are advertisements. Like always for some gyms and I don't know why. […] I hate it because it's always like very slim girls, like those at Victoria's secret. She's wearing a hat, she's at the beach, you know with loose hair and she's

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in the water. And she's wearing a really small swimsuit. And she's like "Hello, I was in the gym and you have to go there as well" […] I see it every day, sometimes even twice a day. I think even if I opened it right now, I would probably find it. (Ewa, Russia)

This raised the necessity to explore distinctly in the survey, how frequently female users had seen beach body content as they had engaged with SNS and how often this had been generated by social media "friends", people and pages they followed.

As outlined in Kleim et al. (2019), participants reported various poses, mimics, and last-minute workouts seen from peers to look thin, toned and sexy on beach body photographs. Those were routinely enhanced through filters in order to create an impression deemed suitable to post onto SNS and to receive validation from other users. Brown and Tiggemann's (2016) finding that postings generated by peers and professional users, such as (micro-)celebrities, may not only infiltrate individuals' newsfeeds but that the content may look rather homogeneously and create an overall norm of how a woman should look could thus be extended to the beach body context. Given that accompanying captions and hashtags such as #beachbodyready consolidate the conversation from various posts, they likely reinforce the pressure that every woman should transform her body prior to summer.

This raised the question of how viewing this rather normative beach body content made young women feel with regards to their own bodies. The data gave some insight into that, examples of which are listed below:

Things like this are just popping up [on your social media newsfeed] and you see it and you're like "oooh"… (Mary, New Zealand)

- Yeah, and you're like eating fries… (Kelsey, USA)

There is this whole fitspo movement that is on Instagram and it's like your friends are like "Ooooh. Oh my God…" […] I don't like getting remorse that you gotta work out and really have to, but you can't. And then that's all they do. (Charlotte, New Zealand)

I think that people who go to the gym for example every day, they do look different on these kinds of photos than we that we don't go every day. (Daria, Ukraine)

The extracts indicate upward comparison processes, self-perceived appearance discrepancies and at least temporary remorses and guilt for not engaging (sufficiently) in a similar fit and allegedly healthy lifestyle. This adds evidence to existing studies on fitspiration and body image (e.g., Easton et al., 2018). Although body-positive postings were mentioned, viewing those did not change the dominating ideal beach body narrative disseminated through social media. Instead, critical attitudes revealed. For example, some agreed that even if someone claimed to be body confident, they did not have to show every detail of their body in a bikini and by so doing, self-sexualise ("She can be confident inside her,

but you don't really have to show it all." Zuzanna, Poland). This indicates that even if (semi-)nude and sexualised images might be normalised and accepted in the online culture, users may still view and interpret them critically.

Taken together, the fact that 19 young women from 14 different countries were exposed to very similar beach body content on social media testifies to the homogeneous online culture that young users interact with regardless of personality, ethnicity and country of origin. The study delivers evidence that much beach body content generated on SNS adheres to the normative ideal and that Jordan's (2007) key themes of beach body representation - the homogenised beach body, the sexualised beach babe/beach beauty body and the disciplined (bikini boot camp) body - prevail online as well. The latter thereby seemed to affect young women the most, especially when they were exposed to fitspiration content. While these findings offer an important update to existing studies on beach bodies in traditional media (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017), they are solely based on a limited sample of qualitative data. Content and critical discourse analyses are needed for further in-depth explorations of the topic, for instance, using trending beach body hashtags as suggested in the literature review (chapter 3.3).

Selfie-Posting

As we have remarked elsewhere (Kleim et al., 2019), participants themselves were hesitant about posting beach body pictures. One reason for not posting beach body selfies was the perceived inability to meet certain appearance expectations, such as to present a fit, but not too muscular body (*"if you had a six pack, it would be too much." Kelsey, USA*); a skin, but curvy body (*"You have to be skinny, but you have to have big boobs. Yeah, but it's like contradictory." Océane, France*)*,* and a relentlessly exposed, but confidently presented body (*"You're expected to wear less, the more confident you are. That's kind of contradictory because how can you be more confident while wearing less?" Charlotte, New Zealand*)*.*

These findings resembled previous notions in the literature about young women struggling to present a sexy, but not too sexy self (Baumgartner et al., 2015); a seemingly unsurmountable task. Participants demonstrated awareness and critical reflection of the unrealistic nature of these expectations while they also acknowledged that the body positivity movement had made it easier to post a picture of a non-normative body in swimwear. But they still perceived pressure to comply to the norm, which many responded to through avoidance, i.e., the decision to not post swimwear selfies in the first place.

Another reason for not posting swimwear selfies were prospective negative attitudes in the culture they inhabited. For instance, a Korean participant reported:

> *No Korean posts about the beach body like in swimwear […] if we take a picture, we take the picture like from this point with a good background of the beach and not of our body. And including me, if someone posts the naked body or with swimwear, everyone will think "Oh my God, he or she just wants to show off that they have a good body" And we don't think it's good to post this on Instagram or Facebook. (Sumi, South Korea)*

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This indicates that even if certain appearance trends are normalised and accepted online, individuals may still view and interpret them primarily through the lens of the culture they inhabit. Online appearance culture may thus function as a meta-culture that generates a persistent stream of information on how individuals ought to look and behave (e.g., in swimwear at the beach). But appearance may be constructed differently in participants' home country, leading to conflicting thoughts amongst users. Therefore, researchers should investigate how individuals deal with these contradictions. The posting of beach body selfies constitutes an apt case to explore this given that public nudity, as previously discussed, has historically been negatively connoted in many cultures and is still criticised in many parts of the world. Although participants in this study had been observed peers frequently engaging in techniques to look good in their selfies (including the use of filters and photo-editing softwares) (Kleim et al., 2019), the fact that they were consistently hesitant toward the posting of beach body selfies strengthened the relevance to assess active and passive beach body exposure on social media separately.

6.1.3 Theme 3: Beach Body Behaviours Prior to Summer

As the literature review demonstrated, women are rather omnipotently surrounded by media appeals to transform their bodies for the beach prior to summer. This is persistently constructed as the only way for women to confidently expose their bodies in swimwear at the beach (Jordan, 2007).

Past research has found women engaging in different kinds of "body work strategies" with the overall objective to look good in swimwear at the beach (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2016, 2021). Thereby, Field et al. (2019) observed various behaviours prior to and during a beach visit depending on the kind of beach women went to and the reason for going (e.g., dating). Small (2016), too, noted women preparing their holiday bodies differently depending on the travel destination. Based on these findings, body work, thus far, has been accepted as something women do in order to conform to sociocultural prescriptions of the ideal beach body, to confidently expose their bodies in swimwear and to avoid embarrassment and shame at the beach (Field et al. 2019; Small, 2016).

This focus group study revealed more nuanced findings, such that young women's decision to engage in body work prior to summer was embedded in complex decision-making processes, involving a range of internal and external factors. Not only the extent and endurance, with which women tried to manage their appearances prior to summer varied; also, the decision not to engage in body work or to stop the attempt at an early stage was rather common, despite participants' internalisation of the beach body ideal.

Data suggested that young women's beach body behavioural decision-making processes consisted of different stages, through which participants and their peers regularly passed prior to summer. These are visualised in Figure 8.
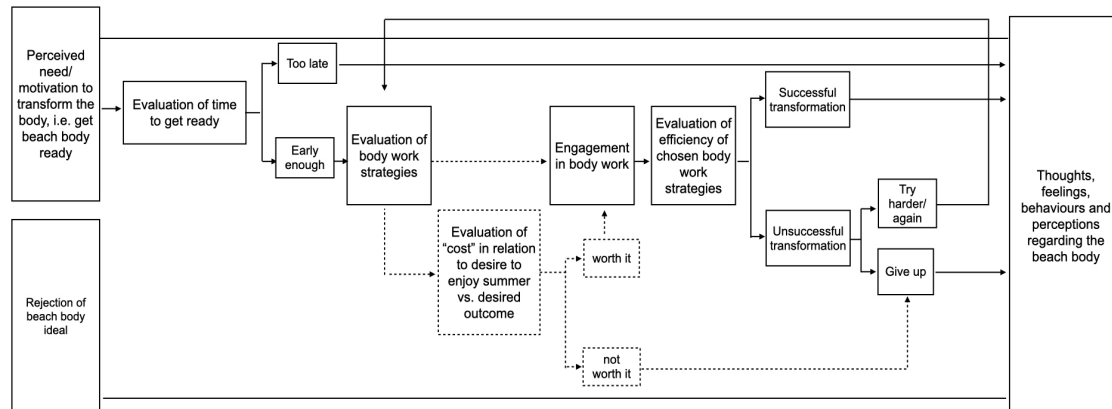
FIGURE 8: OBSERVED BEACH BODY BEHAVIOURAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

It should be noted that in line with the seasonal perspective of the beach body, the decision-making process was independent of a beach visit and rather served the overall purpose to prepare the body for summer. Individual stages of the process will be described in the following paragraphs.

Stimuli triggering beach body-related concerns

Focus group participants highlighted two factors that routinely triggered their need to get beach body ready: the first was interactions with family members and peers who obsessed about getting beach body ready, as the following excerpt suggests:

> *My sister used to be really crazy about this [preparing her body for summer]. So, she was really pushing on me. She was not saying "oh you have to go on a diet", but like, she was always crazy, and I was like "probably I have to do something", so it's about the people around you and how they're talking about it. (Ewa, Russia)*

The second were normative beach body messages on social media, as addressed in the previous theme.

> *I feel it's like shaming [on social media]. It's like if you… if you're planning to go to the beach, it's like you should be doing this [fitspiration]. And if you're not doing this, then something's wrong with you. Like you can't go to the beach unless you've been doing this. (Mary, New Zealand)*

These findings offer preliminary evidence that the "primary core sources of influence" as identified in the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999) contribute to beach body-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

The idea that participants consistently retrieved from family members, peers and the media was that they should join in and get beach body ready, which appeared like a normalised, aspirational goal. Even occasionally viewing body-positive beach body content did not seem to change the dominance and persistence of that message; although this may as well relate to the previously noted critical attitudes that some participants demonstrated toward body-positive postings. However, as will be shown in the remainder of this analysis, family and peers might as well have a protective impact on women's body image and beach body-related experiences of embodiment, and it is important to acknowledge the two-sided nature of these findings.

Behavioural decision-making process

The literature review demonstrated that people are differently affected by appearance-related stimuli and that not everybody may feel the same motivation to transform their beach bodies.

This became evident with regards to the beach body concept, too, as the following lines will show.

Stage 1: Acceptance vs. rejection of the beach body ideal

(Post-)Feminist and neoliberal scholars such as Gill (2008) have emphasised women's choice to resist sociocultural beauty prescriptions. However, the decision whether to resist or to what extent to accept the pressure to transform one's body into an ideal beach body turned out to be mostly complex in this study.

To explain, participants consistently presented critical attitudes toward idealised and staged media images and, through occasional snorting and almost sarcastic tones of voice, expressed their disapproval about obsessive beach body behaviours they had witnessed or experienced themselves. Maintaining a critical attitude toward the ideal beach body seemed easier for participants who were surrounded by peers with a neutral or positive body image. As indicated previously, this seemed to have a protective effect on them, such that it helped young women cope with the perceived pressure to present an ideal beach body and enjoy the beach regardless of body shape.

> *Like the people you know, like your friends… It's like "oh, do you really need to lose some weight?" It's like "oh let's go… do you guys wanna go shopping?" Like "Let's get some bikinis". It wouldn't be like "you need to shape up for the beach". (Mary, New Zealand)*

> *For us, usually we go to the beach every summer, but it's not like we are worried about our bodies. We are like "ah, f*** it, let's go!" (Valentina, Mexico)*

As discussed in chapter 4.3, the influential role of family and peers on body confidence at the beach has been noted, such that women have been found placing lesser importance on their looks when surrounded by close individuals (Small, 2016, 2021). The role of family and peers on women's body

image prior to a beach visit, however, has not yet been discussed. The above findings may contribute to this by suggesting that young women may be less likely to engage in beach body-related body work prior to summer in the first place when surrounded by family members and peers with a non-negative relationship to their bodies.

Scholars in the realm of body positivity and those studying body image preventions might wish to explore this aspect further as it may help young women to maintain their critical attitudes toward the beach body ideal and to build and maintain body confidence with regards to their own bodies during the warm season.

For many participants, it seemed difficult to reject the beach body ideal though. This resembles previous notions about them accepting celebrity postings even if those did not make them feel good about themselves. To cope with and reduce the pressure they received from social media, beach body-obsessed family members and peers, young women engaged in different behaviours that will be outlined below. Although most of them did not appear to involve any extreme behaviours such as obsessive exercising or extensive beach body dieting, they still linked to negative self-evaluation and dualist-objectivist beliefs about the body as a malleable object, thereby testifying to the vulnerability of young women at this time of the year that made it impossible for them to fully reject the beach body ideal.

Stage 2: Evaluation of time to get ready

Participants' decisions of whether and how much to engage in beach body behaviours started with an evaluation of the available time span to summer and whether it sufficed to transform the body. This aspect was critical because if time was too short, participants agreed that there was no reason to try and transform the body according to prescribed norms.

> *Even one month before it's like "Okay, it's too late… like in June". (Leyla, Azerbaijan)*

As a result of this, the decision to try and get beach body ready prior to summer was linked to great perceived time pressure.

> *It's like "Oh my God, time's passing so fast, so we need to get ready!" (Océane, France)*

> *Sometimes people do start to get prepared half a year before they are going to the beach, so they are always like in a rush to get ready and they are always nervous like "Oh my God, I'm not prepared yet. I have to start… like next year, I have to start earlier." Well, it's… I think that's why people are always in this "I have to start right now" and they are worried and depressed about it. It's like a circle. (Ewa, Russia)*

As Ewa's previous statement suggests, the presumption that the available time was too late to transform their bodies to a socially accepted standard prior to summer caused immediate negative body image outcomes such as anxiety, nervousness and depression in young women.

If the available time was, however, considered as sufficient, which, on average, corresponded to 6-8 weeks, they would, in a next step, assess different strategies to transform their beach bodies.

Stage 3: Evaluation of body work strategies

Participants showed profound knowledge of different strategies to get beach body ready; none of them needed to search for this information but had previously acquired and memorised it. As previously noted, social media constituted an important source of information amongst the target population. Participants, regardless of culture, knew about specific products (detox teas, dieting supplements, special creams etc.) and body work practices (e.g., beach body exercising regimens) that celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner typically recommended prior to summer.

They had themselves tried and/or knew individuals in their immediate environment who routinely engaged in dieting (oftentimes accompanied by the consumption of weight loss pills, detox teas, protein shakes and other supplements); exercising (i.e., fitspiration); and tanning behaviours (e.g., sun bed use, spray tanning, permanent tanning) with the primary aim to look good in swimwear during summer. Hair removal practices were emphasised only amongst participants from cultures with more visible body hair, whereas it seemed not noteworthy and normal amongst others.

> *So, they [women in our culture] start with all this epilation stuff one or two months before [summer] because we are Asian, and our bodies are supposed to be more hairy than Europeans. And proper epilation takes a bit longer, so they want to get prepared before the summer arrives. (Leyla, Azerbaijan)*

Participants also reported that they usually put much thought into picking the right piece of swimwear that would accentuate bodily assets and look fashionable and exclusive to others. Oftentimes, this involved shopping for swimwear, an experience that they typically shared with trustworthy friends. Clothing choices can thus be confirmed a strategy amongst young women to feel confident at the beach, or, as Field et al. (2019, p. 437) put, "to avoid embarrassment".

In congruence with Field et al. (2019) and Hermans (2021a, 2021b), cosmetic surgery (breast augmentation) was perceived by some women as a means to look good in swimwear; this confirms the normalisation of high-risk beauty regimens to get beach body ready and strengthens the link between the beach body and cosmetic surgery as two distinct fields of appearance research. However, it must be acknowledged that post-surgical recovery may not only require longer than the typical 6-8 weeks period to get beach body ready. Also, taking a step as profound as a cosmetic procedure likely relates to more than just the wish to display an attractive body at the beach. In other words, presenting an ideal beach body might be promoted by marketers as a core motive for undergoing cosmetic surgery, but it may be embedded in an individual's complex psychology of appearance. In reconnection with the

various conceptualisations of the beach body initially proposed in this analysis, one possibility is that the beach body serves as a synonym for any occasions of bodily display.

Independent of strategy, participants across focus groups reported that attaining a thin and toned beach body in time was a hard, tenacious project that required consequent restrictive and/or excessive body work. Some reported that they had, in the past, frequently engaged in body work because they had felt this was their responsibility. But unsuccessful past attempts to transform the body seemed to have encouraged young women to be more reflective. This involved thinking about the pros and cons of body work before making the choice of whether to engage in practices to get beach body ready.

Stage 4: Weighing up of the expected reward vs. "cost"
It was common amongst participants and their peers to carefully weigh up the expected reward/outcome of their body transformation (i.e., an ideal beach body) against the anticipated "cost" of body work, based on their previously acquired knowledge.
Participants mentioned various situations they had experienced or witnessed, in which the motivation to either display a good-looking beach body or to say they had tried, had outweighed any costs or concerns. However, many concluded that it was not worth the hard work and/or that they could not attain the ideal beach body anyway, a result of which was that they gave up before engaging in body work at all. These descriptions were commonly reinforced by sarcasm and frustration in participants' voices, which testified to the affirmative element ascribed to the experience.

The choice not to engage in body work was commonly justified as a result of negative past experiences, where participants had unsuccessfully attempted to transform their bodies, and by so doing had gained profound knowledge about the sacrifices, risks and pitfalls of body work and the unattainability of the beach body ideal. This matches the overall observation by Krayer and colleagues (2008) that individuals' unidirectional drive upward may entail immediate, potentially "healthy" behavioural changes, such as increased levels of physical activity, but that that these self-improvement appraisals may backfire and turn into unhealthy behaviours eventually.
Others justified that slimming the body down for summer would naturally entail re-gaining weight during the winter and expressed doubts that it was worth the efforts at all. Based on past dieting behaviours, participants also reported strong desires to enjoy summer without restrictions. For instance, eating ice cream was mentioned several times.
These contradictory feelings and cognitions ascribed to summer can be described as a "summer paradox" and they may transfer individuals into a psychological state of cognitive dissonance throughout the beach body behavioural decision-making process. Cognitive dissonance describes a situation, in which individuals are confronted with inconsistencies and as a result, experience psychological tension, mental distress and discomfort (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance typically motivates individuals to try and reduce the uncomfortable feelings by aligning their perceptions to their actions through different coping mechanisms (Festinger, 1957). These include the observed behavioural changes (here: engaging in body work) and justifications (here: why they could not or did not want to do it).

Stage 5: Choice and evaluation of efficiency —> Body transformation

Although body work was controversially discussed, unsuccessful beach body transformation was consistently associated with failure and seemed to catapult those who had chosen to engage in body work strategies into another state of psychological discomfort between fulfilling the socially prescribed norm and attending to their personal needs.

Participants mentioned two ways to cope with the perceived discomfort of failing to attain the ideal beach body. The first was to try and engage into other, i.e., quicker and more effective ways to transform the body:

> *It's like you can't achieve your beach body if you miss one [exercising] session and then you get really like all tired about it. And it's like "now I have to start eating better". (Charlotte, New Zealand)*

In that case, young women re-evaluated the available body work strategies in order to pick one that had the potential to bring them closer to their objective than the one they had (unsuccessfully) applied before; or they would try harder with the same method.

> *…then I missed a workout [with my friends] one day, so the next day I worked out twice. (Mary, New Zealand)*

The second option was to give up. Giving up seemed a common choice amongst participants, especially when they felt the cost of body work was too high and if they could justify that they had tried at least.

> *Then it's like 1st March. Like "Okay, today, I'm going on a diet. Let's buy all the healthy food, let's try and go to the gym and everything." And then 2nd March: "No, this is not going to work." Every time there is like the first date of the month, for example 1st April is a Monday and you realise "oh my gosh, it's like so close [to summer] now, so you have to do something with it. But on Friday you're giving up. (Mary, New Zealand)*

> *The majority of my friends stop at the level of "okay, I lost 5kg. I'm fine with that. Now I look much better. I even have some bones here in the shoulders, I have hip bones, I have this gap between my legs, everything is perfect. I am ready for summer." But as the summer comes, they start eating ice cream and they gain these 5kg back. (Ewa, Russia)*

As previously remarked, when young women explained why they had stopped the attempt to transform their bodies, many emphasised that they had been willing to fulfil societal expectations, but not been able to succeed. Highlighting that they had tried seemed to help them reduce the negative feelings ascribed to giving up and might thus constitute another form of cognitive dissonance. Lengthy justifications indicated that, although young women had made the choice not to engage in restrictive eating or excessive exercising prior to summer, they struggled to express this with confidence.

Again, this highlights the complexity aligned to rejecting a socially ingrained appearance concept such as the ideal beach body. Lacking body confidence bears the risk that young women stay vulnerable toward beach body-related cues throughout summer and possibly beyond. Potential consequences of this might be negative embodiment and self-evaluation, further (unsuccessful) attempts to transform the body and avoidance of situations, in which the body is exposed, as previously discussed.

However, internalisation of the beach body ideal did not always link to changing behaviours, as the following excerpt suggests, in which a participant talked about the discrepancies between what her peers had said and done prior to summer:

> *I think most of my friends are like "yeah, I should start like dieting… but maybe tomorrow…" and then they still take their donut or whatever. And then they go on Instagram and say "Oh, I would like to look the same" and in the end they're just going to the beach and don't really care. […] they are like "yeah I would like to eat more healthy food bla bla bla…" but they are not doing it. (Laurine, France)*

While behaviours like this might be indicative of just another state of psychological tension caused by wanting to attain and reject the ideal beach body at the same time, it is also possible that young women may feel the need to express their overall motivation to transform their bodies because they think this is expected of them or something every woman does (and talks about), even if they may not actually feel that way. Because the description above is based on the objective perception of a peer, no conclusions can be drawn about the subjects' underlying motivations and/or their body image that might have driven the behaviour.

The way in which peers' behaviour was described, especially the "bla bla bla", indicated that the inconsistent behaviour was not taken too seriously. It is possible that this related to participants' degree of self-reflexion about the impossibility to attain an ideal beach body and raises the question, to what extent this might affect the impact of exposure to unhealthy behaviours in peers; a question worth to be investigated in the future.

Body image outcomes

Self-perceived inabilities to meet socially prescribed ideal beach body standards consistently related to negative body image outcomes, regardless of whether and to what extent individuals had tried to transform their bodies. As the following excerpts show, negative outcomes included frustration, shame, negative self-evaluation and guilt.

> *Like you always want more, more, more. And even if you feel good, you will never feel perfect. There will be always something to show you that you are not perfect. (Charlotte, New Zealand)*

For me, if something is ideal it's usually the opposition of how I look like. So it's like "Okay, my ideal body is like that or that because I haven't achieved what I want in the future." So it's like "yeah, it's perfect but I can't do it". (Madeleine, France)

I don't like getting remorse that you gotta work out and really have to, but you can't. And then that's all they [fitspiration postings] do. (Charlotte, New Zealand)

Participants' overall frustration was underscored by occasional laughter and sarcastic tones when expressing their "you-can't-do-it-anyway"-attitude.

No participant described the lived experience of a successful beach body transformation, perhaps because of their self-perceived inability to attain the ideal. However, in accordance with the beach body literature (Small, 2016), they had witnessed it amongst people they knew. For that reason, successful beach body transformation is acknowledged as another possible outcome in Figure 8.

Taken together, the findings presented in this theme revealed several original insights to enhance our understanding about women's beach body behaviours. Most notably, they implied that not every woman engages equally into practices to get beach body ready prior to summer and that a person's decision (not) to engage or to stop engaging in body work prior to summer might be psychologically complex and should not be considered an indicator of positive or negative body image. Put differently, only because a woman has made the choice to not work on transforming her body prior to summer does not mean she feels confidently about displaying her body in swimwear the way it is, or that she feels otherwise unaffected by the concept of the ideal beach body.

Several dialogues indicated that young women routinely compared their bodies and behaviours to socially prescribed ideal norms and engaged in beach body-related behavioural decision-making processes, even if they had previously indicated a willingness to resist those. Lengthy justifications implied that young women struggled to practice the necessary amount of confidence to express the choice not to get beach body ready as one made of rational self-acceptance.

In support of sociocultural models of body image such as the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999), one reason can be ascribed to the appearance-related pressure they received from family, peers and the media that collectively raised the importance of transforming one's body for summer.

Witnessing family members and peers obsessing about their beach bodies might be particularly challenging to someone who went through this in the past and is still working on building and maintaining a positive body image. The same goes for regularly receiving media stimuli such as the mentioned fitspiration appeals to get beach body ready. Those might reactivate old thinking patterns and trigger negative body image reactions even if individuals had initially demonstrated critical attitudes toward them, as observed by Easton et al. (2018).

Another option is that focus groups participants may not have felt comfortable to admit their beach body concerns in front of others or as argued by Morgan (2012), they might have reflected upon their actions through the reaction of others. In that sense, group interactions constituted a potential methodological disadvantage. However, it can be acknowledged on one hand that other qualitative methods such as

face-to-face interviews might not have produced different outcomes and that the vivid group interactions, on the other hand, had resulted in fundamental insights about the complexity of beach body-related thoughts, feelings and behaviours that young women routinely experienced regardless of where they lived.

6.1.4 Theme 4: Experiences of Embodiment at the Beach

When one participant in Small's (2016) study on Australian women's holiday memories reminisced about a beach she had been to where looks had not mattered much, this constituted a rare exception. In this cross-cultural study, however, this view dominated:

> *I live like 40 minutes from the first beach and people don't really care. It's no fancy place. It's just normal. Like everybody is going to the beach because you are just living close to the sea, and they don't really care. (Laurine, France)*

> *When I was at a Czech beach, it was like a little lake and a lot of people there and nobody cared. (Tereza, Czech Republic)*

Laurine's statement suggests that individuals who live closer to the sea might maintain a rather uncomplicated relationship to the beach. Others agreed that going to the beach was a normal leisure activity that exposing the swimwear-clad body was a natural, unquestioned part of. This opposes previous assumptions that living in proximity to the beach might increase individuals' appearance concerns (Quine et al., 2003).

However, some participants acknowledged that certain beaches, even within the same country, were more appearance-focused than others. This perception is congruent with past research (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2021). To give an example, participants from France highlighted that the pressure to display an ideal beach body was considered higher at beaches in the South. They ascribed this to the fact that beaches in the warm and sunny South of France were used more for sunbathing and posing during summer, whereas people at the beaches in the North of France engaged more in physical activity such as surfing or simply focused on relaxing and having fun.

These findings may enrich our understanding of why different beach cultures may drive different attitudes and behaviours. Although the surfing aspect is somewhat contradictory to the literature, in which high pressure has been identified to be put on female surfers to display a sexually appealing beach body (Hunter, 2018; Stranger, 2002; Wheaton, 2003), the idea that women might feel more comfortable about exposing their flawed bodies at beaches, where they are able to relax and engage in physical activity informed some item of the subsequent survey.

Viewing of swimwear-clad bodies at the beach

Seeking to understand how participants had experienced other women's appearances at the beach, it revealed that those had been predominantly perceived oppositional to the beach bodies on SNS,

namely as "flawed" and "natural". To demonstrate how they distinguished from the stereotypical beach body ideal, some even described them as "out of shape" or "awful", as the following excerpts suggest:

> *In Poland, […] if you go to the sea, like the Baltic sea, especially the older people like 40+, they don't care at all. So you can see men with huge bellies at the beach. The women like 60+, they take off their bras. (Others: really?!) Yes. All people are completely out of shape… They don't follow the trends. (Zuzanna, Poland)*

> *In Russia […] in the countryside […] there is no need for a beach body. Because nobody cares. Because everybody is more awful than you anyway. (laughter) (Jekaterina, Russia)*

Most participants described the beach bodies of their female friends, with whom they had gone to the beach and who might have constituted more realistic comparison targets than the ageing women in the above excerpts, with words such as "normal" and "regular", too. Also, they appreciated the diversity of looks ("I was thinking about my friends and… maybe we can say all of my friends have different bodies, but I like all of them." Laurine, France). Even friends who were perceived as having perfect or close-to-perfect beach bodies were described rather matter-of-factly and non-judgmental. This offers an alternative view to Krones et al.'s (2005) study, in which comparisons against seemingly better-looking peers in real-life contexts were connected to body image concerns. These findings imply that women may obtain a distinct and more realistic understanding of bodies at the beach given that swimwear may reveal bodily flaws that are covered in everyday life. This may create a more nuanced impression of peers whose appearances might otherwise be considered superior. According to these observations, exposure to non-normative beach bodies seemed to broaden participants' perspective of beauty and attractiveness, which has been identified as an important step in the development and maintenance of a positive body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

Although this somewhat aligns to Small's (2016) notion that participants placed lesser importance on physical appearance when at the beach with family and friends, the fact that many participants in this study were well able to describe their friends' (and other women's) bodies in detail implies that they still routinely compared against those, as attention is the first step toward comparison. Appearance comparisons did not seem to occur consciously though because in a beach context, participants did not mention any negative sensations with regards to their body shapes. If any, importance was placed on the wearing and displaying of appropriate, i.e., well-fitting and fashionable bikinis at some beaches.

> *And the bikinis are always like, you know, really, really nice bikinis and they can't be, you know, something you just got from a cheap store. (Kelsey USA)*

In few cultures such as in Azerbaijan, make up and jewellery completed the perfect beach look. Additionally, participants from Europe, the US and South America, similar to the Italian female participants in Abramovici's study (2007) and Australian participants in Small's (2016) study, reported

of a strong cultural preoccupation and competitive behaviours amongst female beachgoers with regard to tanning.

> *They [the other women] are like "Oh I'm having a great summer - look at my tan!" […] so they like all sit in the sun and wait for half an hour to one hour and then put sunscreen on. (Maria, Brazil)*

While acquiring a tanned body seemed to matter at these beaches, participants of New Zealand showed a consistently critical and negative attitude toward sunbathing rituals because of a particularly high propensity of skin cancer in their country. Body tan resultantly did not constitute an aspirational beach body feature for all, and the direction of comparison against tanned women at the beach might depend on the overall attitude (approval vs. disapproval) toward sunbathing.

Taken together, viewing the swimwear-clad bodies of other women at the beach, contrary to viewing beach body images on SNS, did not seem to relate to negative body image outcomes in this study. This finding informed the third hypothesis of the survey. Seeking to understand why beach body exposure had had a non-negative impact on participants' body image, four explanations could be uncovered.

The first is that even in well-shaped bodies, physical flaws may be revealed when moving around in swimwear at the beach. This makes another person's body a more realistic comparison target as compared to a non-moving photograph of a flawless beach body on SNS. Especially given that it was common amongst participants to refrain from practices to transform their bodies for summer, women may have been reassured that every beach body has natural flaws and as a result engaged in lateral or downward rather than upward comparisons, which led to more positive body image outcomes.

The second explanation relates to the observed solidarity between female friends who went to the beach together that seemed to protect them from negative experiences. In fact, participants described their positive experiences at the beach more often with words such as "we" and "us" rather than "I". This shared sense of solidarity and togetherness might be comparable to the enacting embodiment observed in body positivity and fat acceptance online groups (Marcus, 2016), amongst postpartum mothers (Singh, 2019) and in LGBTQ+ students (Miller, 2017), where some kind of "we-are-all-on-the-same-boat"-feeling dominated within groups. Given that participants had described how important it was for them to shop for bikinis together with a friend they trusted, it is possible that the same level of trust or what Small (2016) referred to as "social comfort" was a pre-condition amongst female friends to comfortably display their semi-naked bodies at the beach together. It is also possible that being surrounded by friends who confidently expose their bodies might have a cross-motivational effect, as observed by Barcan (2001), and that displaying a non-normative beach body served to demonstrate resistance of the beach body ideal after all.

In contrast, participants agreed that any perceived pressure to look good and (pretend to) feel good at the beach resulted from (unknown) other women's gaze and their anticipated critical judgment. A

testimony of this is the following dialogue between two young women from the Czech Republic and New Zealand:

> *I think women are more critical to each other. (Others agree) Yeah, you don't wanna be criticised, so you need to feel good and look good. (Tereza, Czech Republic)*

> *- I feel like guys on the beach don't care. They're like "oh there is a girl in a bikini - Nice." […] the girls are always very critical about the girls […] Girls are like releasing gazes. (Charlotte, New Zealand)*

These views resonate with Abramovici's (2007) notions about women scrutinising one another at the beach and they imply that the pressure to look and feel good, as suggested by Gill and Elias (2014), may apply to the beach. It thus adds further evidence to Small's (2016) suggestion that objectification at the beach might as well - and perhaps predominantly - stem from same-sex individuals rather than men. This study delivers another important contribution on this matter by suggesting that being with close friends might shield young women from the impact of feeling judged and looked upon by others. This aspect should be explored profoundly in future research.

The third explanation relates to the characteristics of beaches as aquatic recreational spaces. As previously mentioned, beaches that were used for recreation, relaxation and physical activity related to fewer perceived pressure than those used for posing and sunbathing. The same applied to those who emphasised the beach as a space to play and have fun. Also, congruent with Field et al. (2019) and in line with blue mind research, women seemed to have experienced their semi-naked bodies particularly positively when *in* the water ("It's just like… you swim and it doesn't matter what you look like**."** Charlotte, New Zealand). Positive bodily experiences might thus, to a certain extent, be explained by individuals' ability to feel good and focus on what they *do* instead of how they look at the beach. This finding strengthened the argumentation to connect blue mind with appearance research in order to uncover new ways of positive embodiment at the beach. More so, it encouraged to assess survey participants' subjective wellbeing and how often they had engaged in physical activity at the beach.

The fourth explanation evolved from the previously observed behavioural decision-making. It is important to re-call that individuals had greatly internalised the view that they should have successfully transformed their bodies by the time they exposed them at the beach; even late spring was oftentimes considered too late to start and transform the body through body work. Therefore, it is possible that participants focused (more) on other women's body tan and clothing at the beach because these were the only remaining areas, in which they could still try and compete with cultural ideal standards. Another indicator for this argumentation is the finding that young people reported of last-minute workouts and posing to look good on swimwear selfies at the beach (Kleim et al., 2019). This implies that individuals who go to the beach without feeling fully confident about their beach bodies might search for ways to reduce the psychological discomfort of displaying a non-normative beach body, or put differently, to feel as comfortable as possible in their bodies.

Experiences of embodiment at non-Western beaches

Participants did not explicitly report of negative body image at normal beaches. The only contexts, in which they admitted that they had felt self-conscious about exposing their semi-naked bodies were environments, where nudity and bodily exposure were negatively connoted. Concerns about bodily exposure were mentioned in a holiday report about Dubai, in discussions about prohibitions of topless sunbathing at Brazilian beaches, in descriptions of Azerbaijanian women who occasionally went swimming in the sea fully dressed because their conservative husbands requested this of them, and in the following contribution by a US student with Indian heritage:

> *My family's living in India and I've visited plenty of times and […] you see those advertisements with like models and their bikinis and stuff. But then in reality, when you're going to the beach, I guess maybe like not in a huge city, but in minor-size cities, if you go to the beach, people are really conservative […] people don't wear bikinis. They have a shirt and a hot pants or not even shorts and things like that. So it's interesting that like… it's persuading in the media as so… as if this is what the ideal beach body is and like you should work out and wear bikinis and stuff, but then in reality, when you go to the beach, like I have never worn a bikini on a beach in India. Like that would be really weird. I'd get so many weird looks. People really look at you… almost disgusted. […] I think like in more recent times, it's beginning that they're a bit more open-minded and things like that. […] But I don't even wear shorts even when it's like a 100°C (laughing) no like when it's 40 degrees and it's really, really hot […] when you're going to the beach in India, you cannot not wear full clothing. (Kelsey, USA)*

Stories like these resembled previous notions about critical cultural attitudes toward the posting of beach body selfies on SNS and align with Small's (2021) remark about feelings of discomfort amongst Australian women in Islamic holiday destinations. It is important to emphasise though that negative experiences of embodiment in these contexts did not relate to the aesthetic details of an ideal beach body, but to the decision of whether to publicly expose the body at all.

Restrictions of the liberal bodily exposure ascribed to archetypical Western beaches were addressed in all groups, thereby reflecting the clashing of conservative traditions and modern Western norms at non-Western beaches. Where cultural conventions seemed deeply anchored, as for instance in India, participants agreed that these should be respected. Even if covering up at times constituted a physical and emotional challenge owing to the warm temperatures. Yet the driving force to adhere to these rules was to avoid public staring and punishment (e.g., fees) as a result of non-compliance and misbehaviour. This form of objectification and external regulation by the people and governments of another culture was well established and can be contrasted to the feeling of being scrutinised by other swimwear-clad women at Western beaches.

These findings highlight the necessity for scholars in our field to explore beach-related experiences of embodiment within (sub-)cultures with conservative cultural views, clothing laws and bathing regulations, where a re-consideration of cultural norms and values might be at the roots of any beach body-related decision-making process. Research should include Muslim women, where the Western-

centric idea of the beach body opposes traditional ideas about modesty, decency and good citizenship (Berg & Lundahl, 2016). As the sociohistorical review showed, the burkini was designed for women to expose their bodies in modest ways, hence, to bridge the contrasting views. Therefore, scholars should strive to extend Evolvi's (2018) study by studying women's burkini experiences at Western and non-Western beaches.

Taken together, participants in this study experienced embodiment positively at Western beaches, especially when exposed to diverse, naturally flawed beach bodies of others, when in a group of trusted friends and if they did not feel that a perfect beach body was required of them. Field et al.'s (2019) suggestion that the combination of idealised beach bodies in the media and real bodies at the beach might enforce women's anxieties, consequently, was not supported. Much frequented beaches did not negatively influence this experience, which suggests that it may not be the number of people at a beach that affect how women feel about exposing their bodies in swimwear.

These aspects yielded important new insights about the conditions, under which young women might feel comfortable about exposing their imperfect bikini-clad bodies at Western beaches that might be helpful for both researchers and practitioners in the future.

6.2 Conclusion, Limitations and Next Steps

This study delivered qualitative in-depth contributions to the question of how active female social media users from different cultures experienced the beach body both online and offline. The collection of cross-cultural data offers a valuable extension to the narrow geographical focus of previous beach body investigations (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2007, 2021), thereby supporting the relevance to study the beach body beyond archetypical beach nations.

As outlined in the methodology and in the previous sections, several findings generated by this study informed the quantitative research (Table 6). Key contributions are elaborated subsequently.

TABLE 6: IMPLICATIONS OF QUALITATIVE FINDINGS FOR SURVEY RESEARCH

Observation in the qualitative study	Implication(s) for the quantitative study
Beach body concept affected participants throughout the entire summer (and beyond)	This informed the choice of the survey instrument and the time of data collection, i.e., after summer, so that participants could reminiscence about their experience. Need to assess the strength of appearance concerns during summer in comparison to the rest of the year
How participants (and their peers) related to their bodies during summer was affected by how much they had internalized the beach body ideal, how much they believed into body transformation, and how satisfied they felt about their bodies	Operationalisation of body image through thin-ideal internalization, self-objectification and appearance evaluation

High internalization of archetypical beach body features	Assessment of the perception of different beach bodies based on a bipolar scale
Hesitance toward the posting of beach body selfies	Relevance to assess active and passive social media usage separately
Participants reported of greater relaxation and motivation to move their bodies at beaches where they felt comfortable	Assessment of subjective wellbeing and physical activity at the beach
Viewing of normative beach bodies on SNS linked to negative body image outcomes	Hypothesis 3
Viewing of non-normative bodies at the beach linked to more positive body image outcomes	Hypothesis 3
Body image outcomes were linked to appearance comparisons both at the beach and on SNS	Hypothesis 11
Body image outcomes related to self-perceived discrepancies between participants' own and other women's beach bodies	Hypothesis 14
Participants felt able to enjoy being at the beach despite beach body concerns	Hypothesis 15

The focus groups suggested that the beach body concept, in complex and sometimes elastic ways, affected young women's body image beyond the immediate moment of exposure, that is, throughout the entire summer season and sometimes beyond. This made it purposive to conduct a survey rather than, for instance, an experiment in the second research strand and to collect data *after* rather than during summer so that participants could look back and evaluate their body image in retrospect to the entire season.

Given that the extent, to which young women had felt affected by the beach body concept varied, an item was added to the survey to assess how participants had felt about their bodies during summer in comparison to the rest of the year. Related to that, body image measures had to be selected that could be adjusted to the seasonal context. The qualitative data yielded implications for that as well: body image concerns linked to internalisation of the Western-centric beach body ideal (thin-ideal internalisation), beliefs about the body as an object that can be transformed into an ideal beach body through hard work (body surveillance) and satisfaction with one's body (appearance evaluation).

Then, thin-idealised normative beach bodies on social media were identified as triggers for complex psychological decision-making processes, which mostly resulted in negative body image outcomes such as feelings of guilt, shame and frustration. Experiences at Western beach, in contrast, were described rather positively. These notions lay the foundation for Hypothesis 3. The observation that young women, despite their complex beach body-related feelings, thoughts and behaviours had still decided to go to the beach and apparently been able to enjoy themselves encouraged to explore whether women's ability to feel good at the beach might moderate the relationship between their beach body satisfaction and appearance concerns during summer (Hypothesis 15).

Moreover, the role of appearance comparisons became evident especially in the social media context, which, under consideration of the literature, informed Hypothesis 11. Part of the comparison process were self-perceived discrepancies between participants' own and other women's beach bodies, which were mentioned especially in fitspiration contexts on social media. This lay the foundation for Hypothesis 14. As discussed previously, participants had internalised some typical beach body features (e.g., thin, toned, tanned, flawless) regardless of where they came from. These were adopted to create a bipolar scale (see also chapter 5.3.2.2), thereby forming the foundation for the beach body discrepancy measures.

Taken together, the study delivers several original insights about how a group of young women from different cultures experienced their own and other women's beach bodies within their daily life. Through its focus on social media, the research expands upon existing beach body studies and adds to the limited number of cross-cultural body image investigations.

A combination of inductive and deductive coding practices enabled the PhD researcher to approach the topic through the lens of participants rather than shaping the nature and scope of the findings through pre-conceived ideas. This was deemed particularly beneficial with regards to lack of knowledge regarding women's beach body experiences on SNS.

Despite the knowledgeable contributions of this study discussed in this section, limitations need to be acknowledged. As summarised by Gundumogula (2020, p. 301) amongst the risks of focus group discussions are "bias and manipulation through leading or dominating participants, difficulties in distinguishing between an individual view and a group view and the difficulty of generalising the results from the small focus group to the larger population, as it is difficult to have a really representative sample".

Correspondingly, it can be acknowledged that the number of participants was low and that, despite the sample's cultural diversity, all participants were in the same age range, able-bodied, with no visual differences, of comparable academic background and social status, neither visibly overweight, nor pregnant, nor parenting. Resultantly, data from which to extract relevant themes were limited and relevant sub-populations as identified in the literature review (e.g., mothers) were not included.

Then, although a noteworthy strength of this cross-cultural study is that participants originated from 14 different countries across Europe, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, the views and experiences shared by individuals in this study may not be representative of an entire culture or country and preclude definitive conclusions about cultural similarities and differences in women's online and offline beach body experiences. Some salient findings, such as participants' homogenized ideas of what an ideal beach body should look like and what women should do in order to transform their bodies for summer indicate that basic understandings and conceptualisations of the beach body might be comparable to a certain extent. However, there was anecdotal evidence that the polarising messages as persistently disseminated by the mass media occasionally clashed with cultural and personal values (e.g., regarding nudity and self-sexualisation). Other important nuances of social media usage, such as active selfie-posting and engagement with body-positive content were not or only one-sidedly discussed given that

none of the focus group participants identified as active posters of beach body selfies and showed critical attitudes toward certain photographs posted in the context of body positivity.

The inclusion and in-depth exploration of greater numbers of individuals, especially of non-Western cultures, is thus warranted to expand our knowledge about women's beach (body) experiences. Variety in terms of age, sexual orientation, education and the likes should thereby be considered.

It can further be acknowledged that no African ethnicities were included in this research, which is relevant especially in order to study African beach history (i.e., racial segregation) and appearance culture profoundly (Booth, 2012). As argued in the literature review, an exploration of Muslim women's beach (body) experiences is another area of research that should find heightened research attention. Although some participants in this study had reported experiences of embodiment at non-Western beaches, those were limited and need further expansion.

Furthermore, in order to make sure participants felt comfortable enough to talk about the beach body in front of fellow students, they were not explicitly asked to share how they had felt about their bodies during the summer, and, in line with other qualitative studies, neither were body image measures applied to investigate this. Although beach body interactions on social media, as opposed to experiences at natural beaches, were more often linked to negative body image outcomes, this study does not serve to establish concrete links between women's body image and beach body exposure in either context. As intended through a purposive combination of focus groups and survey research (Babbie, 2015), these limitations were attempted to be balanced out as much as possible through the second study of this mixed methods research, which is discussed in the subsequent sections.

CHAPTER 7: Research Findings – Survey

Based on study 1, the online survey attended to the question: *How strongly do women's beach body experiences on SNS and at the beach relate to their body image during summer?*
The following sections aim to describe and discuss the quantitative findings of this research under re-consideration of the underlying hypotheses as outlined in chapter 5.1.

7.1 Preliminary Analyses

Scale range, means, and standard deviations for all main variables are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7: SCALE RANGE, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR MAIN VARIABLES

	N	Scale Range	*M*	*SD*	missing values (%)
Global subjective beach body satisfaction	657	1-5	3.27	0.87	0.31
Beach variables:					
Time spent at the beach during summer 2018	659	1-10	5.43	2.91	0
Exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach)	656	1-5	2.58	0.62	0.46
Subjective wellbeing at the beach	659	1-5	3.35	1.02	0
Physical activity at the beach	658	1-5	2.83	1.18	0.16
Appearance comparison tendency (Beach)	659	1-5	3.7	1.22	0
Beach body discrepancy (beach)	637	1-5	-0.74	0.84	3.33

	N	Scale Range	M	SD	missing values (%)
Social media variables:					
Daily time spent on SNS	659	1-12	4.92	2.32	0
Exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS)	653	1-5	4.12	0.69	0.9
Beach body selfie-posting (SNS)	163	1-5	3.92	1.13	4.1
Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)	659	1-5	3.60	1.30	0
Beach body discrepancy (SNS)	620	1-5	-1.43	0.87	5.42
Body image variables:					
Appearance evaluation	659	1-5	2.88	0.92	0
Self-objectification	657	1-5	3.30	0.89	0.3
Thin-Ideal Internalisation	656	1-5	3.19	1.07	0.46

As the table shows, the amount of item-level missing data (beach body selfie-posting excluded because not every participant posted beach body selfies) ranged from 0% to 5.42% with a mean of 1.03%. Missing data were not replaced or otherwise estimated.

As a foundation for the analyses, the assumptions of homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, independence of errors, and normal distribution of residuals were examined and found to be satisfactory. Analyses were based on an alpha level of 0.05 for significance.

(Social) Media Usage

Data supported that the target population had used social networking sites more frequently than they had consumed other media types such as print media and TV, that is 5 hours per day on average ($M = 4.92, SD = 2.32$). The most frequently used social networking site was Facebook, which was used by 76.3% of the overall sample; followed by Instagram, which was used by 71.8% of participants. Some 35.9% frequently used WhatsApp, followed by 35.6% for Youtube, 32.9% for Snapchat, 31.8%

for Twitter and 15.7% for Pinterest. Smaller shares of participants had used dating apps (7.7%), Tumblr (2.6%) and blogs (3.6%). More than 98% confirmed they had seen beach body content on SNS at least sometimes with 58.69% saying they had been exposed to these images most of the time or constantly throughout summer. In comparison, less than a third of participants had confirmed the same frequency for print media, TV and public adverts. Some 90% reported these images had been posted by friends or other people/pages they followed (N=659).

Time spent at the beach

The maximum time spent at the beach during a presumed 3-months-summer period was 552 hours with an average beach time of 59.22 hours (*SD = 69.26*). However, because some had spent time in swimwear at the beach beyond summer, there was an average beach time of 76.4 hours (*SD = 133.74*) in the overall sample.

7.2 Correlation Analyses

The following sections deal with the correlations proposed in Hypotheses 1-6.

7.2.1 Relationship between Time (SNS/Beach) and Body Image

It was hypothesized that time spent on social networking sites (SNS) would link to negative body image during summer, such that women who spent more time on SNS will score lower in appearance evaluation and higher in thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification. In contrast, time spent at the beach was assumed to correlate with more positive body image outcomes during summer, such that women who spent more time at the beach would score higher in appearance evaluation and lower in thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification.

Analyses revealed a positive, significant relationship between time spent on SNS and self-objectification (r (657) = .189, $p < .001$) and thin-ideal internalisation (r (656) = .192, $p < .001$) and a negative, significant relationship with appearance evaluation (r (659) = -.107, $p < .001$). No significant relationship could be identified between time spent at the beach and self-objectification (p (657) = .833) and thin-ideal internalisation (p (656) =.053). However, appearance evaluation positively and significantly related to time spent at the beach (r (659) = .107, $p < 0.01$). Resultantly, Hypothesis 1 could be partially supported.

7.2.2 Relationships between Online and Offline Beach Body Experiences and Body Image

To assess the relationships between women's beach body experiences at the beach and their body image during summer, it was hypothesised that global subjective beach body satisfaction, physical activity, subjective wellbeing and exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach would correlate with higher appearance evaluation and lower in thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification. Contrary to that it was assumed that exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS would link to high appearance concerns (low appearance evaluation, high thin-ideal internalisation, high self-objectification). Partial correlations were run on all main variables controlling for age and BMI (Table 8).

TABLE 8: PARTIAL CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN MAIN VARIABLES CONTROLLING FOR AGE AND BMI

	Appearance evaluation	Self-objectification	Thin-ideal internalisation	Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)	Appearance comparison tendency (beach)
Global subjective beach body satisfaction	.78***	-.52***	-.48***	-.44***	-.48***
Exposure to normative bodies (SNS)	-.34***	.32***	.33***	.30***	.26***
Beach body selfie-posting	.27***	-.16	-.13	-.22**	-.18*
Exposure to non-normative bodies (beach)	.36***	-.28***	-.29***	-.23***	-.28***
Subjective wellbeing at the beach	.55***	-.48***	-.36***	-.35***	-.36***
Physical activity at the beach	.27***	-.22***	-.13***	-.17***	-.11**

*p < .05.   **p < .01.   ***p < .001.

Hypotheses 2-5 could be supported. Global subjective beach body satisfaction was positively significantly associated with appearance evaluation (r(625) = .78, p < .001) and negatively associated with self-objectification (r(625) = -.52, p < .001) and thin-ideal internalisation (r(625) = -.48, p < .001). Exposure to normative beach body photographs on SNS was negatively significantly associated with appearance evaluation (r(620) = -.34, p < .001) and positively significantly correlated with self-objectification (r(620) =.32, p < .001) and thin-ideal internalisation (r(620) = .33, p < .001). In contrast, negative, significant relationships revealed between exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach and self-objectification (r(624) = -.28, p < .001) and thin-ideal internalisation (r(624) = -.29, p < .001), and a positive, significant relationship with appearance evaluation (r(624) = .36, p < .001). Negative, significant relationships also revealed between subjective wellbeing at the beach and self-objectification (r(624) = -.48, p < .001) and thin-ideal internalisation (r(624) = -.36, p < .001) as well as between physical activity and self-objectification (r(624) = -.22, p < .001) and thin-ideal internalisation

(r(624) = -.13, p < .001). Positive, significant relationships revealed between subjective wellbeing at the beach and appearance evaluation (r(624) = .55, p < .001) and between physical activity at the beach and appearance evaluation (r(624) = .27, p < .001), respectively.

7.3 Analyses of Subpopulations

Three relevant subpopulations will be considered in the following, as proposed by Hypotheses 7-10: (1) beach body selfie posters vs. passive users, (2) mothers vs. non-mothers, and (3) individuals with low/medium/high beach body satisfaction. To contextualise the outcomes of the analyses, subpopulations will be characterized based on demographics and individual beach/SNS variables before the statistics are presented.

7.3.1 Beach Body Selfie Posters vs. Passive Users

About a quarter (24.73%) of survey participants claimed they had posted beach body selfies on SNS during the summer of 2018 (N = 163). The analysed sample was thus small compared to the overall sample size of N = 659. To recall, it was hypothesised that beach body selfie posting would link to higher thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification, but also to higher appearance evaluation, and that women who posted photos of their beach bodies on SNS would report of higher appearance evaluation, self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation compared to passive users.

7.3.1.1 Group Characteristics

Most selfie posters (81.6%) had only sometimes shared beach body photographs online compared to 10.5% who had shared beach body selfies most of the time or daily. Table 9 presents an overview of the demographic details of beach body selfie posters compared to passive users.

TABLE 9: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF BEACH BODY SELFIE POSTERS VS. PASSIVE USERS

	Beach body selfie posters (N = 163)	*Passive users (N = 495)*
Mean Age	*M = 28.36 (SD = 12.00)*	*M = 32.07 (SD = 12.42)*
Mean BMI	*M = 25.15 (SD = 5.92)*	*M = 25.96 (SD = 6.39)*
Sexuality	Heterosexual: 86.5% Lesbian: 0.6% Bisexual: 11.7% Others: 0.6%	Heterosexual: 83.0% Lesbian: 3.6% Bisexual: 9.7% Others: 1.4%

Ethnicity	White: 92.6% Asian: 1.8% Black/African/Caribbean: 1.2% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 1.8% Other: 2.5%	White: 93.9% Asian: 2.6% Black/African/Caribbean: 1.0% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 0.8% Other: 1.2%
Relationship status	Single: 33.7% Married: 20.9% In a relationship: 41.7% Other: 1.8%	Single: 28.9% Married: 30.9% In a relationship: 38.4% Other: 1.2%
Visual disfigurements	Yes: 27% No: 73%	Yes: 26.9% No: 73.1%
Eating disorder history	Yes: 30.7% No: 69.3%	Yes: 31.1% No: 68.9%
Motherhood/ Pregnancy	Mothers: 20.2% Pregnant: 1.8%	Mothers: 32.5% Pregnant: 0.8%

As the table shows, beach body selfie posters were, on average, younger than passive users, had a slightly lower average BMI, were more often hetero- and bisexual, more often single, less often married and had less often children. However, pregnant participants had more frequently shared beach body selfies than not. Table 10 presents some additional details about some beach and social media measures of this study sorted by group.

TABLE 10: DIFFERENCES IN BEACH AND SOCIAL MEDIA MEASURES BETWEEN BEACH BODY SELFIE POSTERS AND PASSIVE USERS

	Beach body selfie posters (N = 163)	*Passive users (N = 495)*
Global subjective beach body satisfaction	*M = 3.69 (SD = 0.67)*	*M = 3.13 (SD = 0.88)*
Time spent at the beach	*M = 112.77 (SD = 192.61)*	*M = 64.51 (SD = 105.23)*
Beach dress	Bikini or less: 39.3% One-piece or tankini: 17.2% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 22.7% Light summer clothes: 19.6% Fully dressed: 1.2%	Bikini or less: 20% One-piece or tankini: 18.4% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 28.3% Light summer clothes: 30.3% Fully dressed: 3%
Physical activity at the beach	Always: 11.7% Most of the time: 25.3% About half the time: 24.7% Sometimes: 30.9% Never: 7.4	Always: 8.5% Most of the time: 21.4% About half the time: 22% Sometimes: 34.3% Never: 13.7%

Subjective wellbeing at the beach	Very much: 20.9% A lot: 39.3% A moderate amount: 31.3% A little: 8% Not at all: 0.6%	Very much: 10.7% A lot: 32.1% A moderate amount: 30.5% A little: 23.2% Not at all: 3.4%
(Daily) Time spent on SNS	*M = 4.97 (SD = 3.50)*	*M = 3.50 (SD = 2.42)*

Beach body selfie posters had on average spent more time at the beach and on social media; they had been more satisfied with their beach bodies and exposed more of their bodies on the beach. Also, selfie posters generally scored higher in subjective wellbeing and physical activity at the beach.

It was additionally assessed how often selfie posters had shared photographs of themselves in swimwear and how they had presented themselves online, i.e., how much of their beach body they had exposed and how often they had edited their selfies before uploading them. Analyses revealed that 81.6% had sometimes posted beach body selfies, as compared to 10.5% who claimed they had done this "most of the time" or "always". It was most common amongst beach body selfie posters to expose their full bodies in one- or two-pieces. Half of them (50.3%) claimed they had exposed their full bodies as opposed to as little as 2.5% who had shown only their faces and 14.1% who had exposed face to shoulders. Some 60.7% had worn traditional one- or two-pieces, with 42.9% wearing a bikini or less. About half of beach body selfie posters (52.7%) said they had rarely or never edited their photos before uploading them. That is compared to 47.3% who engaged in photo manipulation sometimes (16.6%), most of the time (17.2%) or always (13.7%).

7.3.1.2 Correlations

In partial support of Hypothesis 6, a positive, significant relationship could be observed between women's beach body selfie-posting activities and appearance evaluation (r(151) =.27, p < .01). No relationships revealed in terms of self-objectification (p(151) = .06) and thin-ideal internalisation (p(151) = .10) though.

7.3.1.3 Inferential Statistics

Independent t-tests were conducted to assess whether there was a statistically significance between the means of beach body selfie posters and passive users in the sample. Analyses showed that there were statistically significant differences with small to medium effect sizes between those who had and those who had not shared beach body selfies online in terms of appearance evaluation (t(656) = -6.47, p < .001, d = -.58) and self-objectification (t (281) = 2.13, p < .05, d =.19), such that appearance evaluation was, on average .53 points higher (95% - CI [-.68, -.36]) and self-objectification was, on average, .17 lower amongst selfie posters (95% - CI [.01, .33]) compared with passive recipients. No statistically significant difference revealed in terms of thin-ideal internalisation (t(274) = 1.64, p = .10). Hypothesis 7 could thus be in parts supported.

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7.3.2 Mothers vs. Non-Mothers

Mothers were identified as a relevant subpopulation in the literature review given that beach body discourse commonly enforces and appraises images of bikini-ready celebrity mothers and of sexually appealing "yummy mummies" in swimwear (O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). It was hypothesized that mothers would generally score higher in appearance concerns during summer as compared to non-mothers, and that they would show more negative body image outcomes than non-mothers when being exposed to and posting beach body content on SNS. Also, stronger positive body image reactions amongst women were assumed when they had been exposed to non-normative beach bodies at the beach, engaged in physical activity and generally felt good at the beach. A portion of N = 195 mothers and N= 484 non-mothers were considered in the analyses.

7.3.2.1 Group Characteristics

Just as in the previous section, an overview of demographic differences between mothers and non-mothers is provided in the following Table 11 in order to contextualise the findings of the conducted inferential statistical tests and the subsequent analyses of group differences in correlations proposed in Hypothesis 10.

TABLE 11: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF MOTHERS VS. NON-MOTHERS

	Mothers (N =195)	*Non-mothers (N = 484)*
Mean Age	*M = 44.45 (SD = 9.55)*	*M = 25.56 (SD = 8.64)*
Mean BMI	*M = 28.86 (SD = 7.17)*	*M = 24.49 (SD = 5.39)*
Sexuality	Heterosexual: 92.3% Lesbian: 0.5% Bisexual: 4.1% Others: 1.0%	Heterosexual: 80.4% Lesbian: 3.9% Bisexual: 12.7% Others: 1.3%
Ethnicity	White: 94.9% Asian: 0% Black/African/Caribbean: 2.6% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 0.5% Other: 1.5%	White: 93.1% Asian: 3.4% Black/African/Caribbean: 0.4% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 1.3% Other: 1.5%
Relationship status	Single: 8.7% Married: 72.3% In a relationship: 14.9% Other: 3.1%	Single: 39.0% Married: 10.1% In a relationship: 49.4% Other: 0.6%
Visual disfigurements	Yes: 32.8% No: 67.2%	Yes: 24.4% No: 75.6%

Eating disorder history	Yes: 28.7% No: 71.3%	Yes: 32.1% No: 67.9%
Pregnancy	Pregnant: 0%	Pregnant: 1.5%

As illustrated, there was a considerable difference in age between mothers and non-mothers in this study, such that mothers were generally older. They also had a higher mean BMI and most of them were married as opposed to most non-mothers being single or in a relationship. Additionally, 92.3% of mothers identified as heterosexual as compared to 80.4% of non-mothers. No mother had at the time of the study been pregnant, as opposed to 1.5% of non-mothers who had been pregnant. Further details are provided in Table 12, which shows that mothers had been slightly less satisfied with their beach bodies and that they had spent less time at the beach and on social media, respectively.

No considerable differences between mothers and non-mothers could be observed in terms of beach dress with similar portions exposing their bodies in one- or two-pieces, and in subjective wellbeing and physical activity at the beach.

TABLE 12: DIFFERENCES IN BEACH AND SOCIAL MEDIA MEASURES BETWEEN MOTHERS AND NON-MOTHERS

	Mothers (N =195)	*Non-mothers (N = 458)*
Global subjective beach body satisfaction	*M = 3.20 (SD = 0.93)*	*M = 3.30 (SD = 0.84)*
Time spent at the beach	*M = 90.14 (SD = 151.47)*	*M = 70.61 (SD = 125.27)*
Beach dress	Bikini or less: 16.9% One-piece or tankini: 25.6% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 23.1% Light summer clothes: 31.8% Fully dressed: 2.6%	Bikini or less: 28% One-piece or tankini: 14.9% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 28.4% Light summer clothes: 26.1% Fully dressed: 2.6%
Physical activity at the beach	Always: 6.2% Most of the time: 26.2% About half the time: 21.5% Sometimes: 33.8% Never: 12.3%	Always: 10.6% Most of the time: 20.7% About half the time: 23.1% Sometimes: 33.5% Never: 12.1%
Subjective wellbeing at the beach	Very much: 11.3% A lot: 37.4% A moderate amount: 25.1% A little: 22.6% Not at all: 3.6%	Very much: 14% A lot: 32.3% A moderate amount: 33.2% A little: 18.1% Not at all: 2.4%
(Daily) Time spent on SNS	*M = 3.18 (SD = 2.53)*	*M = 4.15 (SD = 2.82)*

		Yes: 17%	Yes: 28%
Percentage of beach body selfie-posters			

Statistical findings will later be interpreted under consideration of similarities and differences between the two groups of women in this study.

7.3.2.2 Correlations

To test Hypothesis 10, the data file was split by mothers and non-mothers to separately assess each group's relationship between appearance concerns and exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS, active engagement with beach body content and beach body selfie posting as well as exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach, physical activity and subjective wellbeing at the beach. Note, only small proportions of N = 33 mothers and N =130 non-mothers had posted selfies of themselves in swimwear and are included in the analyses of the beach body selfie posting variable. The remaining correlation coefficients refer to the complete sample sizes of N = 195 mothers and N = 458 non-mothers.

TABLE 13: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BEACH BODY EXPOSURE (SNS/BEACH) AND APPEARANCE CONCERNS GROUPED BY MOTHERS AND NON-MOTHERS

		Appearance evaluation	Self-objectification	Thin-ideal internalisation	Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)	Appearance comparison tendency (beach)
Exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS)	*Mothers (N = 195)*	**-.40***	**.40***	**.40***	**.30***	**.28***
	non-mothers (N = 458)	**-.28***	**.33***	**.35***	**.36***	**.30***
Beach body selfie-posting (SNS)	*mothers*	**.46****	**-.49****	-.28	-.25	-.05
	non-mothers	.17	-.05	-.08	-.15	**-.18***
Exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach)	*mothers*	**.38***	**-.33***	**-.27***	**-.27***	**-.23***
	non-mothers	**.38***	**-.30***	**-.32***	**-.25***	**-.33***
Physical activity at the beach	*mothers*	**.29***	**-.30***	**-.17***	**-.21****	**-.31***

		Appearance evaluation	Self-objectification	Thin-ideal internalisation	Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)	Appearance comparison tendency (beach)
	non-mothers	.24***	-.19***	-.11*	-.16***	-.05
Subjective wellbeing at the beach	*mothers*	.52***	-.53***	-.41***	-.37***	-.45***
	non-mothers	.54***	-.43***	-.32***	-.33***	-.30***

*p < .05.   **p < .01.   ***p < .001.

Table 13 presents that viewing normative beach bodies on social media was more strongly related to appearance concerns in the group of mothers than in the group of non-mothers. In contrast, while beach body selfie-posting was not significantly related to body image outcomes in the group of non-mothers, it was positively, significantly associated with appearance evaluation (r(33) = .46, p < .01) and negatively, significantly with self-objectification (r(33) = -.49, p < .01) amongst the 33 mothers who had shared beach body selfies during summer. No significant relationships revealed between active engagement with beach body content and women's body image.

The negative, significant relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach and thin-ideal internalisation was stronger in non-mothers (r(460) = -.32, p < .001) than in mothers (r(193) = -.27, p < .001) whereas it was stronger amongst mothers in terms of self-objectification (mothers: r(193) = -.33, p < .001; non-mothers: r(460) = -.30, p < .001). Both groups scored equally in appearance evaluation.

Both physical activity and subjective wellbeing at the beach were, on average, associated with more positive body image outcomes amongst mothers compared to non-mothers, although both groups showed similar effect sizes in the relationship between subjective wellbeing and appearance evaluation (mothers: r(193) = .52, p < .001; non-mothers r(460) = .54, p < .001).

7.3.2.3 Inferential Statistics

Independent t-tests showed that there were statistically significant differences with medium effect sizes between mothers and non-mothers in terms self-objectification (t (326) = -4.83, p < .001, d = -.41) and thin-ideal internalization (t (335) = -6.37, p < .001, d = -.54), such that self-objectification was, on average, .38 points lower amongst mothers (95% - CI [-.54, -.23]) and thin-ideal internalisation was, on average, .59 points lower amongst mothers (95% - CI [-.77, -.41]) compared with non-mothers. No statistically significant difference revealed in terms of appearance evaluation (t(361) = -1.45, p = .149). Hypothesis 9, therefore, could not be supported.

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7.3.3 Individuals with Low/Medium/High Beach Body Satisfaction

To assess correlations amongst women who had scored low, medium or high in global subjective beach body satisfaction, the global subjective beach body satisfaction scores were re-coded: beach body satisfaction scores of 1-3 were subsumed under "low" beach body satisfaction, scores between 3 and 4 under "medium" beach body satisfaction, and scores between 4 and 5 subsumed under "high" beach body satisfaction.

It was believed that women who had felt dissatisfied with their beach bodies would have had stronger negative body image reactions when being exposed to and sharing beach body content on SNS and stronger positive reactions when being exposed to non-normative beach bodies at the beach, when engaging in physical activity at the beach and when feeling good at the beach compared to women who felt neutral or satisfied with their beach bodies.

7.3.3.1 Group Characteristics

Table 14 presents the demographic differences between individuals with low, medium or high beach body satisfaction. The three groups vary in size and comparisons are possible only to a limited extent. Nevertheless, differences in variables such as age, BMI, chosen beach dress and others may help to characterise the subpopulations and contextualise the findings presented in this section.

TABLE 14: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH LOW/MEDIUM/HIGH GLOBAL SUBJECTIVE BEACH BODY SATISFACTION

	Individuals with low beach body satisfaction (N =269)	*Individuals with medium beach body satisfaction (N =277)*	*Individuals with high beach body satisfaction (N =111)*
Mean Age	*M = 30.38 (SD = 12.15)*	*M = 32.13 (SD = 13.33)*	*M = 30.46 (SD = 10.49)*
Mean BMI	*M = 27.20 (SD = 6.65)*	*M = 24.83 (SD = 5.64)*	*M = 24.37 (SD = 6.08)*
Sexuality	Heterosexual: 83.6% Lesbian: 3.0% Bisexual: 10.4% Others: 1.5%	Heterosexual: 85.6% Lesbian: 2.5% Bisexual: 9% Others: 1.1%	Heterosexual: 80.2% Lesbian: 3.6% Bisexual: 12.6% Others: 0.9%
Ethnicity	White: 94.4% Asian: 2.2% Black/African/Caribbean: 1.1% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 1.5% Other: 0.7%	White: 93.1% Asian: 2.9% Black/African/Caribbean: 0.7% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 0.7% Other: 2.2%	White: 92.8% Asian: 1,8% Black/African/Caribbean: 1.8% Mixed/Multiple ethnic background: 0.9% Other: 1.8%

	Single: 32%	Single: 31.0%	Single: 23.4%
Relationship status	Married: 27.5%	Married: 28.5%	Married: 30.6%
	In a relationship: 38.3%	In a relationship: 38.3%	In a relationship: 43.2%
	Other: 1.1%	Other: 1.8%	Other: 0.9%
Visual disfigurements	Yes: 32.3%	Yes: 23.5%	Yes: 20.7%
	No: 67.7%	No: 62.5%	No: 79.3%
Eating disorder history	Yes: 35.7%	Yes: 27.1%	Yes: 28.8%
	No: 64.3%	No: 72.9%	No: 71.2%
Pregnancy/ Motherhood	Pregnant: 0.7%	Pregnant: 1.4%	Pregnant: 0.9%
	Mothers: 32.3%	Mothers: 28.9%	Mothers: 24.3%

The table shows small to moderate demographic differences amongst individuals with low, medium and high global subjective beach body satisfaction, especially in terms of age, BMI, sexuality, ethnicity, relationship status and pregnancy/motherhood. More notable differences can be observed in terms of visual disfigurement and eating disorder history though, such that more participants with low beach body satisfaction had reported having a visual disfigurement and an eating disorder history compared to those with medium and high beach body satisfaction.

Greater variations could be observed in terms of chosen beach dress, physical activity and subjective wellbeing at the beach, as well as time spent at the beach and on SNS, respectively.

TABLE 15: DIFFERENCES IN BEACH AND SOCIAL MEDIA MEASURES BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS WITH LOW/MEDIUM/HIGH GLOBAL SUBJECTIVE BEACH BODY SATISFACTION

	Individuals with low beach body satisfaction (N =269)	*Individuals with medium beach body satisfaction (N =277)*	*Individuals with high beach body satisfaction (N =111)*
Time spent at the beach	*M = 61.62 (SD = 83.39)*	*M = 83.19 (SD = 146.15)*	*M = 96.42 (SD = 187.93)*
Beach dress	Bikini or less: 13.4% One-piece or tankini: 14.5% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 36.1% Light summer clothes: 32.3% Fully dressed: 3.7%	Bikini or less: 30% One-piece or tankini: 19.1% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 20.9% Light summer clothes: 27.4% Fully dressed: 2.5%	Bikini or less: 39.6% One-piece or tankini: 24.3% Beachwear with a scarf/towel/etc. wrapped around the body: 19.8% Light summer clothes: 16.2% Fully dressed: 20%
Physical activity at the beach	Always: 5.2% Most of the time: 16.4% About half the time: 24.2% Sometimes: 38.1% Never: 16%	Always: 10.5% Most of the time: 29.6% About half the time: 22% Sometimes: 29.6%	Always: 16.2% Most of the time: 26.1% About half the time: 20.7% Sometimes: 31.5% Never: 5.4%

		Never: 11.2%	
Subjective wellbeing at the beach	Very much: 2.2% A lot: 19.3% A moderate amount: 36.1% A little: 36.1% Not at all: 6.3%	Very much: 14.8% A lot: 42.6% A moderate amount: 32.5% A little: 9.7% Not at all: 0.4%	Very much: 36% A lot: 47.7% A moderate amount: 13.5% A little: 2.7% Not at all: 0%
(Daily) Time spent on SNS	*M = 4.28 (SD = 3.11)*	*M = 3.69 (SD = 2.47)*	*M = 3.35 (SD = 2.62)*
Percentage of beach body selfie-posters	13.8%	27.8%	44.1%

As illustrated in Table 15, women with lower beach body satisfaction were more likely to cover their bodies and less likely to engage in physical activity at the beach compared to women who had reported medium or high global subjective beach body satisfaction. Moreover, they had spent on average considerably lesser time at the beach (*M = 61.62, SD = 83.39*) than women who had felt satisfied with their beach body (*M = 96.42, SD = 187.93*). As opposed, individuals with low satisfaction had spent more time online on social media (*M = 4.28, SD = 3.11*) compared to those with high satisfaction (*M = 3.35, SD = 2.62*).

7.3.3.2 Correlations

Correlation coefficients divided by groups of individuals with low (N = 269), medium (N = 277) and high (N = 111) global subjective beach body satisfaction are presented in Table 16.

TABLE 16: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BEACH BODY EXPOSURE (SNS/BEACH) AND APPEARANCE CONCERNS GROUPED BY BEACH BODY SATISFACTION

	Global subjective beach body satisfaction	Appearance evaluation	Self-objectification	Thin-ideal internalisation	Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)	Appearance comparison tendency (beach)
Exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS)	*low (N = 269)*	**-.25*****	**.28*****	**.34*****	**.24*****	**.20*****
	medium (N = 277)	-.11	**.31*****	**.29*****	**.36*****	**.28*****
	high (N = 111)	**-.21***	**.41*****	**.49*****	**.40*****	**.32*****

	Global subjective beach body satisfaction	Appearance evaluation	Self-objectification	Thin-ideal internalisation	Appearance comparison tendency (SNS)	Appearance comparison tendency (beach)
Beach body selfie posting	low	.09	.01	.03	.08	.04
	medium	.01	.02	.03	-.05	-.03
	high	.17	-.01	-.01	-.11	-.03
Exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach)	low	**.18****	**-.20****	**-.19****	**-.20*****	**-.22*****
	medium	**.21****	**-.22****	**-.23****	**-.17****	**-.24*****
	high	.13	**-.22****	**-.29****	**-.29****	
Physical activity at the beach	low	**.23*****	**-.22*****	-.11	**-.13***	**-.13***
	medium	**.16****	**-.13***	-.06	**-.12***	-.01
	high	.04	-.06	.08	-.04	.02
Subjective wellbeing at the beach	low	**.22*****	**-.31*****	**-.14***	**-.15***	**-.20*****
	medium	**.27*****	**-.29*****	**-.17****	**-.16***	-.10
	high	**.37*****	**-.20***	**-.20***	**-.24***	**-.21***

*p < .05.   **p < .01.   ***p < .001.

Contrary to the hypothesis, the positive relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and total appearance concerns was strongest amongst participants with the highest beach body satisfaction (r(111) = .51, p < .01) compared to groups with medium and low beach body satisfaction. Exposure to normative beach bodies on social media was particularly strongly associated with thin-ideal internalisation (r(111) = .49, p < .01) and self-objectification (r(111) = .41, p < .01) amongst individuals who had felt satisfied with their beach bodies.

In contrast, the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and self-objectification was weakest amongst individuals who had scored low in global subjective beach body satisfaction (r(269) = .28, p < .01). The negative relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance evaluation was, however, slightly stronger in this group (r(269) = -.25, p < .01) compared to individuals who had scored high in global subjective beach body satisfaction (r(111) = -.21, p < .05). No significant correlations revealed amongst participants with high global subjective beach body satisfaction. Also, consistent with previous partial correlation analyses, no significant relationships could be observed in terms of beach body selfie-posting across groups.

Exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach correlated strongly and significantly with all body image measures in the group of participants who had scored low or medium in global subjective beach body satisfaction. In partial support of the hypothesis, the largest effect sizes in appearance evaluation and self-objectification revealed amongst participants who had scored medium or low in beach body satisfaction. The strongest negative relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies and thin-ideal internalisation, however, revealed amongst those with the highest global subjective beach body satisfaction (r(111) = -.29, p < .01).

No significant relationships revealed between physical activity at the beach and thin-ideal internalisation. However, physical activity significantly correlated with appearance evaluation (r(269) = .23, p < .001), self-objectification (r(269) = .22, p < .001) and appearance comparison tendency amongst participants with low beach body satisfaction. Lower, yet significant correlations between physical activity at the beach and appearance evaluation (r(277) = .16, p < .01) and self-objectification (r(277) = -.13, p < .05) revealed in the group with medium beach body satisfaction whereas no significant correlations could be observed in the group with high beach body satisfaction.

Significant correlations between subjective wellbeing at the beach and body image revealed across groups, whereby those with high beach body satisfaction had the strongest effects in appearance evaluation (r(111) = .37, p < .001) and thin-ideal 177ocializing177ion (r(111) = -.20, p < .05) whereas the effect size between subjective wellbeing and self-objectification was largest in the group with low beach body satisfaction (r(269) = -.31, p < .001).

7.4 Mediation Analyses

Simple mediation analyses were performed using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2021) to test Hypotheses 11 and 12. That was to explore whether women's tendency to compare against other women's bodies mediated the direct path between exposure to normative and non-normative beach bodies (SNS/beach) and appearance concerns (appearance evaluation, thin-ideal internalisation, self-objectification) in women during the summer; and whether global subjective wellbeing at the beach mediated the direct path between time spent at the beach and appearance evaluation. Findings are presented in the following paragraphs.

7.4.1 Appearance Comparison Tendency as a Mediator

In partial support of Hypothesis 11, the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance concerns during summer was partially mediated by appearance comparison tendency (SNS) (Figure 9-11).

A negative, significant effect of exposure on appearance evaluation was observed (B = -.39, *SE = .053*, p < .001). After entering appearance comparison tendency (SNS) as a mediator into the model, exposure predicted appearance comparison tendency significantly (B = .72, *SE = .078*, p <.001), which in turn predicted appearance evaluation significantly (B = -.25, *SE = .029*, p <.001). The relationship between appearance evaluation and exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) was reduced but remained significant after entering appearance comparison tendency (SNS) as a mediating variable (B = -.21, *SE = .054*, p <.001).

It can thus be concluded that the relationship was partially mediated by women's tendency to compare against other women's beach body images on SNS (indirect effect ab = -.1811, *BootSE = .0289*, 95% - CI [-.2414, -.1283]).
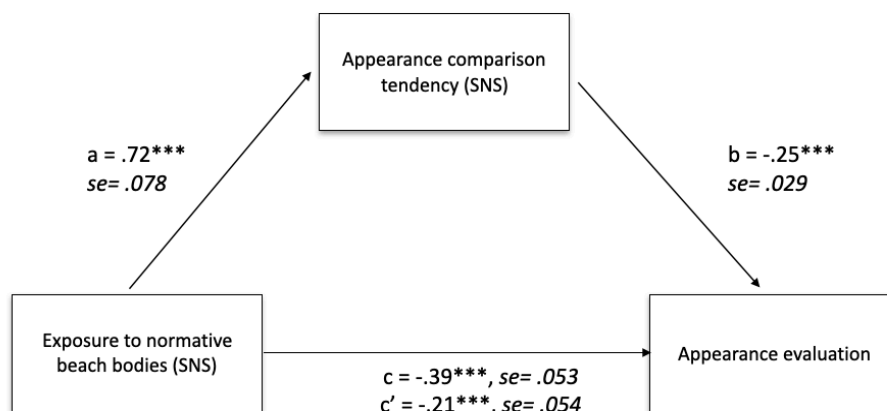
FIGURE 9: MEDIATING EFFECT OF APPEARANCE COMPARISON TENDENCY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO NORMATIVE BEACH BODIES (SNS) AND APPEARANCE EVALUATION

A positive, significant effect of exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) on self-objectification revealed (B = .50, *SE = .056*, p < .001). Exposure predicted appearance comparison (SNS) significantly (B = .73, *SE = .078*, p < .001). Equally, appearance comparison tendency (SNS) predicted self-objectification significantly (B = .40, *SE = .026*, p < .001). Just as in appearance evaluation, the correlation between self-objectification and exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) was reduced but remained significant after entering appearance comparison tendency (SNS) as a mediator (B = .22, *SE = .047*, p < .001; indirect effect *ab* = .2876, *BootSE = .0344*, 95% - CI [.2234, .3588]. The fact that the confidence interval did not include zero and the relationship remained significant indicated partial mediation.

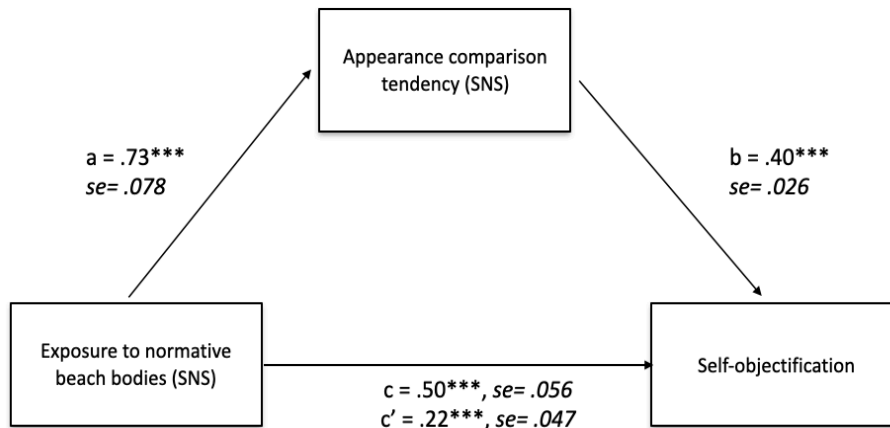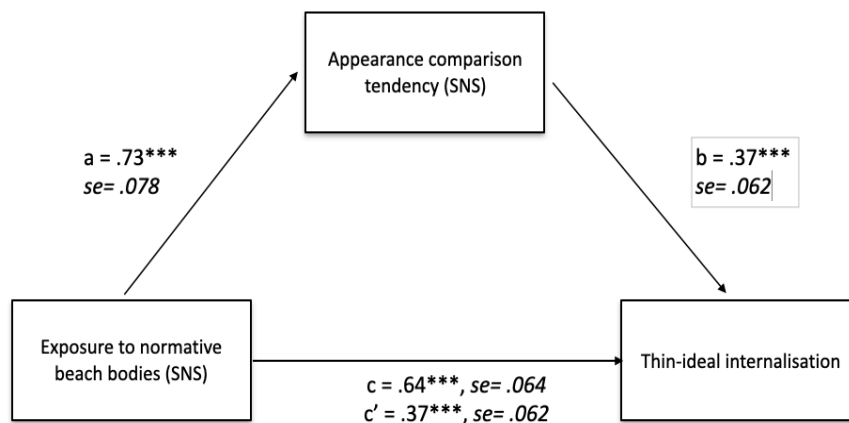**FIGURE 10:** MEDIATING EFFECT OF APPEARANCE COMPARISON TENDENCY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO NORMATIVE BEACH BODIES (SNS) AND SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

The positive, significant effect of exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) on thin-ideal internalisation ($B = .64$, SE = .06, $p < .001$) was reduced, but stayed significant ($B = .37$, SE = .06, $p < .001$) when entering appearance comparison tendency (SNS) as a mediator ($B = .37$, SE = .06, $p < .001$). Given that the relationship remained significant, and the confidence interval did not include zero, appearance comparison tendency was found to partially mediate the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and thin-ideal internalisation (indirect effect $ab = .2743$, *BootSE = .0378*, 95% - CI [.2038, .3529]).
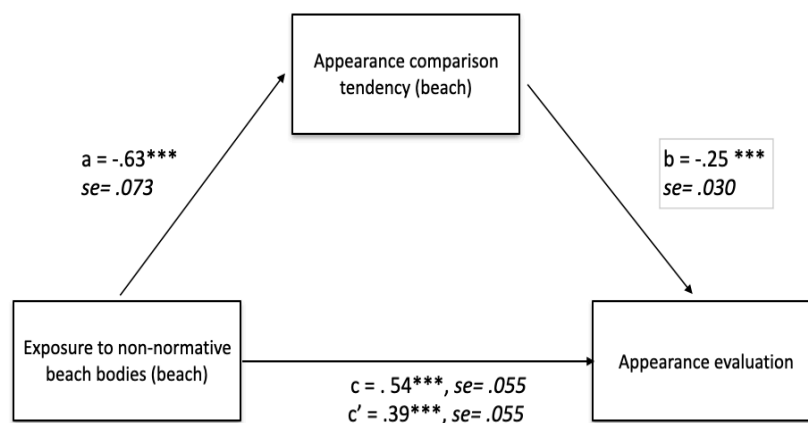

FIGURE 11: MEDIATING EFFECT OF APPEARANCE COMPARISON TENDENCY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO NORMATIVE BEACH BODIES (SNS) AND THIN-IDEAL INTERNALISATION

In congruence, women's tendency to compare against other women's bodies at the beach partially mediated the relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach) and appearance concerns during summer. The effect of total beach body exposure (beach) on women's appearance concerns (appearance evaluation, self-objectification, thin-ideal internalisation) during summer was smaller in all cases when the mediator was entered in the regression equation than when the exposure

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variable was entered on its own. Individual results are elaborated in the following paragraphs and illustrated in Figure 12-14.

The first regression analysis suggested that the significant, positive linear relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach) and appearance evaluation (B = .54, *SE = .055*, p < .001) was reduced to beta = .39, *SE = .055*, p < .001 when appearance comparison tendency at the beach (B = -.25, *SE = .030*, p < .001) was entered in the equation. The fact that the confidence interval did not include zero and the relationship remained significant indicated partial mediation (indirect effect ab = .1549, *BootSE = .0246*, 95% - CI [.1093, .2067]).

FIGURE 12: MEDIATING EFFECT OF APPEARANCE COMPARISON TENDENCY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO NON-NORMATIVE BEACH BODIES (BEACH) AND APPEARANCE EVALUATION

Similarly, a negative, significant effect of exposure to non-normative beach bodies on self-objectification was observed (B = -.47, *SE = .054*, p < .001). After entering appearance comparison tendency (beach) as a mediator into the model, exposure predicted appearance comparison tendency significantly (B = -.63, *SE = .073*, p <.001), which in turn predicted self-objectification significantly (B = .44, *SE = .027*, p <.001).

The relationship between self-objectification and exposure to non-normative beach bodies was reduced but remained significant after entering appearance comparison tendency (beach) as a mediating variable (B = -.20, *SE = .047*, p <.001). It can thus be concluded that the relationship is partially mediated by women's tendency to compare against other women's beach body images on SNS (indirect effect ab = -.2755, *BootSE = .0374*, 95% - CI [-.3545, -.2057]).
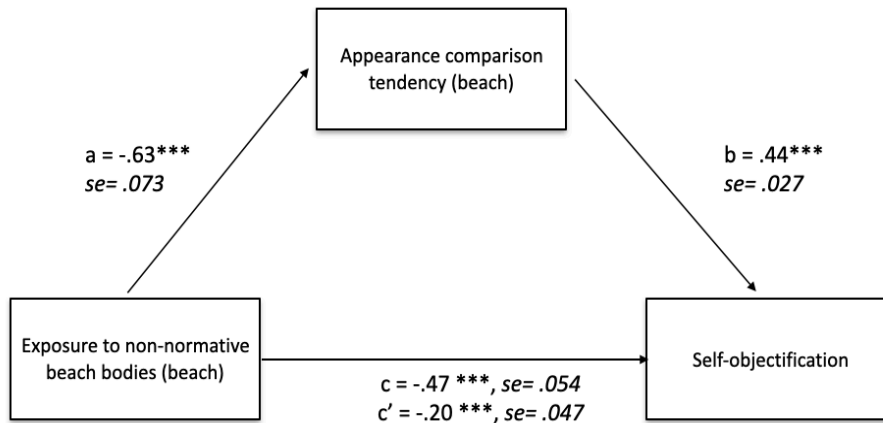
FIGURE 13: MEDIATING EFFECT OF APPEARANCE COMPARISON TENDENCY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO NON-NORMATIVE BEACH BODIES (BEACH) AND SELF-OBJECTIFICATION

The third mediation analysis revealed that the significant, negative linear relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach) and thin-ideal internalisation (B = -.56, *SE = .062*, p < .001) diminished to beta = -.33, *SE = .063*, p < .001 when appearance comparison tendency at the beach (B = .37, *SE = .035*, p < .001) was entered in the equation.
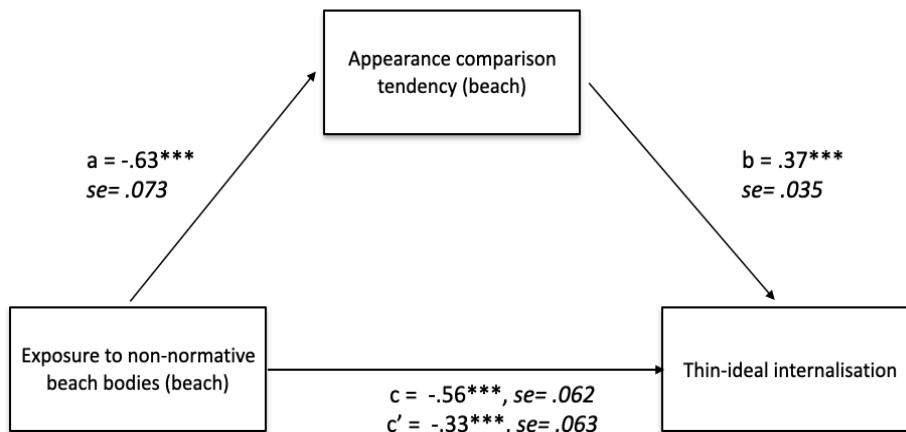

FIGURE 14: MEDIATING EFFECT OF APPEARANCE COMPARISON TENDENCY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO NON-NORMATIVE BEACH BODIES (BEACH) AND THIN-IDEAL INTERNALISATION

The fact that the confidence interval did not include zero and the relationship remained significant indicated partial mediation in this case, too (indirect effect ab = -.2342, *BootSE = .0357*, 95% - CI [-.3097, -.1667]).

7.4.2 Subjective Wellbeing at the Beach as a Mediator

In support of Hypothesis 12, the relationship between time spent at the beach and appearance evaluation was fully mediated by women's women's ability to feel good and relaxed at the beach (indirect effect ab = .0409, *BootSE* = .01, 95% - CI [.0273, .0545]).
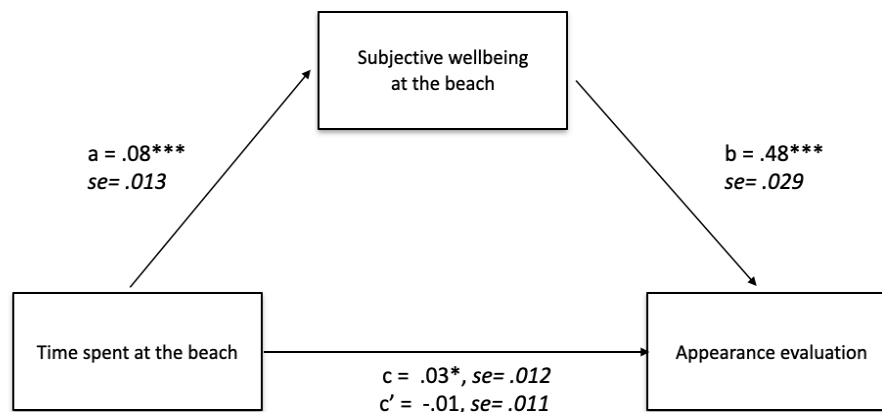

FIGURE 15: MEDIATING EFFECT OF SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING AT THE BEACH ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIME SPENT AT THE BEACH AND APPEARANCE EVALUATION

Regression analysis confirmed a significant, positive linear relationship between time spent at the beach and appearance evaluation (B = .03, *SE = .012*, p < .001). After entering subjective wellbeing at the beach as a mediator into the model, time spent at the beach predicted wellbeing at the beach significantly (B = .08, *SE = .013*, p <.001), which in turn predicted appearance evaluation significantly (B = .48, *SE = .029*, p <.001). As shown in Figure 15, the relationship between appearance evaluation and time spent at the beach became insignificant after entering wellbeing at the beach as a mediating variable (B = -.01, *SE = .011*, p = .422).

7.4 Moderation Analyses

Simple moderation analyses were performed to test Hypotheses 13-15. That is, to explore whether age and appearance discrepancy moderated the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance concerns; whether beach body discrepancy additionally moderated the relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies at the beach and appearance concerns; and whether subjective wellbeing at the beach moderated the relationship between global subjective beach body satisfaction and women's appearance concerns during summer. Moderation was assumed to occur where the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for the conditional effects did not include zero (Preacher et al. 2007). Following a recommendation by Hayes (2018), simple effects models were performed where no moderation could be observed in order to further explore the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables after dropping the interaction term.

7.4.1 Age as a Moderator

Opposing Hypothesis 13, age did not moderate the effect between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance evaluation (ΔR^2 = .00%, $F(1,649)$ = .01, p = .94, 95% CI [-.0082, .0076]), self-objectification (ΔR^2 = .01%, $F(1,647)$ = .09, p = .77, 95% CI [-.0091, .0067]), and thin-ideal internalisation (ΔR^2 = .02%, $F(1,646)$ = .16, p = .69, 95% CI [-.0075, .0113]).

Simple effects models revealed significant relationships between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance evaluation (B = -.44, *SE = .05*, p < .001), self-objectification (B = .42, *SE = .05*, p < .001), and thin-ideal internalisation (B = .53, *SE = .06*, p < .001), and between age and appearance evaluation (B = -.01, *SE = .00*, p < .01), self-objectification (B = -.01, *SE= .00*, p < .001), and thin-ideal internalisation (B = -.02, *SE= .00*, p < .001).

7.4.2 Beach Body Discrepancy as a Moderator

Figure 16 presents how participants rated their own beach bodies in comparison to those of other women they had seen on SNS and at the beach, respectively.
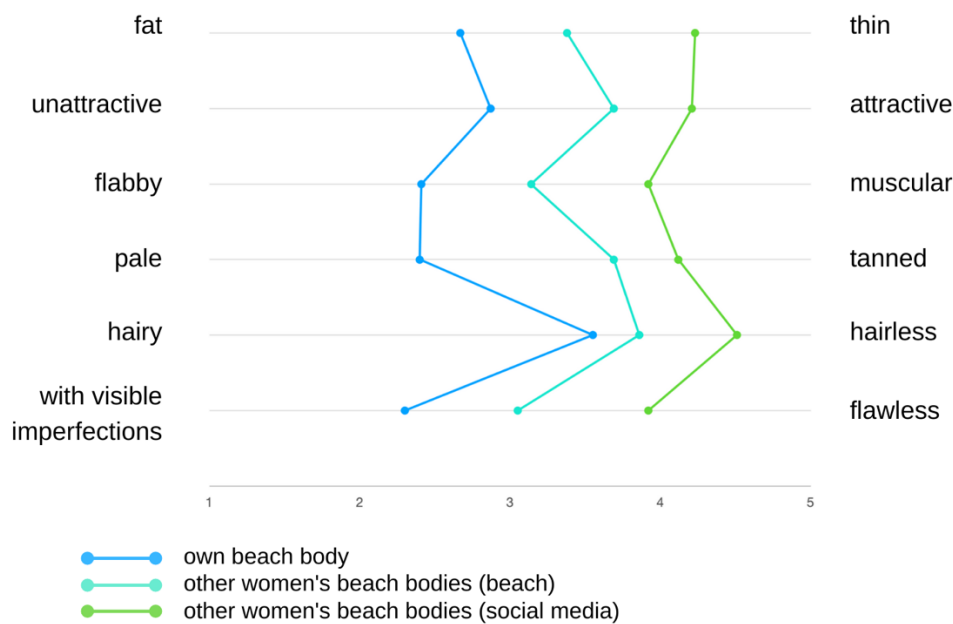

FIGURE 16: SELF-PERCEIVED BEACH BODY DISCREPANCIES

As illustrated, there were considerable differences in the way women compared their own bodies to the beach bodies of other women. Based on that, Hypotheses 15 and 16 sought to explore the extent to which beach body discrepancies moderated exposure to different kinds of beach bodies and women's body image.

Analyses showed that participants' self-perceived discrepancy between their own beach body and normative beach bodies they had been exposed to on SNS did not significantly moderate the effect

between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance evaluation (ΔR² = .22%, F(1,616) = 1.44, p = .23, 95% CI [-.0420, .1741]) and self-objectification (ΔR² = .12%, F(1,615) = .68, p = .41, 95% CI [-.1573, .0642]). It did, however, moderate the effect between exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and thin-ideal internalisation significantly, ΔR² = .60%, F(1,615) = 3.88, p = 0.05, 95% CI [-.2537, -.0003] such that thin-ideal internalisation increased when exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS was moderated by beach body discrepancy.

Similarly, participants' self-perceived discrepancy between their own and other women's bodies at the beach did not significantly moderate the effect between exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach) and appearance evaluation (ΔR² = .05%, F(1,633) = .59, p = .44, 95% CI [-.1314, .0577]), but it did moderate the effect between exposure to non-normative beach bodies and self-objectification (ΔR² = 1.45%, F(1,631) = 12.69, p < .001, 95% CI [.0845, .2923]) and thin-ideal internalisation (ΔR² = 1.49%, F(1,631) = 13.72, p < .001, 95% CI [.1080, .3518]). Hypothesis 14 could thus be partially supported.

Simple effects models showed significant relationships between both exposure to normative beach bodies (SNS) and appearance evaluation (B = .48, *SE = .06*, p < .001) and self-objectification (B = .25, *SE = .07*, p < .01), and between beach body discrepancy (SNS) and appearance evaluation (B = .87, *SE= .05*, p < .01) and self-objectification (B = -.24, *SE = .06*, p < .01). A significant relationship between exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach) and appearance evaluation (B = -.34, *SE = .07*, p < .001) and between beach body discrepancy and appearance evaluation (B = .87, *SE = .05*, p < .001) could be observed as well.

7.4.3 Subjective Wellbeing at the Beach as a Moderator

It was additionally explored whether the relationship between global subjective beach body satisfaction and appearance evaluation, self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation was moderated by subjective wellbeing at the beach.

Subjective wellbeing at the beach did significantly moderate the effect between global subjective beach body satisfaction and appearance evaluation (ΔR² = 2.28%, F(1,653) = 31.65, p < .001, 95% CI [.0979, .2029]).

It did, however, not moderate the effect between global subjective beach body satisfaction and self-objectification (ΔR² = .17%, F(1,651) = 1.40, p = .238, 95% CI [-.1066, .0265]) and thin-ideal internalisation (ΔR² = .35%, F(1,650) = 2.76, p = .097, 95% CI [-.1483, .0124], so that Hypothesis 14 could only partially be supported. Simple effects models revealed significant relationships between global subjective beach body satisfaction and self-objectification (B = -.34, *SE = .04*, p < .001) and thin-ideal internalisation (B = -.45, *SE = .06*, p < .001), and between subjective wellbeing at the beach and self-objectification (B = -.22, *SE= .04*, p < .001), and thin-ideal internalisation (B = -.12, *SE= .05*, p < .01), respectively.

7.5 Additional Exploratory Findings

Survey data delivered further knowledgeable insights about the seasonality of beach body concerns and about women's beach avoidance behaviours that may contribute to complementing and contextualising the previous findings.

Figure 17 illustrates that almost half (45.58%) of participants said they had felt more negatively about their body during summer as compared to the rest of the year; this is relative to 35.02% who had felt indifferently, and 13.41% who had felt more positively about their body during summer.
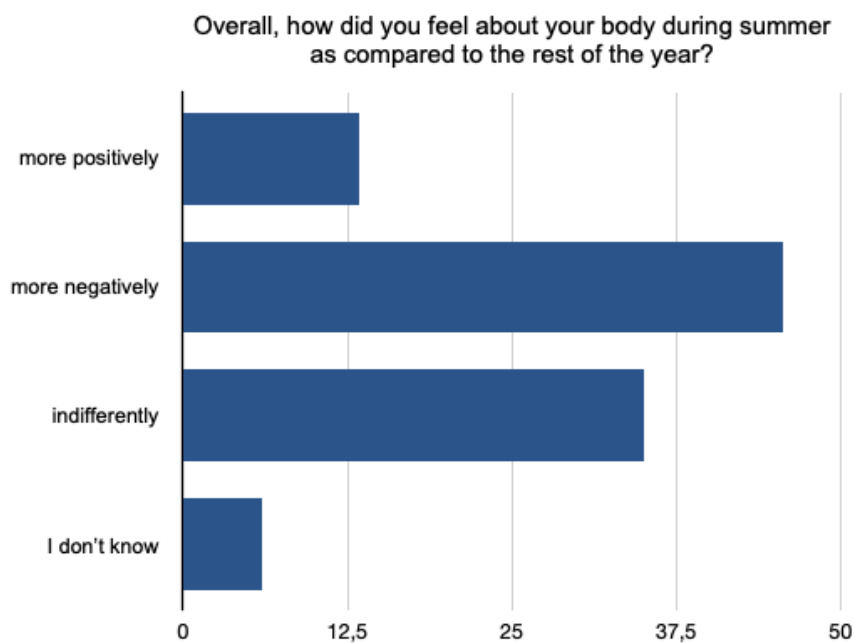

FIGURE 17: SELF-PERCEIVED BODY IMAGE FLUCTUATIONS DURING SUMMER

A qualitative exploration of reasons why some women had chosen to spend no days at the beach throughout the summer (N=74) revealed that appearance and time were the most common motives with each scoring 32.43%. Other motives were weather (31.08%), logistics (13.51%), money (12.16%) and lacking interest into a stay at the beach (12.16%). A small share of 6.76% mentioned other reasons, such as insufficient swimming skills.

In addition to that, some 41.4% of the main sample (N= 659) claimed they had at least sometimes avoided going to the beach because of the way they had felt about their look. Every tenth participant reported this had happened to them most of the time or very often.

7.6 Interpretation of Findings

Past qualitative investigations of women's beach body (or holiday body) experiences suggest a link between women's media consumption and the way they relate and behave with regards to their own bodies (Field et al., 2019). While the strength of that relationship remained unexplored, insufficient attention was put onto the role of social media. That is, despite growing evidence suggesting that engaging with normative appearance-related content on SNS is associated with heightened appearance concerns (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Mingoia et al., 2017; Perloff, 2014; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). The first aim of this survey was to fill these gaps through a quantitative exploration of the relationship between engagement with beach body content on SNS and women's body image during summer.

Second, while a multitude of studies on traditional and social media effects on body image exist (Grabe et al., 2008; Groesz et al., 2002; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016), few have considered real-life, i.e., in-vivo environments (Fardouly et al., 2016). Therefore, the second aim of the correlational study was to deliver insights into women's experiences of embodiment at natural beaches and how those related to their body image during summer.

Specific attention was thereby put on women's subjective wellbeing at the beach, i.e., the extent to which participants had relaxed and felt good at the beach. Doing so served to provide an original touching point between appearance psychology and blue mind research and to assess the potential of the beach in reducing and preventing appearance concerns in women. This section aims to discuss the findings of this study under consideration of objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954).

General social media usage and the viewing of normative beach body images in this study linked to heightened appearance concerns including higher self-objectification, thin-ideal internalization and overall greater appearance comparison tendency in women during summer, all of which constitute risk factors for disordered eating and several other physical and mental health issues (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

Overall, this finding agrees with existing reviews and meta-analyses that have connected social media engagement with negative body image outcomes (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019). Against the presumption that individuals may routinely be exposed to beach body content posted by unknown others, 90% of the participants claimed that the content they had seen on their newsfeeds had been posted by friends and people or pages they followed. This strengthens the relevance to study the influence of family and peers in a social media and beach body context, as proposed in the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999).

The literature review suggested that an in-depth exploration and contextualisation of beach body-related social media engagement, thus far, has been neglected, even in studies with a direct relationship to the topic (e.g., Drenten and Gurrieri's (2018) content analysis of the bikini bridge hashtag). This study

thus serves to enhance the existing research on social media and body image. This includes studies that have considered general social media usage (Eckler et al., 2017; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Mabe et al., 2014), or, more specifically, exposure to appearance-related content and/or photo-based activities (Meier & Gray, 2014; Mingoia et al., 2014), and those that have studied specific hashtags such as fitspiration (Easton et al., 2018) and emerging themes such as celebrityhood (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2022), all of which may contribute to the dissemination of normative beach body messages. Further, the correlational study serves to enrich research considering exposure effects of homogenised and sexualised beach body photographs of models (Tran & Belul, 2017) and ordinary users (Davis, 2018) including those that have dealt with content shared by female athletes and individuals engaging in water sports such as surfing (Olive, 2015).

Although assumptions about the harmful consequences of viewing thin, toned, tanned and idealised beach body images can be somewhat supported, it is important to acknowledge the correlational nature of this study, which suggests that the relationship between viewing normative beach body images on SNS and women's appearance concerns might as well be bidirectional.

This can be demonstrated at the example of participants who identified as mothers. Those were more strongly affected by normative beach body images on SNS compared to participants without children. Mothers who feel particularly vulnerable about their bodies during summer might engage more with normative beach body content; for instance, to evaluate their own standing, inform about ways to "bounce back" and adhere to the socially approved norm of young, slender, sexy and "bikini-ready" celebrity mothers as commonly promoted across traditional and digital mass media channels (Nash, 2018; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015; B.M. Williams et al., 2017). Existing body image research has sufficiently demonstrated that comparing against these images may enforce our body image concerns (B.M. Williams et al., 2017; Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2021).

In further support of the Tripartite Influence Model, mediation analyses suggested that exposure to normative beach bodies on social media correlated with appearance comparison tendency, which in turn linked to heightened appearance concerns and partially mediated the direct path between exposure and body image. Appearance comparisons, therefore, can be identified as one relevant variable in the psychological processing of online beach body content. Further aspects should be explored in future research.

Additionally, self-perceived discrepancies between women's own and other women's beach bodies were identified as moderating variables and it appears plausible to assume that women may experience more negative body image outcomes, the more they feel their body differs from normative beach body images displayed on SNS when comparing against those. Partial mediation indicated that a significant direct effect between exposure to normative beach body images and women's body image remained though. Also, weak to moderate effect sizes could be observed in the correlations between exposure to normative beach bodies on social media and body image. The details of this should be studied profoundly in the future. For instance, the role of photo-based activities such as sharing, liking and

commenting should be explored, enhancing relevant contributions of scholars such as McLean et al. (2015).

The posting of beach body selfies related to positive body image outcomes (high scores in appearance evaluation and low scores in self-objectification) and was somewhat oppositional to other analyses conducted as part of this PhD research, where no significant relationships could be observed between the two variables (including non-mothers, individuals with low/medium/high global beach body satisfaction and the total sample when controlling for age and BMI). Thereby, more than half (52.7%) of selfie posters had never or rarely shared beach body selfies online, a hesitation which resonated with the focus groups of this research. Of those who had posted beach body selfies, almost half (47.3%) had at least sometimes edited those prior to uploading them. Photo manipulation in this study was consequently weaker than the overall portion of 70% suggested by the American Renfrew Centre Foundation (2014). It was, however, higher than in comparable studies such as by Cohen et al. (2018), in which 80% of participants claimed they had never or rarely edited their selfies before uploading them, whereas 19.3% had engaged in photo manipulation "sometimes" to "very often".

The findings therefore contradicted existing studies such as by Cohen et al. (2018) who observed that women who had posted selfies infrequently and had put efforts into photo manipulation had scored higher in body dissatisfaction than those who had posted selfies regularly, and other studies that identified self-objectification as a motivator and potential outcome of selfie-posting in women (Grogan et al., 2018; Veldhuis et al., 2020). Even more surprisingly, the findings suggested that women may not necessarily self-objectify even in potentially sexualising environments (Szymanski et al., 2010). This raised the question as to why that was.

Effect sizes of notable strength revealed amongst mothers who accounted for 20% of selfie posters. Arguably, only a small portion of N = 33 mothers who had shared beach body selfies were included in the analysis, so that these findings are by no means representative, however, they may contribute preliminary insights to increasing our understanding about the positive body image outcomes ascribed to selfie-posting in this study.

Analyses revealed that more than 40% of the beach body selfies shared by mothers were described as full-body shots and more than half had presented themselves in revealing swimwear. Full-body social media self-presentations in revealing dress have been observed amongst body-positive activists (Cohen et al., 2019). Therefore, one explanation is that mothers in this research posted bikini photos for the purpose of showing what postpartum bodies look like, i.e., as an act of enacting online embodiment and inspiration for other mothers. This has been observed elsewhere (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2021; Singh, 2019).

Supportive of that is the finding that mothers in this study generally scored lower in self-objectification and thin-ideal internalization than non-mothers. Also, 66.7% of mothers, compared to 49.2% of non-mothers in this study said they had never or rarely edited their beach body selfies, as compared to 24.3% of mothers and 32.3% of non-mothers who had done this "always" or "most of the time". Moreover, a third of mothers who had posted beach body selfies reported having visual disfigurements

such as disabilities, congenital conditions, burns or scars that would become visible in swimwear. Body-positive motivations might explain why mothers refrained from objectifying and sexualising views of their bodies as malleable, transformable "yummy mummy" projects and instead evaluated their appearances positively. Social media usage, in that case, might trigger positive body image outcomes and women might feel empowered and supported by the body-positive online community to present their swimwear-clad bodies with confidence.

However, not all positive body image outcomes may necessarily relate to body image activism. The posting of photographs showing oneself in swimwear at the beach might simply be part of sharing holiday and leisure memories with social media "friends". Low scores in self-objectification might thereby indicate that women did not feel much affected by the pressure to present an ideal (and sexy) beach body, but perhaps focused more on presenting appearance-unrelated things (e.g., showing a nice holiday destination). Given that the data generated by this study do not serve to increase our understanding about the motives, feelings and perceptions of selfie-posting women at the beach, future qualitative research is warranted.

Another notable contribution of the quantitative study is that it finds the extent, to which participants felt satisfied with their beach bodies inextricably linked to the way they inhabit their bodies during summer. More than 80% of participants indicated they had not felt very confident about their beach bodies during the past summer season and almost half of the participants claimed they had related to their bodies more negatively during summer as compared to the rest of the year. These findings offer preliminary evidence that Griffiths et al.'s (2021) concept of seasonal body image applies to women. Given that many women may resultantly need heightened support during the warm season(s), they are of specific relevance to individuals and groups with the aim to contribute to reducing and preventing appearance concerns in women. Implications will be addressed in chapter 9.1.

Evidence was also provided that being at the beach might help some women to experience more positive body image outcomes during summertime. While time spent at the beach generally related to more positive appearance evaluation, relevant roles could be ascribed to women's subjective wellbeing and physical activity at the beach.

It appears plausible that body confidence may help women to feel good and relaxed at the beach whereas positive experiences of embodiment at the beach, in turn, might contribute to strengthening their body image. Following this logic and the finding that beach body satisfaction correlated strongly with women's body image, one could expect women with a critical attitude toward their beach bodies to experience embodiment at the beach more negatively. However, in this study, subjective wellbeing at the beach related to positive body image outcomes even in women who had not felt satisfied with their beach body. One explanation for this are the mental health benefits ascribed to engaging with blue environments that may diminish appearance-related concerns (Ashbullby et al., 2013; MacKerron & Mourato, 2011; O'Brien, 2006).

Strong and significant correlations could be observed in mothers. Almost all (97%) mothers reported they had been able to relax and feel good at the beach with almost half of them doing this "a lot" or

"very much". It is important to emphasise that participants had been explicitly asked, how much *they* had been able to relax and feel good at the beach. Subjective wellbeing consequently referred to mothers themselves rather than the wellbeing of the family that they might otherwise tend to place over their own. By so doing, the variable attempted to explore the extent to which mothers had felt able to enjoy *themselves* at the beach and to experience balance and recovery from the duties of everyday life, as proposed by blue mind researchers (Nichols, 2018). Therefore, the findings indicate that mothers may experience the beach as a place outside home where they are given the (rare) opportunity to care for both the family and their own wellbeing without one of the two falling short. Experiences of embodiment in natural settings such as the beach should thus find heightened attention in research studying mothers' body image.

The relevance of blue mind benefits further unfolded in the finding that beach body satisfaction and appearance evaluation were moderated by subjective wellbeing at the beach. This suggests that even women who struggle with relating to their beach bodies positively may evaluate their overall appearance less critically during summer, if being at the beach contributes to their overall wellbeing. Part of this may relate to the realisation that bodily perfection does not matter as much at the beach as constructed by the media, and that the beach might be enjoyable regardless of looks, as suggested by the focus groups.

Subjective wellbeing also fully mediated the positive relationship between time spent at the beach and appearance evaluation. This indicates that even short beach visits may contribute to greater overall body satisfaction if being in this space makes us feel good. Given that women with low beach body satisfaction had less frequently worn typical one- or two-pieces compared to women with high beach body satisfaction, it is possible that the positive body image outcomes are independent of dress. This area needs further exploration though given that the literature presents mixed findings about women's (un-)dressing practices during summer (Clarke et al., 2009; Field et al., 2019; Small, 2017).

Another important role could be ascribed to physical activity at the beach. Analyses revealed that participants who were not fully satisfied with their beach bodies had generally engaged less frequently in physical activity at the beach compared to women with high beach body satisfaction, which supports research such as by Liechty (2009) and Small (2021) who have connected negative self-evaluation with greater hesitance amongst women to engage in swimwear activities.

Nevertheless, physical activity related to high levels of appearance evaluation and decreased self-objectification in women with low to medium beach body satisfaction. This indicates that, if women decide to move their bodies and actively engage in beach life regardless of their negative attitude toward their beach body, they may experience positive appearance outcomes.

A moderately strong and significant correlation between physical activity and body image could be observed in the subpopulation of mothers who accounted for 60% of women with low or medium beach body satisfaction. Although many mothers held a critical attitude toward their beach bodies, some 87.7% claimed they had at least sometimes engaged in physical activity at the beach. A recent study by Raspovic and colleagues (2020) suggests that healthful, i.e., enjoyable physical movement might help

mothers to build and maintain a positive body image. The beach as a setting for families to play, swim and have fun together might constitute an apt environment to experience this. Ashbullby et al. (2013) observed families engaging in various kinds of physical movement at the beach. Rather than with pressure to lose weight or get in shape to attain a certain appearance ideal, participants in their qualitative study associated this with fun, stress relief and engagement with nature. The benefits of engaging with nature as we move our bodies have been highlighted (Nichols, 2018; O'Brien, 2006) and strengthen the relevance to connect appearance psychology with blue mind research.

The role of non-normative bodies at the beach was more controversial. While viewing non-normative beach bodies generally related to decreased appearance concerns, mediation analyses connected appearance comparisons at the beach with negative body image. This opposes the general assumption that downward and lateral comparisons may trigger improved body image outcomes (Wheeler & Miyake, 1992) and contradicts some existing studies of nude beaches such as by Barcan (2001), Green (2001) and West (2017, 2022), which propose that seeing similar- or worse-looking comparison targets might serve as a cross-motivational aspect for women to expose their own, flawed bodies at the beach ("if she can do it, so can I").

While this might indicate differences between embodiment at nude and textile beaches, it is as well possible that if women engage in appearance comparisons at the beach, they might still perceive other women as better looking, regardless of flaws and imperfections. This is supportive of previous assumptions that any kinds of appearance comparisons might be associated with negative body image (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

Just as in the social media context, appearance comparison tendency partially mediated the relationship between exposure to other women's non-normative beach bodies at the beach and women's body image. Thereby, partial mediation implies that a direct relationship between the two variables exists that remained unexplored in this study and should find attention in future research.

Of note, women were generally less likely to engage in appearance comparisons at the beach. This is oppositional to a study by Fardouly et al. (2017) who found women engaging the most in appearance comparison processes in "in vivo" contexts. Possible explanations are that women may generally pay lesser attention to looks and focus more on appearance-unrelated things at the beach (e.g., relaxing) or that in an environment of semi-nudity women may respect each other's privacy and avoid gazing at each other, especially if they do not feel very confident about their own beach body.

Taken together, the survey delivers evidence that the beach might be good for our body image if we consider it a place to feel good and relaxed. Although not all beach activities naturally affect all women in the same way, it has been shown that especially those of us who worry about their beach bodies might benefit from the benefits that being nearby, in or under the water holds. Strong effect sizes could be observed in appearance-unrelated variables such as subjective wellbeing and physical activity. This suggests that we may benefit the most from the beach when focusing on how we feel and what we (can) do rather than how we or other women look.

A brief look should be taken at those who had avoided the beach because of the way they had felt about their look. As pointed out by von Spreckelsen, Glashouwer, Bennik, Wessel and de Jong (2018), high levels of body dissatisfaction may drive individuals to avoid any kind of mental or physical exposure toward their bodies. Going out, socializing and spending time in an environment, where swimwear is the preferred dress code may then feel like an insurmountable challenge and trigger social anxiety, which can entail further complications such as depression (Levine & Harrison, 2009).

The survey supports evidence by Frederick and colleagues (2006) that women tend to avoid the beach because of negative body image. While for some, lacking body confidence was a major motive for not going to the beach at all, others would drop out from the beach experience in varying frequency. Although further research is needed to produce a more detailed picture, these findings indicate that avoidance is a common strategy amongst women to deal with beach body concerns. A consequence of this is that they miss out on the potential physical and mental benefits ascribed to the beach. Scholars and clinical practitioners should thus strive and explore the specific needs and sensations of individuals who avoid the beach for appearance reasons and uncover means to overcome these boundaries. Concrete suggestions are provided in chapter 9.

7.7 Limitations

A strength of the study is that the sample differentiates from female college student samples as typically found – and oftentimes criticized - in body image research by employing adult women of a broad age range, different body shapes, and at different life stages. By so doing, the findings serve to expand our (limited) knowledge about the body image of relevant subpopulations such as mothers and ageing women.

However, as outlined in chapter 5.4.14, the use of non-probability sampling methods limits the generalizability of findings. More specifically, the number of mothers and pregnant women was comparably low and, on average, a greater number of younger rather than older women participated in the study, which led to a relatively young mean age of 31 (*SD* = 12.4). Further research is therefore warranted to investigate the beach body experiences of these subgroups in more depth.

Limited diversity was also achieved in terms of ethnicity and sexual orientation. As a result, the beach body experiences of ethnic, religious and sexual minority groups could not be sufficiently covered. What has been discussed in the previous section may resultantly not be representative of all women in Australia and the UK.

While the survey added original insights about the beach body experiences of mothers, the average age of M = 44.45 (*SD = 9.55*) in this subpopulation indicates that the sample included mothers of different ages and probably not just recent mothers. Motherhood was not further explored through the age of children or the time when women had given birth though, which might have affected their relationship to their postpartum bodies (Gjerdingen et al., 2009). Additional socio-demographic differences such as eating disorder history or visual disfigurement were not included in the analyses either as this would have exceeded the scope of this PhD thesis. The same goes for photo-based

interactions such as the liking, commenting and sharing of beach body content. More detailed investigations of these survey items in the future will further enrich the existing body image and beach body literature.

Some methodological weaknesses need to be addressed, too. As previously remarked, physical activity and subjective wellbeing at the beach were assessed using single items. This constituted a quick method to assess two vital aspects of women's beach experiences separately and by so doing, obtain meaningful answers to the research questions. While these items consequently served the overall exploratory purpose of this research, scholars in the future should develop stronger and more validated measures to connect body image and blue mind research, for instance, investigating the extent to which individuals enjoyed moving their bodies at the beach and how they felt about their bodies when in the water.

Relatedly, Cronbach's alphas in the "exposure to non-normative beach bodies (beach)" and in the "global subjective beach body satisfaction" measures granted only acceptable reliability and internal consistency. These measures could be improved in the future as well.

Then, as posited by Andrade (2020), participation on a voluntary basis may result in an overrepresentation of participants who might provide biased answers whereas non-response rates and errors may lead to incomplete data sets. Given that the research design was retrospective, there is also a risk of recall biases that might have affected the extent, to which participants reminisced about their experiences of embodiment over the past summer. This could be addressed by longitudinal and experimental studies with data collections at different stages throughout the summer season.

To conclude, future investigations are needed to improve the scope and depth of this survey research, based on representative and more diverse samples. Nevertheless, it can be acknowledged that a sample of N=659 women with a considerable range in age and BMI, and variation in relationship status, eating disorder history, motherhood and visual appearance offers a workable research foundation to enrich our current knowledge about women and their bodies with regards to a specific context of embodiment, especially in combination with the qualitative findings generated by study 1. Meta-inferences of both methods are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8: Bringing Qualitative and Quantitative Data Together – A Discussion of Meta-Inferences

A key intent of integrating qualitative and quantitative data is to present findings that could not have been retrieved through a single method alone (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Therefore, the following section aims to discuss where and how the survey findings complement, correspond to and contradict the findings obtained by the focus groups.

The first meta-inference discussed in this section concerns the idea of seasonal body image and therefore connects to the concept proposed by Griffiths and colleagues (2021). Both studies conducted in this PhD research provide evidence that many women struggle with their body image more during summer as compared to other seasons. This linked to the normalisation and prevalence of normative beach body discourse in our society. The finding became especially clear in the survey, where more than 45% of Australian and British participants confirmed that they had felt more negatively about their bodies during summer.

The qualitative study, which employed participants from multiple cultures and geographical backgrounds indicated that the topic might be more complex in practice and that advanced research is needed to tackle this. Participants from regions with no distinct seasonal changes described that they usually felt pressure to obtain an ideal beach body throughout the entire year. The prospect of appearance-focused social events, such as the Brazilian Carnival, was described to increase those concerns. New Year's was identified as another critical time of the year where many women in the northern hemisphere routinely worried about transforming their body for summer as a New Year's resolution.

Others equalised the concept of the ideal beach body with the all-year body ideal and described how it affected peers and other people they knew in various situations where the body got exposed and/or accentuated, regardless of temperature, season and geography. An example was the wearing of revealing party dress that encouraged peers to try and lose weight or even avoid situations of bodily exposure. The quantitative study confirmed avoidance of beach situations for appearance reasons to be common amongst women. Both studies therefore deliver evidence that women who worry about their bodies based on idealised understandings of how a swimwear-clad body should look may adjust their social life during summer and beyond, such that they may miss out on social activities and restrict themselves. The implications of this finding for individuals inside and outside of academia will be discussed in chapter 9.

Further original insights obtained through the meaningful connection of qualitative and quantitative data revealed with regards to the relationship between exposure to normative beach bodies on SNS and women's heightened appearance concerns that could be observed in both studies. Although the methods employed in this research do not serve to make causal inferences, focus group participants made it clear that certain kinds of beach body-related contents on social media made them feel worse about their appearance, especially when viewing them at a time when it was already too late to

transform their own beach body. Typical examples were fitspiration postings and postings generated by (micro-)celebrities and others, in which products and programmes to transform the body for summer (e.g., detox teas, diet lollies, exercising routines) were promoted. This strengthens the assumption that there might be a causal relationship between the viewing of normative beach body content and body image, which should be further explored by future experimental research.

Unexpectedly, the survey suggested that viewing normative beach body images on SNS related to the most negative body image outcomes in women who had felt most satisfied about their beach bodies. This raised the question as to why that was.

One explanation could be retrieved from the quantitative study itself, which suggests that women's beach body satisfaction and their body image during summer may not necessarily contradict each other as they form two separate concepts. This became evident in the focus groups. Participants who had tried and inhabited their beach bodies positively described how they struggled to uphold their positive self-evaluation when being exposed to beach body content on social media that reminded them of what they should do, or, if it already was summer, what they should have done in order to look good in swimwear. Participants described how the content of these postings made them feel guilty and frustrated, even if they tried and embraced their bodies as they were. Comparing against other users' allegedly perfect beach body made them aware of the areas of their bodies that still needed improvement. Appearance comparison processes then lead to a "never-ending" desire for self-optimisation through body transformation.

Nevertheless, the negative sensations did not necessarily result in changing behaviours amongst participants. That was either because time was considered as too late to engage in body work or because of individuals' unsuccessful past attempts to getting beach body ready, which prompted them to give up. However, the tone with which participants described the moments of exposure toward normative beach body content on social media indicated frustration and, to a certain extent, helplessness given that unfollowing or unfriending people (e.g., celebrities) who produced content that made them feel bad did not seem to be an option.

The observed negative reactions toward normative beach body content would suggest positive reactions toward body-positive ones. However, the qualitative study suggested the opposite and thereby opposes other studies (e.g., Cohen et al., 2018).

Survey findings offer one explanation for this. Analyses indicated that self-perceived discrepancies between women's own beach body and the beach bodies they had viewed on SNS moderated the relationship between exposure to normative beach body images and thin-ideal internalisation. Given that focus group participants were young and none of them visibly overweight, it is thus possible that they could not identify enough with what they had seen in these postings.

This indicates that downward comparisons, under certain circumstances, may not lead to positive body image outcomes, as oftentimes assumed by the literature (Krayer et al., 2008). This finding, once again, confirms existing assumptions that appearance comparisons may foster negative body image outcomes, regardless of the direction of comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Myers & Crowther, 2009).

That notwithstanding, the possibility must be considered that the qualitative and quantitative data strand contradicted each other at this point. One explanation for the controversial responses could be differing cultural and religious attitudes amongst participants toward public nudity and self-sexualisation. While bodily exposure might be normal and accepted in Western beach nations such as Australia and the UK, focus group participants from other, especially non-Western cultures were more likely to show critical attitudes. The way, in which individuals respond to and make sense of beach body-related content, might resultantly be largely affected by moral understandings ascribed to (public) nudity and sex.

Apart from increasing our understanding about potential root causes of women's body image concerns during summer, the mixed methods research served to uncover an array of aspects that may help to prevent and diminish those. First, the survey emphasised the relevance of subjective wellbeing and physical activity at the beach which both strongly correlated with positive body image outcomes. Subjective wellbeing at the beach, moreover, moderated the relationship between women's beach body satisfaction and their body image during summer. This indicates that women who feel dissatisfied about their bodies but enjoy being at the beach because of the way it makes them feel, may experience fewer appearance concerns during summer. Conversely, heightened appearance concerns during summer may not automatically relate to beach body dissatisfaction, if women enjoy being at the beach.

Given that participants in both studies had, on average, shown a positive overall attitude toward spending time at the beach, this finding may serve to explaining why many women had decided to go to the beach even if they had not felt fully satisfied with their beach bodies. Additionally, it offers preliminary insights to the question of why beach engagement was associated with positive body image outcomes in women who had not felt fully satisfied with their beach bodies.

Then, focus group participants suggested that the overall comfort, with which they exposed their (flawed) bodies at the beach was strongly affected by the people around them, such that trusted friends helped young women to enjoy the beach, even when experiencing objectifying treatment by unknown other beachgoers. This finding might serve as a tentative, preliminary attempt to explain the lacking correlation between time spent at the beach and self-objectification and thin-ideal internalisation found in the survey.

Even further, participants who were surrounded by individuals with a healthy body image seemed less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours to get beach body ready prior to summer. The role of peers in body image development and fluctuation should be explored profoundly given that the survey showed a correlation between women's overall beach body satisfaction and their body image. Body-positive peers might thus help women to worry less about their (beach) bodies.

Taken together, the meaningful integration of the two research strands yields various insights about women and their beach bodies that could not have been obtained by a single method. While the survey helped to measure the strength of the relationship between women's body image and them viewing other women's beach bodies at the beach and on social media, focus groups testified to complex psychological and sociological contexts, in which women's beach body experiences are embedded. By so doing, the mixed methods research applied in this PhD research offers valuable original knowledge

contributions to the paucity of appearance psychology-related beach body research. How individuals outside and inside of academia might benefit from the findings discussed in this PhD thesis will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusions

By focusing on a very specific research context, the case of the female beach body, this PhD research attempted to think "outside of the box". Knowledge from multiple disciplines (e.g., appearance research, tourism/leisure, blue mind research), theories (objectification theory, appearance comparison theory) and paradigms (pragmatism, social constructivism, feminism) was brought together, and original qualitative and quantitative data were contributed from heterogeneous, cross-cultural research samples in order to create a profound and multifaceted understanding of adult women and their beach body experiences.

By so doing, this research makes both theoretical and empirical contributions to a greatly overlooked and understudied case that might substantially influence how women inhabit their bodies in specific mediated and unmediated environments when being exposed to and actively exposing their bodies dressed in modern swimwear. Two major contributions of this research and the implications they yield for individuals outside (i.e., clinical practitioners, activists, marketers and journalists) and inside of academia (i.e., researchers) will be discussed in the following: (1) the appearance psychology of the (ideal) beach body, and (2) potentials of the beach as an environment for positive embodiment.

The thesis ends with concluding thoughts and reflections about the female beach body in our contemporary society.

9.1 Contribution 1: The Appearance Psychology of the (Ideal) Beach body

The first major contribution of this PhD project are original insights about the appearance psychology ascribed to viewing and sharing beach body content in the mass media.

Supporting previous descriptions of the concept of the ideal beach body as a global phenomenon, the focus groups found women across cultures affected by rather consistent ideas of how a female body in swimwear should ideally look and how to accomplish this. Evidence has been provided that many social media users may be routinely exposed to normative beach body images and appeals to get beach body ready on their newsfeeds during summer, even if not actively searching for this kind of content. Although young women in the qualitative study were able to critically reflect upon the unrealistic and potentially harmful nature of this content, resistance seemed to require high levels of body confidence that they seemed to struggle to maintain. As a result, they engaged in complex decision-making processes aimed at justifying their behaviours and seemed to relate to their bodies more negatively when being confronted with the prospect of exposing and accentuating physical details that are normally covered.

The survey reinforced that almost half of the participants had felt more negatively about their bodies during summer as compared to the rest of the year and that general social media usage and exposure to normative beach body images on social media was associated with negative body image outcomes. This was partially mediated by women's tendency to compare their beach body to others at the beach and on social media and moderated by self-perceived appearance discrepancies.

9.1.1 Implications for Clinical Practitioners

The finding that almost every second participant in the survey had felt more negatively about their body during summer as compared to the rest of the year implies that many women may need specific support in building and maintaining body confidence prior to and during the warm season. More so, because even women who had tried to resist the socially prescribed beach body ideal and who had felt satisfied about their own beach bodies were found struggling when being surrounded by dominant, one-sided online beach body discourse. This is particularly relevant given that the Internet is largely based on complex algorithms and artificial intelligence, so that social media users may only partially be able to control the content they get to see. Moreover, Drenten and Gurrieri's (2018) exploration of the bikini bridge showed how body image trends and allegedly innocuous hashtags might be misused to disseminate dangerous appearance messages and images of severely thin bodies and dismembered body parts.

Clinical practitioners may attempt to strengthen women's overall resilience against potentially harmful media content, for instance through individual-level psycho-educational programmes in media literacy that have been found useful in reducing or preventing proximal risk factors for the development and maintenance of negative body image (Levine & Murnen, 2009). These involve critical reviews of media content, trainings in which women learn to focus on their body functionality rather than aesthetics (Alleva & Tylka, 2021) and trainings in critical thinking and scepticism toward certain socially constructed social media messages (McLean, Wertheim, Masters, & Paxton, 2017; Tamplin, McLean, & Paxton, 2018). Further, Mingoia, Hutchinson, Gleaves and Wilson (2019) observed significant decreases in tanned-ideal internalisation, appearance comparisons, tanning intentions and overall tanning attitudes amongst young women after completing a social media literacy intervention aimed at decreasing positive tanning attitudes for skin cancer prevention.

Another promising approach is self-compassion, a concept similar to positive body image, in which people accept themselves the way they are, turn to themselves in kindness and understanding and accept that mistakes and imperfections are normal (Germer & Neff, 2013). Research implies that by engaging in self-compassion, individuals might build defence mechanisms that protect them from potentially harmful mass media images and help them to create a more positive body image (T. D. Braun, Park, & Gorin, 2016).

9.1.2 Implications for Activists

The re-conceptualisation of the beach body as a body in swimwear at the beach was inspired by body image activists. Beach body photographs are a common means amongst campaigners to express their personal evolution from body loathers to body lovers and to show resistance against socially prescribed beauty norms. Given that the viewing of thin, toned, tanned and otherwise flawless bodies in swimwear might trigger appearance pressure and body dissatisfaction in women, as shown in this PhD thesis, a de-stigmatisation and re-construction of the one-sided ideal beach body narrative is relevant and needed.

Nevertheless, the findings generated by this PhD thesis imply that certain aspects (as illustrated in Figure 18) should be considered in beach body-related social media activism that may otherwise diminish or even contradict the idea of a positive body image and embodiment as defined by research (Piran, 2016; Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2015).
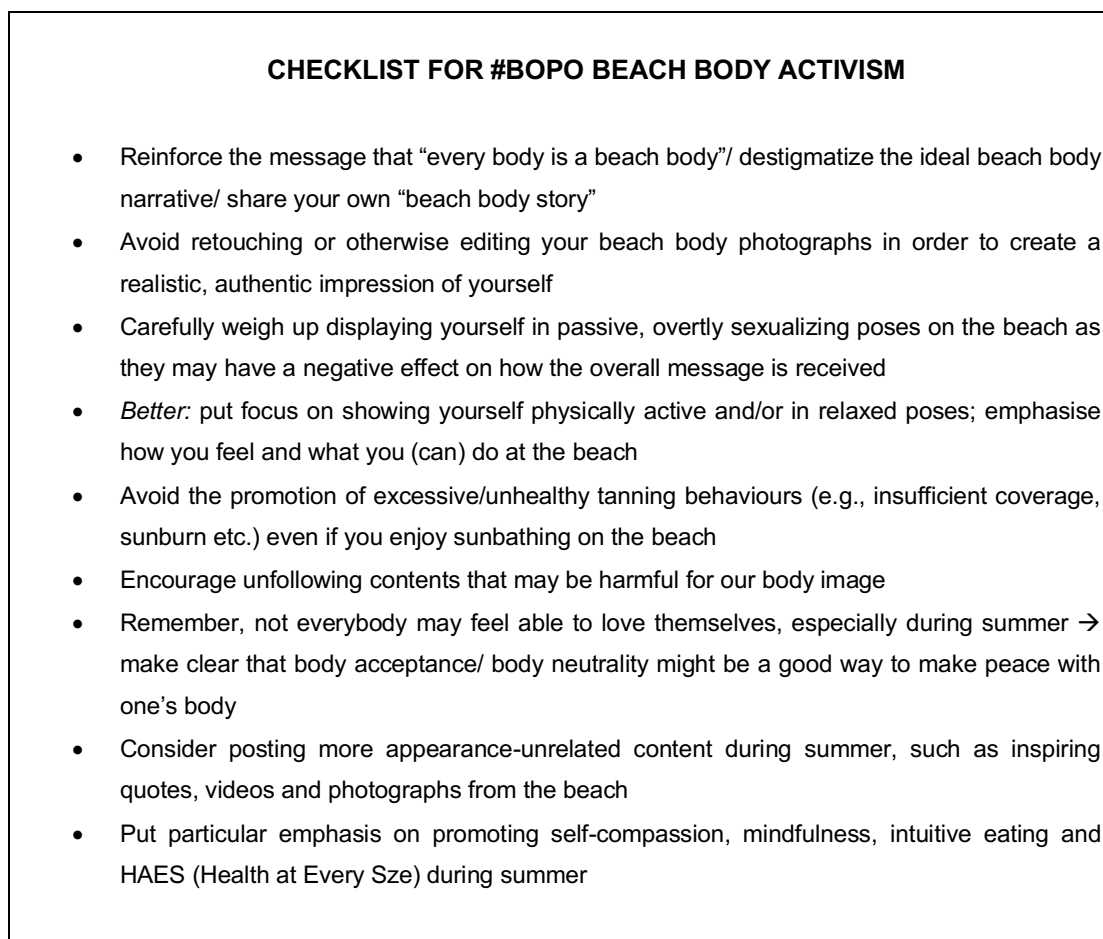

CHECKLIST FOR #BOPO BEACH BODY ACTIVISM

- Reinforce the message that "every body is a beach body"/ destigmatize the ideal beach body narrative/ share your own "beach body story"
- Avoid retouching or otherwise editing your beach body photographs in order to create a realistic, authentic impression of yourself
- Carefully weigh up displaying yourself in passive, overtly sexualizing poses on the beach as they may have a negative effect on how the overall message is received
- *Better:* put focus on showing yourself physically active and/or in relaxed poses; emphasise how you feel and what you (can) do at the beach
- Avoid the promotion of excessive/unhealthy tanning behaviours (e.g., insufficient coverage, sunburn etc.) even if you enjoy sunbathing on the beach
- Encourage unfollowing contents that may be harmful for our body image
- Remember, not everybody may feel able to love themselves, especially during summer → make clear that body acceptance/ body neutrality might be a good way to make peace with one's body
- Consider posting more appearance-unrelated content during summer, such as inspiring quotes, videos and photographs from the beach
- Put particular emphasis on promoting self-compassion, mindfulness, intuitive eating and HAES (Health at Every Sze) during summer

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FIGURE 18: CHECKLIST FOR BODY-POSITIVE BEACH BODY ACTIVISM

The literature has shown that, even where diversity in shape, size and skin colour is shown, body-positive content is oftentimes idealized, that is, artificially retouched. Given that this is misleading and contributes to disseminating unrealistic appearance standards, activists should critically reconsider the

use of photo-editing software. They are best advised to abstain from any kind of photo manipulation and to create an authentic image of themselves.

Furthermore, many body-positive beach body postings have been found contributing to sexualising women in swimwear, e.g., when featuring women in eroticising swimwear and sexually suggestive poses. While selfie-posters may perceive this form of self-presentation as a proof of body confidence and empowerment (Alentola, 2017; Tiidenberg, 2014), nudity and self-sexualisation remain controversial topics. Given that women continue to be displayed as desirable sexual objects, those photographs may be interpreted as contradictory to female empowerment and evoke critical attitudes amongst those who view them.

Activists should be aware of the sensibility of body language and posing in the content they share. Rather than enforcing the image of the sexy "beach babe/beach beauty", they might focus on expressing how they *feel* and what they (can) *do* at the beach. The positive effects of promoting body functionality and of viewing images of physically active individuals (in swimwear) have been sufficiently demonstrated (Daniels, 2009; Linder & Daniels, 2018; Mulgrew et al., 2018; Williamson & Karaszia, 2018; Reichart Smith, 2015).

Additionally, this PhD research suggests that women might experience the most positive body image outcomes when focusing on their subjective wellbeing at the beach. Therefore, rather than posing, activists might display how they engage in typical beach activities such as swimming, playing ball and relaxing. This might involve other beachgoers (e.g., family, friends) who have been found playing an important role in women's beach experiences. Within growing concerns about skin cancer and unhealthy tanning attitudes (Dixon et al., 2011; Mingoia et al., 2017), the promotion of sufficient sun protection should be normalized and extreme tanning practices, such as underlying the sunburn art trend, should be avoided. To enforce the message of diversity and inclusion and to contest the tanned beach body ideal, a variety of skin tones, types and conditions should be displayed.

The next aspect relates to viewers' processing of the beach body photographs. Activists should note that other women may not necessarily experience positive body image outcomes as they compare their appearances against theirs. Even where bodily flaws and imperfections are shown, women might still tend to perceive others as better-looking. This might be further reinforced by content, in which body confidence is communicated as the result of body transformation (e.g., after a diet). Although commonly shared under body-positive hashtags, this kind of content contradicts the core idea of a healthy body image, that is, to accept one's appearance as it is, and it enforces rather than changes the ideal beach body narrative.

This research suggests that even a critical assessment of potentially harmful social media content may not automatically help users to develop and maintain a positive body image. For instance, focus group participants reported following certain (micro-)celebrities even if seeing their postings made them feel negatively about their bodies. Activists may thus encourage other users to unfollow people, pages, and communities that make them feel negatively about themselves, and they may as well lead by example given that activists themselves may need to set and/or (re-)adjust their own boundaries in order to maintain a non-negative relationship to their body.

Given that body positivity, as discussed in chapter 3.3, has emerged into a contemporary marketing and media trend, it is important to emphasise that the idea of unconditional self-love might feel like an unrealistic and unachievable target to many women that may increase their pressure to comply with social expectations. Rather than promoting body positivity as a one-size-fits-all approach, it thus seems purposive for activists to communicate various ways of how to establish a non-negative relationship to one's body. Body neutrality, i.e., shift away from a focus on appearance onto other things, constitutes an applicable alternative. For instance, a series of studies suggest that the posting of appearance-unrelated content such as landscape photographs and inspirational quotes connects to positive body image outcomes (Slater et al., 2017; Swami et al., 2018; Swami et al., 2019; Williamson & Karaszia, 2018). This might be supported by the promotion of self-care, mindfulness, self-compassion, and holistic wellbeing approaches such as intuitive eating and HAES. Given that many women reported worrying more about their bodies during summer as compared to other seasons, sharing inspirational and empowering content appears particularly important at this time of the year.

That notwithstanding, the controversial reactions surrounding Protein World's beach body advert and even body-positive campaigns such as Bethany Townsend's bikini selfie serve to exemplify that social media activism alone may not suffice to evoke sustainable changes in concepts as deeply socially ingrained and economically embedded as the ideal beach body. Dialogues and collaboration with industries, researchers, journalists and policy makers should go hand in hand with social media activism in order to dismantle the harmful one-sidedness of the ideal beach body concept in our culture and to normalise the message that the beach is a place for everyone, regardless of looks.

9.1.3 Implications for Marketers and Journalists

A century ago, the ideal beach body began to be constructed as an aspirational and consumable lifestyle. Today, it is linked to million-dollar industries that profit from individuals' appearance concerns and their wish to transform their bodies for summer (Griffiths et al., 2021). This thesis delivers evidence that photographs and videos featuring young, thin, toned, tanned and otherwise flawless women in swimwear continue to play a dominating role in the mass media during summer. Normative images are typically accompanied by opinionated, polarising and judgmental language. A rather prevalent example is the construction and appraisal of the quickly bikini-ready and otherwise perfect postpartum mother that stands in stark contrast to the public body-shaming that non-normative mum's bodies in swimwear routinely experience on some media channels (Hopper & Aubrey, 2015; Nash, 2012; O'Brien Hallstein, 2015). Related to that are thin-praises and endorsement of health-risking body image trends such as the bikini bridge or Toblerone tunnel. As there is no doubt about the potentially harmful effects of this kind of editorial content, it should be erased or replaced; for instance, with appearance-unrelated content about the beach as an environment for leisure, pleasure and self-care (see also chapter 9.2.3). While the economic power ascribed to the concept of the ideal beach body is inarguable, it circumvents a broader and more inclusive approach toward bodies in swimwear. Marketers and journalists should critically reflect upon their role in this. If they wish to contribute to more body acceptance in our society,

they should stop promoting (beach) body transformation products and services, even this links to (temporary) financial and economic loss.

Market research and consumer activism testify to a growing demand for diversity and inclusion (Fearing, 2020; Standish, 2019) and, as demonstrated in chapter 3, a growing number of advertisers and journalists have started to respond to this by including more diverse models in their advertising campaigns and editorial content. While this is a favourable development, some actions may enforce rather than prevent an emphasis of the normative beach body ideal. The following paragraphs aim to address some emergent issues as identified in this PhD thesis by providing a list of do's and don'ts in Table 17 that marketers and journalists might wish to consider when producing beach body content.

TABLE 17: CHECKLIST FOR MARKETERS AND JOURNALISTS TO APPROACH THE BEACH BODY IN BODY-POSITIVE MANNERS

Do's
- Feature a variety of bodies in swimwear
- Pay heightened attention to displaying under-represented groups such as individuals with disabilities, visual differences, chronic health conditions as well as ethnic and sexual minority groups
- Depict models and athletes in active rather than sexually suggestive poses on the beach
- Focus on appraising (sportive) achievements rather than looks
- Respect diversity (e.g., looks, opinions, values, worldviews)
- Disclose and put limits to photo-manipulations (e.g., "easy" modifications such as adjustment of lighting or cropping may be allowed, whereas changes of a model's appearance are not)
- Integrate body positivity as a part of (corporate) social responsibility and mind consistency and authenticity in the implementation
Don'ts
- Avoid polarizing, stigmatizing and otherwise misleading beach body discourse
- Refrain from thin-praising and body shaming women in swimwear
- Refrain from sexualizing and objectifying beach bodies
- Do not praise or endorse body image trends (e.g., thigh gap, ribcage bragging, bikini bridge)
- Avoid advertising aimed at promoting products and services for body transformation (e.g., weight loss products, exercising programmes, cosmetic surgery) during summer
- Do not handle body positivity as a short-term marketing trend with economic value

Chapter 3 revealed that many allegedly body-positive marketing campaigns include inconsistencies and ambiguous messages. For instance, while many marketers have started to include beach body models

of various body shapes and sizes in their campaigns, they continue to be sexualized and idealised (Alentola, 2017; Cohen et al, 2019; Lazuka et al. 2020). As critiqued by the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (2019), these might enforce the normalisation of women as sexualised objects of the (male) gaze. History has sufficiently shown us how messages like these might enforce gender imbalances, power relations, suppression, societal split and general negative treatment of women at the beach.

Given the potential harmful effects of sexualized media content, there should be a shift away from constructing women in swimwear as sexual objects ("beach babe"/"beach beauty") to an emphasis of (sportive) achievements and (beach) life stories, which, as previously remarked, might lead to healthier body image and mental health outcomes (Daniels, 2009; Linder & Daniels, 2018; Reichart Smith, 2015; Williamson & Karazsia, 2018).

It is important to note that the language surrounding any kinds of beach bodies should be respectful and empowering rather than polarizing, stigmatising and otherwise judgmental. Aligned to this, there should be increased visibility and normalisation of under-represented subpopulations in public beach body discourse. This includes Muslim women in burkinis (Alentola, 2017; Fitzpatrick, 2009) and individuals with disabilities, visible differences and chronic diseases including swimwear-clad women with colostomy bags and abdominal surgery scars (Rademacher, 2018). One way to achieve this is a greater representation of advertising created by swimwear fashion lines such as MIGA who offer specific designs for individuals with disabilities.

The idealisation of photographs is a controversial issue between body image activists and researchers on the one hand and marketers and journalists on the other hand. Following a considerable body of research that has linked the consumption of idealised photographs to negative body image as discussed in chapter 4, the safest recommendation seems to discourage photo manipulation in order to prevent the dissemination of harmful media content. However, unless backed by non-voluntary legal regulations, it might be unrealistic to expect marketers and journalists to stop doing what is normalised in their business. Else, it might lead to the same inconsistent and ambiguous approaches as observed elsewhere (de Freitas et al., 2017; Reid Boyd & Moncrieff-Boyd, 2018; Seselja & Sakzewski, 2017).

A more collaborative first step to bring both sides together might thus be to limit photo manipulation to practices that are potentially less harmful to viewers. This might include the adjustment of lighting, cropping, and colour adjustments. Modifications such as to change a model's silhouette (e.g., slim down her legs, enlarge her eyes) or to adjust her skin tone and texture (e.g., remove freckles, cellulite, wrinkles) should, however, be avoided as they may considerably change a model's look and by so doing create largely unrealistic expectations of beauty. Where applied, digital modification should be enclosed through disclaimer labels, such as proposed in Photoshop laws. Although the effectiveness of these approaches is not yet empirically supported (Tiggemann, 2022), the negative effects of idealized media content have been sufficiently demonstrated and the use of disclaimers might at least constitute one step toward the normalization of non-idealised, more realistic appearance content in our culture.

A final remark of this section is that journalists and marketers should be aware of the risk of a superficial and inconsistent adoption of body positivity as an economically profitable short-term marketing trend. This is counter-productive to the actual meaning of the positive body image as defined by scholars such as Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) and may backfire. Craddock, Ramsey, Spotswood, Halliwell and Diedrichs (2019) have argued for a holistic implementation of body positivity within business strategies, and this might be extended to journalists who have an equal measure of social responsibility toward their readers.

Some governments have tried and encouraged this through voluntary codes of conduct, such as in Australia. However, the risk of poor implementation has been discussed in this thesis. Holistic implementations of diversity and inclusion are thus needed amongst all who contribute to public body discourse. Thereby, they should strive to produce authentic, relatable and sustainable appearance messages that match the needs not only of their target audiences, but also of our global society and that of future generations.

9.1.4 Directions for Future Research

To provide a possibly multi-faceted overview of women and the female beach body topic, an extensive body of literature from various disciplines was brought together in this research. One risk of doing so is to create an impression of superficiality and to leave a multitude of research gaps uncovered. Future scholars might thus wish to explore certain areas more profoundly that could not be sufficiently addressed in the scope of this work. Some are outlined in the following paragraphs:

Longitudinal and experimental studies
The qualitative study indicated that beach body-related experiences of embodiment must be considered over a longer period; that is, women may start dealing with their beach bodies long before they set foot on the beach, and even if they have not planned a beach visit. The way they feel about their beach bodies might affect them throughout the entire summer season and sometimes beyond. Longitudinal studies might extend our knowledge about seasonal fluctuations in body image, for instance considering the time around New Year's, as proposed by the focus groups.

In addition to that, experimental studies might help to assess the immediate causal effects of exposure toward different kinds of normative and non-normative bodies in swimwear in the media. Extending the findings of this PhD research, scholars might thereby wish to study individuals' beach body experiences using different measures and theories.

Content and critical discourse analyses
Existing content and critical discourse analyses studied the beach body on traditional media such as magazines (Jordan, 2007; Small, 2017). Little is, however, known about beach body content produced on SNS. This includes explorations of relevant hashtags that directly relate to the beach body such as #beachbody or #beachbodyready, and of those with an indirect relationship, such as #summerofcellulite. Drenten and Gurrieri's (2007) analysis of the bikini bridge hashtag testifies to the

relevance of such scholarship that may contribute to detecting and raising awareness onto potentially harmful social media content.

Photo-based activities and photo manipulation

As previously noted, limited findings have been offered about women actively liking, commenting and sharing beach body content online and how photo manipulation related to their body image during summer. Scholars in the future might try and fill these gaps.

Impact of family and peers

The qualitative study touched upon the impact of family and peers on beach body behaviour, thereby lending preliminary evidence that the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson et al., 1999) might be applicable to study the beach body theme from a sociocultural perspective. A focus on family and peers constitutes a meaningful complementation to the media-focused findings of this PhD research. Further, scholars might wish to study both social comparison tendency and thin-ideal internalization as mediating variables as initially proposed by Thompson and colleagues (1999).

Qualitative exploration of mothers' beach body experiences

The survey offered several original insights to mothers and their beach body experiences. However, the quantitative method did not serve to study any feelings, motives and perceptions of this relevant subpopulation, such as how mothers feel about the socially prescribed bikini-ready postpartum body and the social expectations ascribed to "new momism" (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). Qualitative data are warranted to fill these research gaps.

Media literacy

The negative body image outcomes ascribed to viewing normative beach bodies on social media necessitate an exploration of body image intervention programmes such as in media literacy to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of this content.

9.2 Contribution 2: Potentials of the Beach as a Natural Environment for Embodiment

The second contribution deals with the exploration of women's body image in relation to experiences of embodiment at the beach. The studies conducted as part of the mixed methods approach in this PhD thesis offer valuable contributions to past studies about women and their bodies at the beach (e.g., Abramovici, 2007; Field et al., 2019; Small, 2007, 2016, 2021).

While the focus group study expands our knowledge to women from cultures other than Australia or Italy, the survey is the first study to measure the strength between the link between women's beach experiences and their body image during summer. Taken qualitative and quantitative data together, it has been suggested that women may benefit the most from a focus on health, wellbeing, relaxation/stress recovery and enjoyment at the beach as an antidote to the stress and demands of

their everyday life. Implications for individuals outside and inside academia are addressed in the following sections.

9.2.1 Implications for Clinical practitioners

The positive body image outcomes ascribed to adult women's experiences at the beach in this research might encourage practitioners to explore water-based environments for body image therapy and prevention. The survey findings indicate that women who feel satisfied with their beach bodies may experience the most positive body image outcomes from relaxing at the beach (e.g., when sunbathing, as suggested by Abramovici, 2007), whereas a combination of relaxation and healthful physical movement, i.e., "mindful physical movement" (Neumark-Sztainer, MacLehose, Watts, Pacanowski, & Eisenberg, 2018; Piran & Neumark-Sztainer, 2020; Raspovic et al., 2020) at the beach might trigger the most positive effects in women who struggle with accepting their body as it is.

In a recent nudity-based body image intervention, West (2022) observed significant increases in (positive) body image, self-esteem, and life satisfaction after individuals had actively engaged with the nudist beach culture for four days. The intervention had involved exposure to naked individuals, physical activity such as yoga and dancing, discussions about public nudity, body-oriented artistic activities, and a 5-minutes exposure of their own naked body in company of one self-selected person.

While the positive outcomes of this approach are without doubt desirable, it can be acknowledged that a) it encompassed a combination of different elements (e.g., mindful physical movement and exposure to other bodies), all of which may affect individuals' body image differently, and b) that it was a nudity-based intervention, which might differ greatly from embodiment at textile beaches (see chapter 4.3). Clinical practitioners should thus strive to develop and assess different intervention methods in cooperation with researchers and under consideration of the individual needs of their patients.

Specific importance should be put on acknowledging that not everybody may relate to the beach in a positive way. For instance, individuals with predisposed body image concerns and/or patients recovering from eating disorders might find it challenging to relax in an environment, where swimwear – let alone nudity - are required. Also, individuals with mental health issues such as depression may feel pressure that there is a social expectation to go outside and socialise with others once it gets warm and sunny, which might feel like a surmountable challenge and add further pressure on them. Practitioners should thus engage with the question of how vulnerable individuals could still benefit from the power of the blue mind.

In that, they might consider water-based *indoor* activities as a possible alternative to engaging with water in protected and private spaces. Water-therapy has been connected to a range of physical and psychological health benefits (Zamuner, Andrade, Arca, & Avila, 2019). Positive effects similar to that observed in beach-contexts have been reported, for instance, by Emily Kate Noren (2015). In her book "Unsinkable", she describes how floating helped her recover from anorexia and bulimia. Congruent with sensations experienced at the beach, she describes the intense connection with water in association with increased relaxation, lightness, and calm. Noren (2015) discusses how the privacy of the float tank

helped her to focus on herself in connection with the water rather than to worry about her looks and what others could think about her. Carried out as a ritual after meals, the deep relaxation experienced in the water eventually helped her to overcome compulsive-obsessive thoughts around food and weight (loss), and to recover. Although this is a singular report, it supports the idea that being nearby, in or underwater may help vulnerable individuals to establish and maintain a peaceful relationship with their body through relaxation and mindfulness.

Moreover, the power of imagination, as used, for instance, in meditation, might serve to experience some positive body image outcomes linked to relaxation at the beach without having to be there. A recent experiment by de Wet, Lane, and Mulgrew (2020) found young adult women reporting significant increases in self-compassion and body appreciation and significant decreases in body shame after engaging in nature-focused guided imagery meditation with a focus on visualizing a sunrise on the beach. Doing so was connected to the same positive body image outcomes as self-compassion meditation, which strengthens the overall eligibility of beach sensations and positive body image. This is supported by research that has associated viewing short films and photographs of natural environments with positive body image outcomes (Swami et al., 2018; Swami et al., 2019). Collectively, these studies suggest that individuals may not need to be physically present at the beach in order to experience some positive appearance outcomes associated with this space. A great benefit of meditation-based approaches is that they may be carried out independently of weather, season, and geographical proximity to the beach. This is particularly relevant given that this PhD research finds women to be affected by beach body concerns irrespective of whether they live and/or plan a beach holiday.

Notwithstanding this, practitioners should strive to pay sufficient attention and sensitively address the individual needs and comfort zones of individuals as regards the beach.

9.2.2 Implications for Activists

In line with the previous section, activism aimed at encouraging women to enjoy the beach without worrying about their appearances is to be supported. Even more, public figures may use their popularity to contribute to disconnecting the beach experience from looks by putting emphasis on communicating more appearance-unrelated content during summer. As previously argued, shifting our attention to substantial questions of how we *feel* and what we can *do* at the beach might produce more sustainable outcomes than a focus on outward appearance.

One of the powers of social influence is in sharing authentic, relatable content (Hendry, Hartung, & Welch, 2021). Therefore, if the aim is to inspire others, activists should strive to create a balanced impression of "human" beach experiences rather than contribute to framing an idealised image of a perfect day at the beach as common in our contemporary mass media discourse. Narratives of a "perfectly imperfect" beach visit, for instance, might resonate with mothers and perhaps show them that perfection is not needed to have a good time, neither with regards to the body nor elsewhere.

Where bodies are, nonetheless, displayed, the implications proposed in chapter 9.1.2 should be considered. That is, a diversity of bodies of different shapes, sizes, ethnicities and abilities in different kinds of swim- and beachwear should be displayed, preferably in active rather than sexually objectifying poses, although relaxation should be emphasised, nevertheless. In our efficiency-oriented society, activists might choose to communicate passivity at the beach as a choice made of confidence and self-care because everybody needs and deserves breaks. Inspirational quotes and additional tips for self-compassion and mindfulness might further reinforce that message.

9.2.3 Implications for Marketers and Journalists

This PhD thesis showed how the prevalence, with which the ideal beach body is communicated throughout mass media channels during the warm season(s) contributes to the internalisation of an unrealistic appearance ideal in women. That is, for instance, by advertisements and editorial contents contributing to the dissemination of homogenised and sexualised portrayals of women in swimwear that normalise the message that bodies need to be transformed in order to be exposed (in swimwear) during summer. However, in a wider sense, this also encompasses one-sided idealised presentations of the beach as an idyllic white-sand-and-blue-seas environment which oftentimes go hand in hand with the construction of perfect bodies in this space. As discussed in this thesis, this polarising, yet powerful discourse may enforce the idea that perfection is needed in order to experience enjoyment and happiness at the beach, and by so doing contribute to beach (body)-related concerns.

As proposed in chapter 9.1.3, marketers and journalists are best advised to pay sufficient attention to the consequences of their actions by putting higher value on the (mental) health and wellbeing of existing and prospective customers than on economic profit-making.
One step is to reduce and possibly replace contents that might foster beach (body)-related concerns in women, such as through the promotion of beach body diets. Instead, they might strive to increase appearance-unrelated beach discourse during the warm season(s). This might include authentic holiday reports and contributions about beach activities for families and individuals. The beach should be (re-) constructed as a place that is open and may be enjoyable for everyone independent of looks, dress, weather conditions and physical ableness; activities that foster the mindful connection between body, mind and nature should be emphasised.

9.2.4 Directions for Future Research

Although there was a focus in this research on exploring the beach body with regards to women's appearance concerns, there are numerous indicators that beach-related experiences may encourage positive embodiment including attuned self-care and self-acceptance, as conceptualised by Piran (2016). Scholars should thus try and explore the potentials of the beach as an environment for reduced appearance concerns and positive body image profoundly. Measures of positive body image should

thereby be applied, and valid and reliable measures should be developed to assess the power of the blue mind from an appearance perspective.

Purposive, interdisciplinary projects aimed at connecting the psychology of appearance with blue mind research are considered particularly resourceful as they may in the future enrich our field through valuable contributions about women and their bodies as they engage with natural blue environments. A variety of viewpoints should be integrated to create rich pictures of the people and bodies in this vivid and unique environment.

Further relevant research areas identified in this PhD thesis are:
- The role of beach stimuli (i.e., the blue mind) in practicing mindfulness, mindful/healthful physical movement, and self-compassion
- The role of family and friends in mediating body image outcomes at the beach
- The effects of viewing non-normative bodies in swimwear.

Scholars should apply different research methods and measures to attend to those areas.

Given that women have been found to inhabit their bodies differently at different beaches (Field et al., 2019; Small, 2016), a variety of beach cultures and cultural contexts should be considered.

For instance, environments with a strong focus on appearance and competitive behaviours amongst women, such as muscle beaches, might lead to more negative body image outcomes compared to less frequented, natural beaches. In this research, an even greater importance could be ascribed to the extent to which women felt comfortable at the beach. The relative comfort with which young women had displayed their bodies in swimwear thereby related greatly to the people who had joined them, such that being surrounded by trusted friends and family seemed to function as a shield that protected women from harmful treatment by other beachgoers.

Moreover, focus group participants reminisced that they had felt more conscious about their swimwear-clad bodies at non-Western beaches such as in India and UAE. Although many holiday destinations are westernized, individuals showed great awareness of cultural and religious values ascribed to nudity and this affected how they related to exposing their semi-naked bodies. This testified to the relevance for beach body researchers to pay heightened attention to advanced sociocultural contexts of embodiment.

For instance, it would be interesting to explore women's experiences of embodiment at gender-segregated or "women only" beaches that can be found in countries such as Turkey, Dubai, and Egypt. The intention behind those beaches is to protect women from unwanted gazes and sexual intentions by men, but this has not yet been empirically explored. It might, however, broaden our understanding about objectification and the role of other same-sex individuals in extended cultural contexts of embodiment.

Moreover, beaches used as outdoor gyms (i.e., muscle beaches) should find heightened research attention. As discussed in the literature review, body transformation carried out directly on the beach

might be perceived like a form of fitspiration taking place in an unmediated offline space. Scholars should thus strive to investigate the appearance psychology of both individuals who engage in exercising at the beach and those who witness it.

Given that focus group participants with no geographic access to the beach worried about exposing their beach bodies at a park or pool, a comparison between different environments/situations of bodily exposure and how they relate to individuals' body image might be useful.

Furthermore, scholars might complement this research by looking more specifically into the beach body experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, men, children and adolescents, and ethnic and religious minority groups. This includes an analysis of the beach body experiences of Muslim women at Western and non-Western beaches and of Black individuals, especially in the socio-historical context of racial segregation at some beaches. An exploration of rural communities' relationship to the beach might present us with alternative cultural views on nudity and nature.

The beach (body) experiences of individuals with disabilities, visual disfigurements, chronic diseases and clinically diagnosed eating disorders should also be considered profoundly to give often marginalized and stigmatised groups a hearing. It appears particularly relevant to draw implications from those findings in order to uncover and raise awareness onto social issues and advocate for greater accessibility and acceptance of bodily otherness at the beaches of this world.

9.3 Conclusive Thoughts and Reflections

The thesis showed that ideas of how women should look and behave when publicly exposing their bodies in swimwear lie embedded in complex historical and concurrent discussions about nudity, sexuality, women's rights, (gender/ sexual/ racial/ religious) equality and female empowerment.

While we may get to see more nuanced depictions of women in swimwear in the media today as compared to a decade ago, much of how female beach bodies continue to be displayed and negotiated adheres to the Western-centric thin, toned, tanned and flawless beach body ideal. By accepting this ideal as a universal appearance norm for all, we contribute to stigmatizing and body shaming those who do not aesthetically adhere. Even body-positive campaigns may be at risk to enforce negative connotations when producing inconsistent, ambiguous and polarising messages that add further pressure on women to adhere to societal expectations. The way in which activists, marketers and individuals have campaigned against normative beach body messages such as Protein World's beach body advert in recent years testifies to a growing need for more inclusive, non-stigmatising approaches toward bodies in swimwear.

Given that one-sided definitions of the beach body as an ideal physique are deeply manifested in many areas of our everyday life and continue to be enforced by political and economic decision-makers, change is happening only slowly, and it will take time and advanced efforts until the idea that everybody is a beach body will be normative in our society.

Meanwhile, women will continue to (sun-)bathe at the beach during summer and some more than others will experience how this environment of sun, sand and sea helps them to recover from the stress and dynamics of everyday life, to restore their energies, relax and feel good. Indeed, there seems to be great potential in fostering a meaningful connection between appearance psychology and the power of the "blue mind" that might help us uncover novel ways of reducing body image concerns and developing and maintaining a non-negative body image.

We should therefore not refrain from working toward changing the beach body narrative and by making clear that the beach is a place for everyone regardless of looks contribute to improving how girls, women and others feel about themselves during the warm season(s).

This PhD thesis sought to set an example by approaching the female beach body from a body-positive stance and by ascribing equal importance to normative and non-normative bodies in swimwear, which may both affect our body-related thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviours during summer and beyond. That said, the researcher hopes that her work will encourage and inspire others to advance this multi-faceted and relevant branch of body image research as it may add valuable contributions to our knowledge about women and their bodies within our dynamically changing world.

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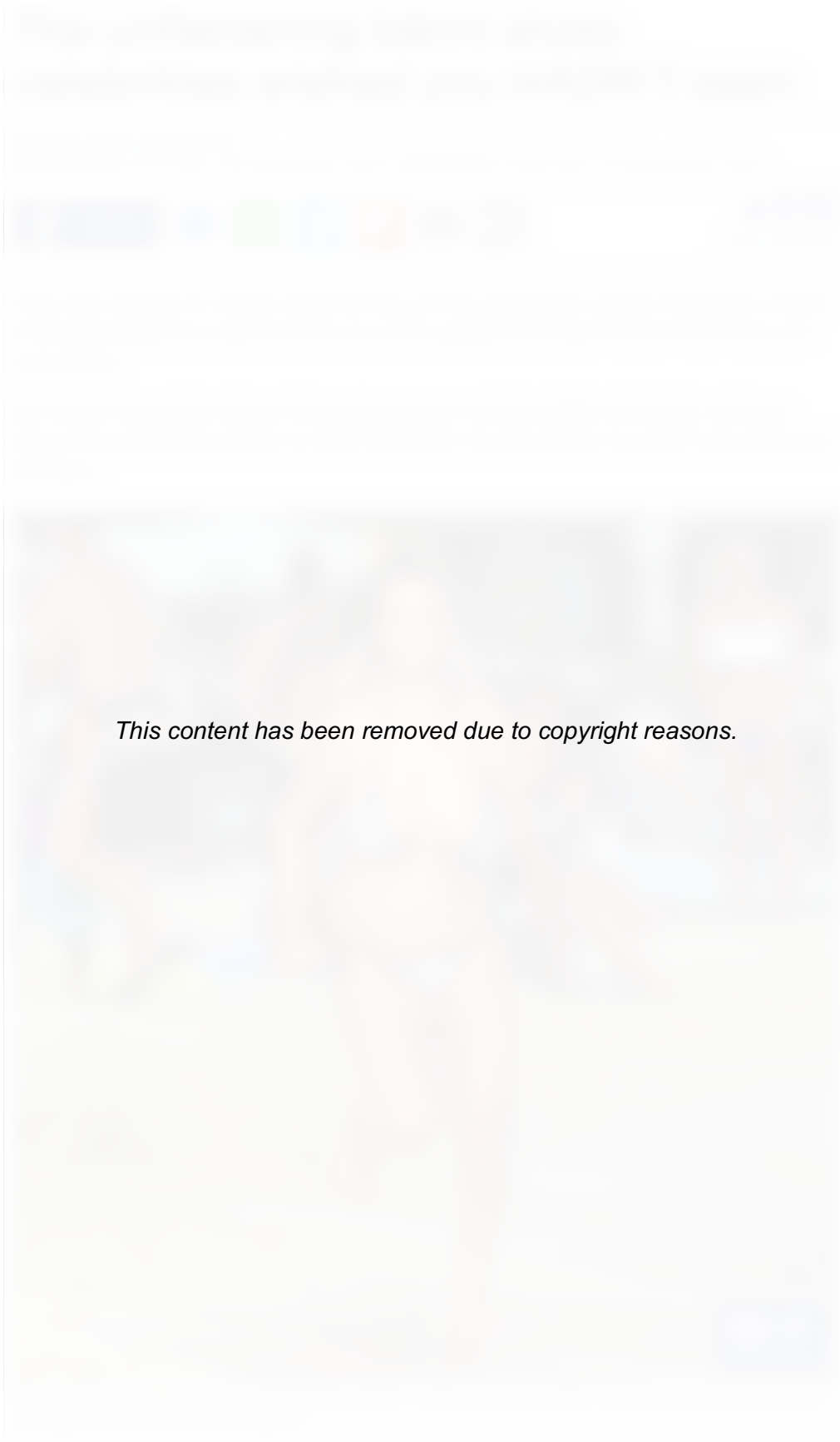
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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Bikini Photo Featuring Helen Mirren In 2008

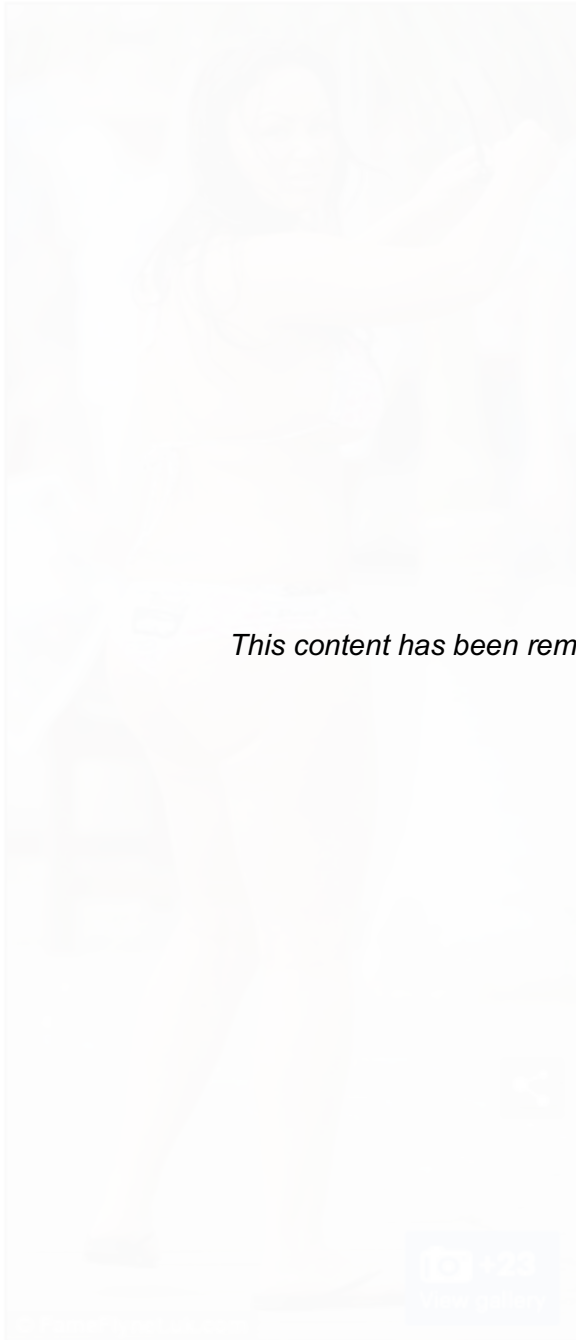*This image has been removed due to copyright reasons.*
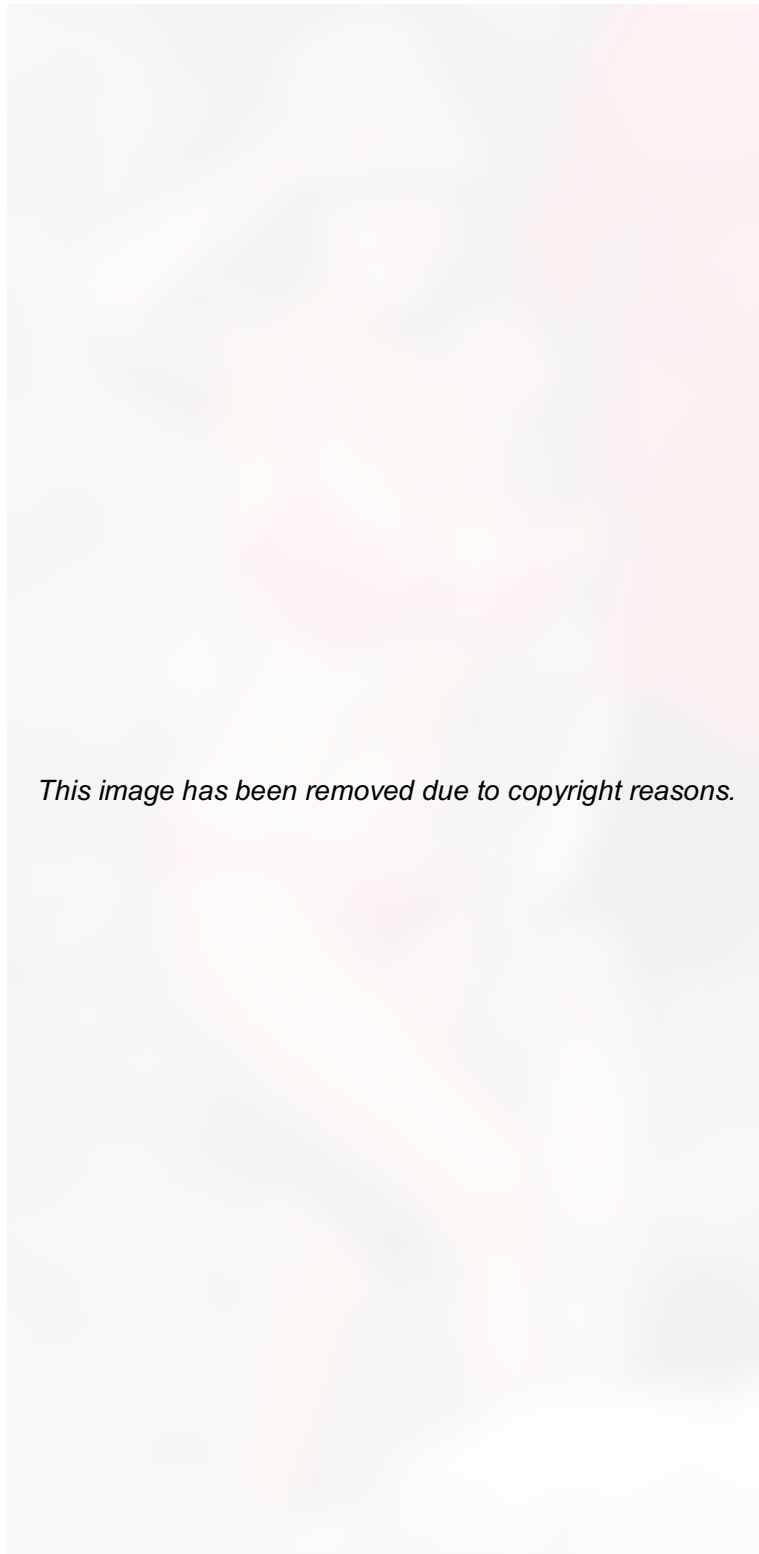
Appendix B: Daily Mail Article "The unflattering bikini shots celebrities wished you hadn't seen"

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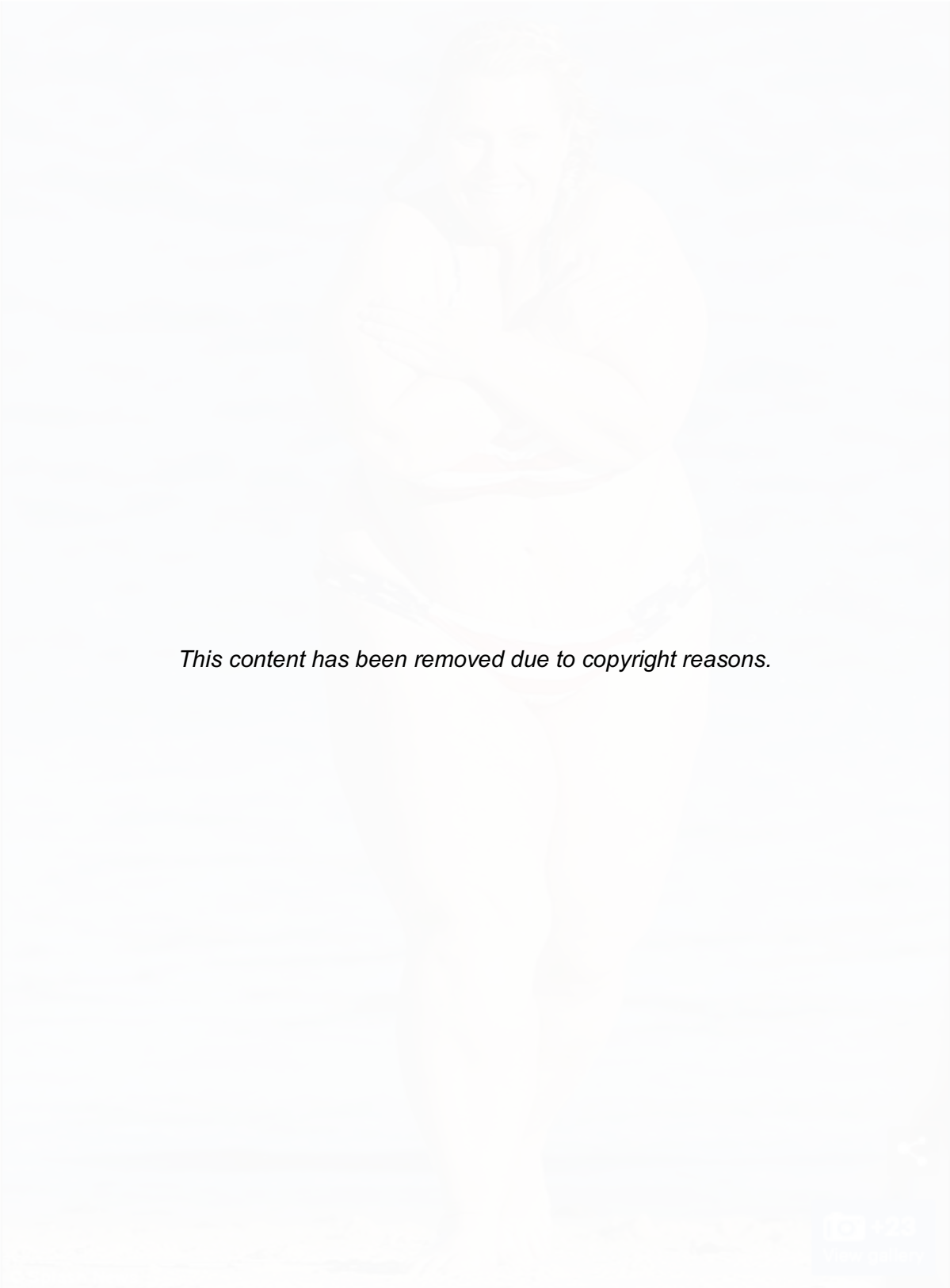
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The mother-of-one, a former Big Brother contestant, flaunted her fuller figure in a string of uncomplimentary shots on the beach. Meanwhile we await the fitness DVD.

Equally awkward pictures emerged if another Big Brother star in Chantelle Houghton, whose jog along a Spanish beach did not conjure images of Bo Derek.

Speaking earlier this year, she admitted that her figure had become less of a priority following the birth of Dolly, her daughter with former fiancé Alex Reid.

'My belly's really flabby, but I really don't care right now,' she said. 'Dolly is my priority.'

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Thin and thinner: Sharni Vincent (L) and Tara Reid show off painfully thin bikini bodies during separate holidays in Miami, Florida

Belly up: Eva Longoria's growing belly was clear to see in Puerto Rico earlier this year

TOWIE babe Frankie Essex looked tanned, but not particularly toned as she frolicked with her man in a pair of saggy white bikini bottoms.

Frankie recently admitted that a penchant for fatty snacks was to blame for her weight gain, telling Now magazine: 'I'm not confident about my belly and I never have been.'

But the TV personality star can take heart in the knowledge that even supermodels can have a bad day at the beach.

Catwalk queen Kate Moss, who showed off an uncharacteristically round tummy in a mismatched bikini while holidaying in Formentera.

She has since shed the belly after attending a tough spa in Thailand.
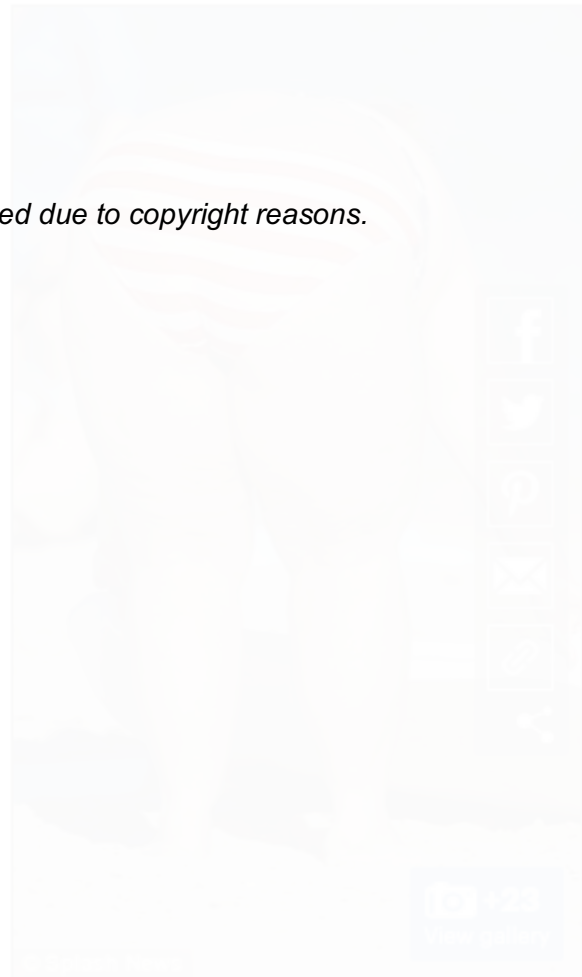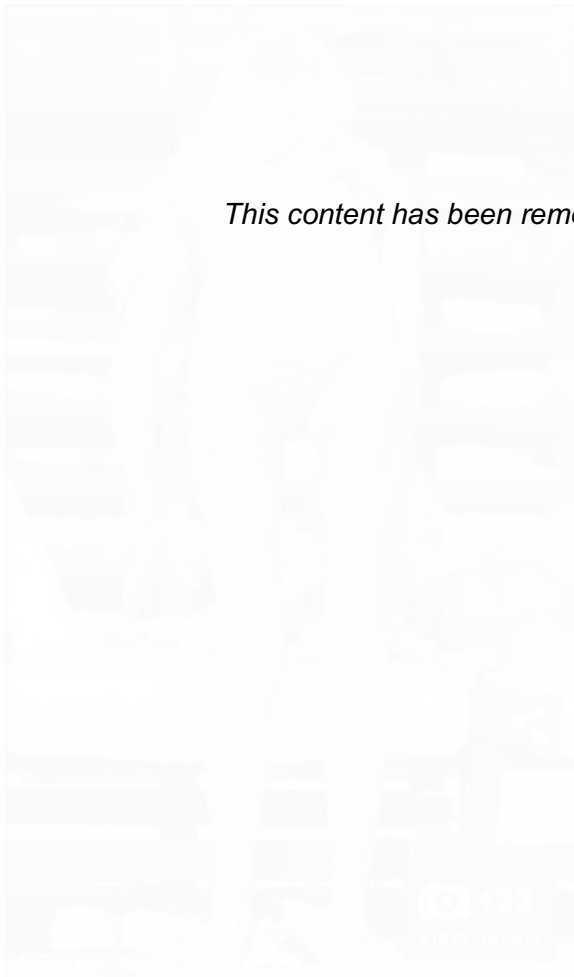
Opposites attract: Tara Reid and Ajay Rochester show off wildly contrasting bodies while enjoying respective holidays in Miami and Sydney earlier this year

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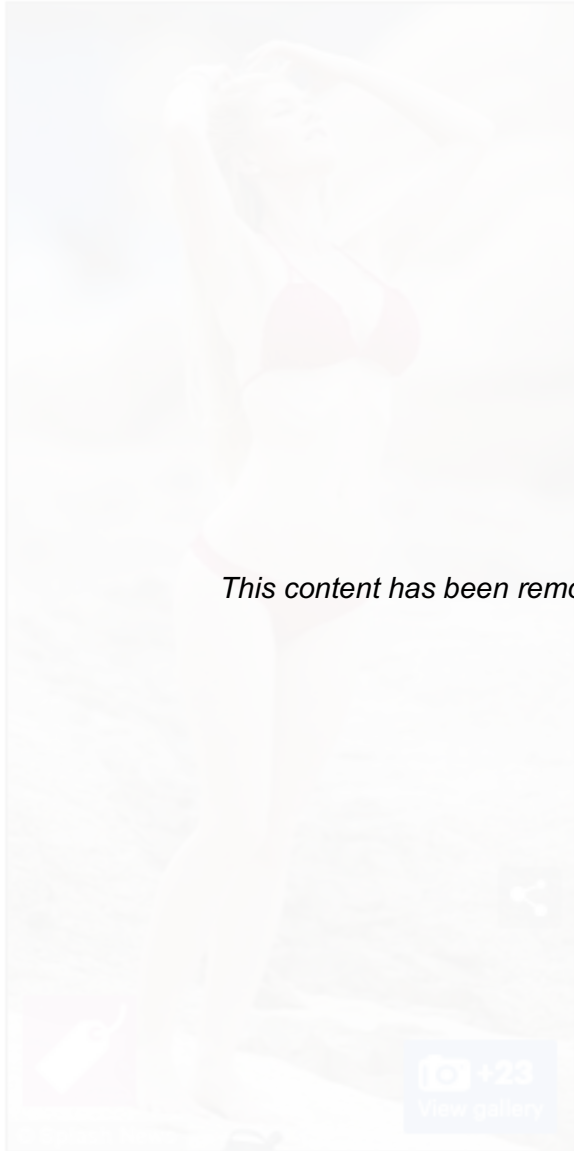
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Rib ticking: Heidi Montag (L) and Donna Air (R) reveal their rib-cages as they peel off on the beach
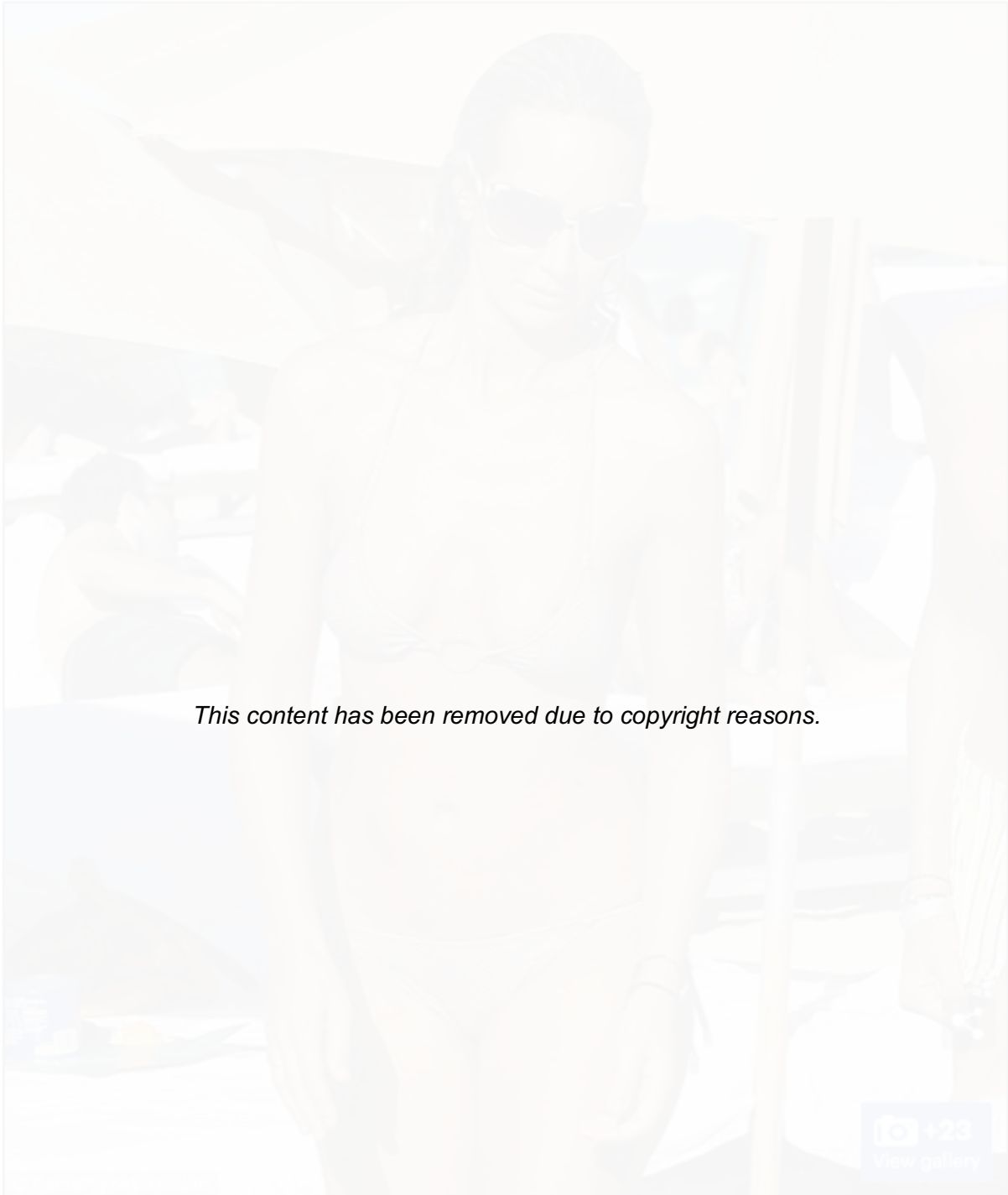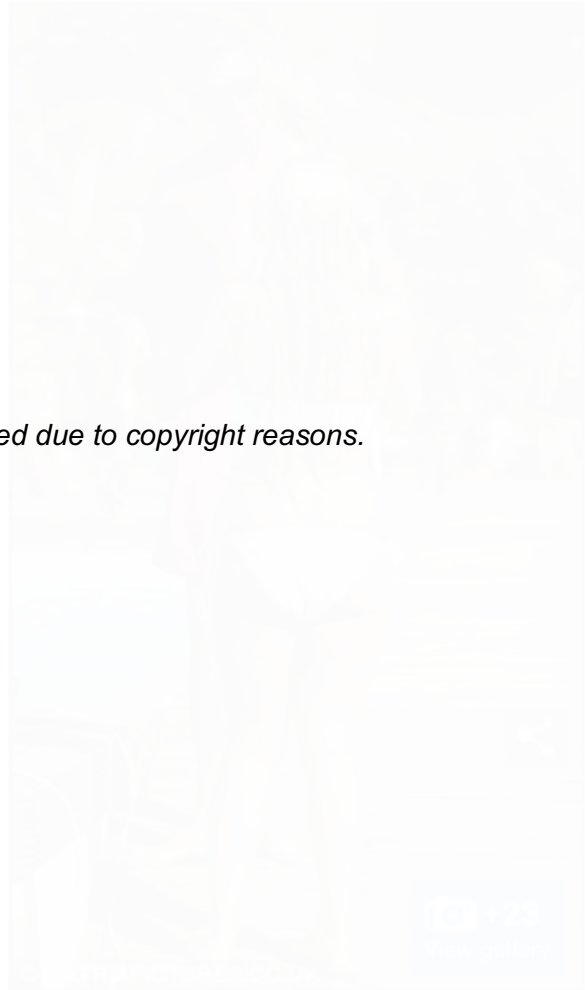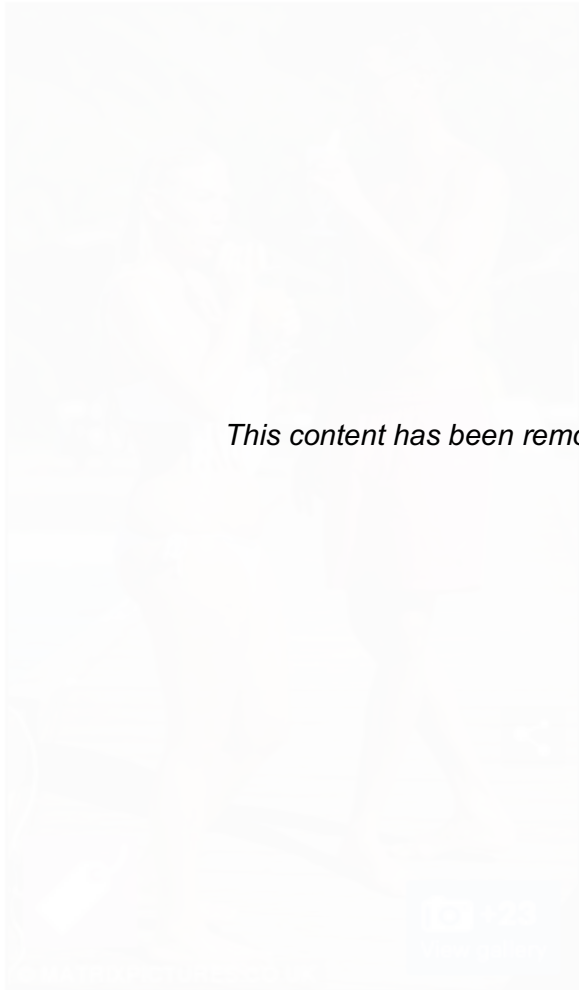
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Not very ladylike: Victoria Hervey's wide cleavage is exposed in Miami

Meanwhile presenter Donna Air appeared to go in the opposite direction while peeling off her top in the Caribbean during a romantic break with former boyfriend Sam Goldstone.
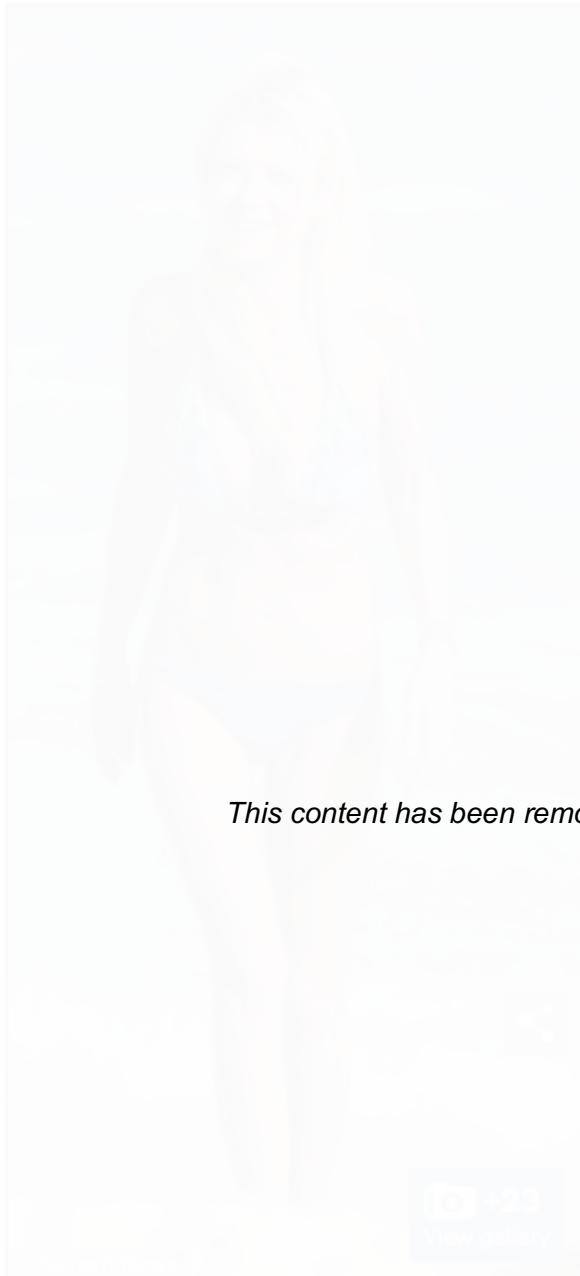
The Geordie star's tanned appearance did nothing to disguise her prominent ribs and painfully thin frame.

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Wafer thin: Tara Reid revealed a thinner frame while she waded through the Miami surf

However, the actress's lack of definition was made up for, in spades, by glamour model turned bodybuilder Jodie Marsh.

Former weight loss guru Ajay Rochester, has made a new career out of parading her fuller figure.

Despite her apparent weight gain, Ajay – author of 2003 self-help book Confessions of a Reformed Dieter – appeared to be having a whale of a time.

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On the opposite end of the spectrum, Kendall Jenner looked wafer thin while she frolicked in the Malibu surf in her own stars and stripes bikini, while Alyson Hannigan looked equally thin during a Miami break with her family.

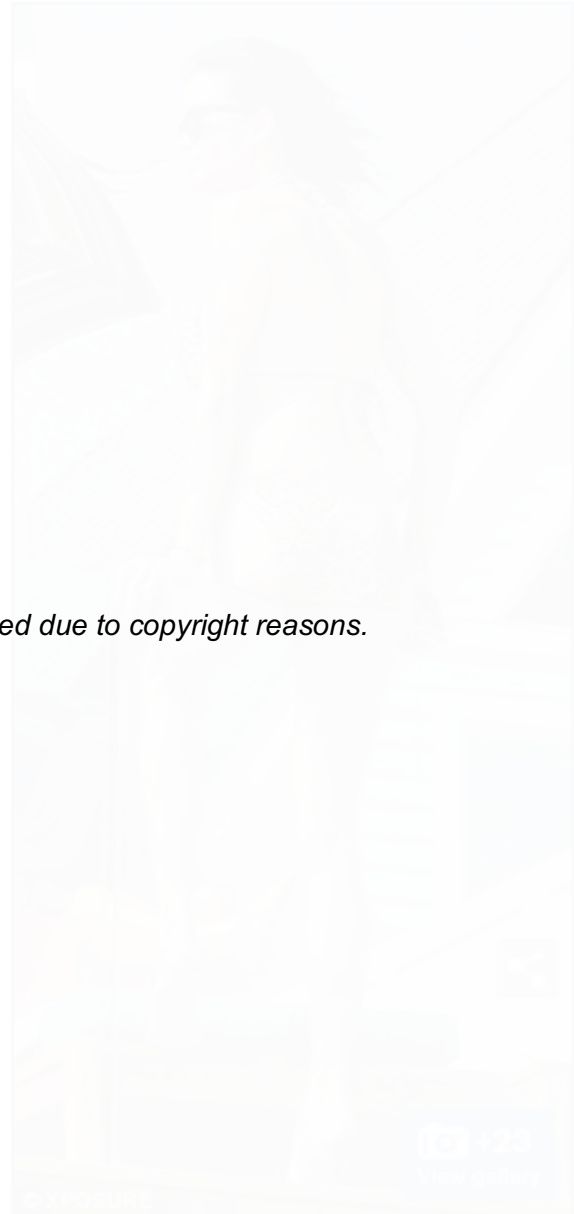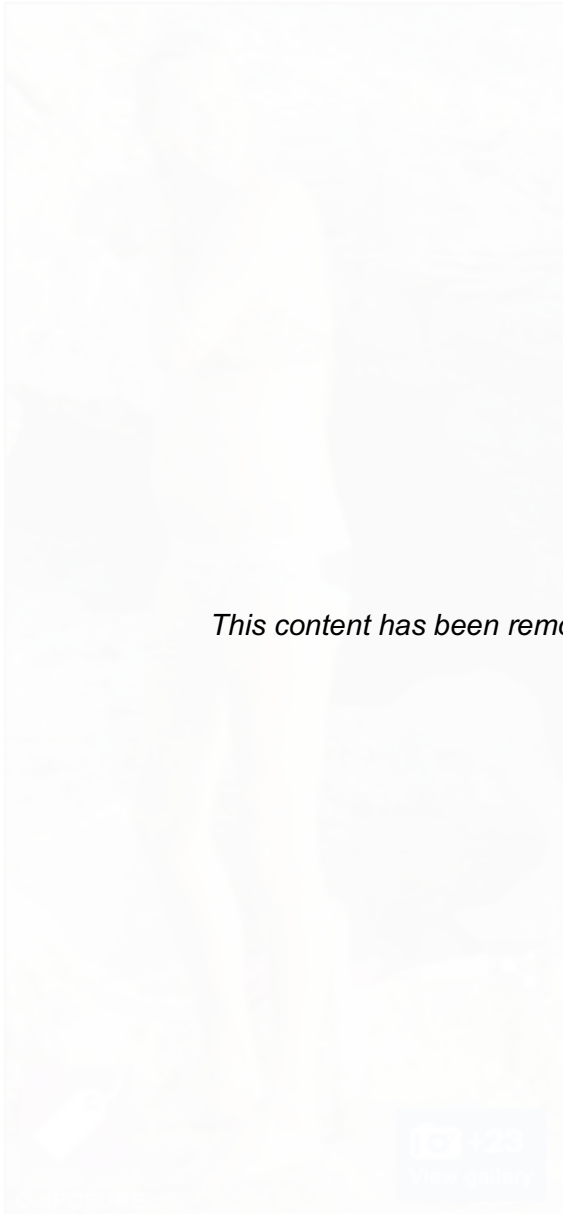In a tweet posted following the birth of daughter Keeva last May she wrote: 'I think by Hollywood standards I'm supposed to be in bikini shape now that my baby is 4 weeks old. My workout goal: Food drops in lap, not on belly.'

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Thinning frame: Alyson revealed her post baby weight loss in August

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Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form Focus Groups

Name of department: School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Journalism
Title of the study: *Focus group discussion on young adults' perception of the beach body in online and offline life.*
Introduction
The focus group discussion is organized by your lecturer in the seminar "consumer behaviour and body image in digital environments", Anke Kleim, as pre-test for her PhD thesis on the ideal beach body. Alongside her PhD studies, she is employed at the University of Cologne as research assistant and lecturer. She can be contacted via e-mail to anke.kleim@strath.ac.uk or phone +49 221 470 7066.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
The investigation aims to explore how the beach body is perceived by young adults and how it encounters and affects them both in their offline and online life. Qualitative insights may serve as a fundament for further research such as a survey as main methodological approach during Mrs Kleim's PhD thesis.

Do you have to take part?
Taking part of this focus group discussion is part of your seminar experience, hence your attendance would be highly appreciated. Nevertheless, you have a right to withdraw from this exercise with no negative consequences whatsoever.

What will you do in the project?
At first, you will be asked to complete an anonymous one-page questionnaire with few – mostly demographic - questions. Then, your group will receive a handout with six questions to guide you through the discussion. No restrictions or specific instructions are given regarding the content of your discussion and there is no right or wrong – Therefore, please feel free to add anything that comes to your mind and seems to be fitting! The more diverse insights and perspectives on the topic you can gather during your discussion, the better.
Focus group discussions will take place in class during spring term 2017 (31 July, 2017 at latest) in Lecture Hall S200 in the Old Mensa Building, Universitätsstraße 16a in Cologne.

Why have you been invited to take part?
This focus group discussion aims to investigate young adults' perspectives on the beach body. With your age and general interest in consumer behaviour and body image, you have been invited to participate in this discussion.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?
There are no potential risks involved in this research.

What happens to the information in the project?
All data will be handled anonymously and confidentially. Please make sure to handle your group members' statements accordingly, especially if personal body image-related experiences are shared. Your discussion will be audio-recorded and transcribed subsequently. Transcribed data will be stored on a secure USB device
The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.
Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?
If you are happy to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this. If you do not want to be involved in the project, thank you very much for your attention.
After the investigation is complete, you may receive feedback on its outcome on request. If you are interested to receive feedback, please e-mail to anke.kleim@strath.ac.uk. The data collected in this focus group discussion might serve for later publications on the beach body, however, as mentioned previously, statements will be used anonymously only.

Researcher contact details:
Anke Kleim
E-Mail: anke.kleim@strath.ac.uk
Phone: +49 221 470 7066

Chief Investigator details:
Dr Petya Eckler
E-Mail: petya.eckler@strath.ac.uk

This investigation has been granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde School of Humanities Ethics Committee.

If you have any specific questions about the research, please contact either me or the School of Humanities Ethics Convener, information listed below.

School of Humanities
Dr Petya Eckler
Ethics Convener
School of Humanities
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences
University of Strathclyde
Lord Hope Building, 4th floor
141 St James Road
Glasgow G4 0LT

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde
Graham Hills Building
50 George Street
Glasgow
G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for Focus Group 1-4 on the Beach Body

Name of department: School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Journalism
Title of the study: *Focus group discussion on young adults' perception of the beach body in online and offline life.*

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences. If I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which have been collected from me will be destroyed.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e., data which identify me personally) at any time.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e., data which do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Appendix D: Focus Groups – Guided Questions

Focus Group Discussion
Topic: The beach body

Focus Group Questions:

1. What does the ideal beach body look like to you? Please describe it as detailed as possible.

2. What (changing) behaviours – both offline and online - have you observed amongst your **female** peers when it came to achieving a beach body?

3. What do you think, during which time (period) of the year is the ideal beach body an up-to-date topic?

4. How do you receive the most information about the beach body in everyday life, both online and offline?

5. Please think about some typical beach body postings that you can find on your social media newsfeed, e.g. published by friends or any pages/people you like or follow.

   How do those postings differentiate (a) from one another and (b) from real-life situations at the beach?

6. Finally, please discuss: The beach body only affects people who plan to go to the beach during summertime.

Anonymous Questionnaire for Focus Group Participants

Age:

Gender: ☐ *male* ☐ *female* ☐ *other*

Relationship: ☐ *single* ☐ *in a relationship* ☐ *do not want to say*

Continent of origin:
☐ *Europe* ☐ *Asia* ☐ *North America* ☐ *South America* ☐ *Australia/ NZ*
☐ *Africa*

How long does it take you to get to the next beach from where you live most time of the year?
☐ *less than ½h* ☐ *½-1h* ☐ *1-2h* ☐ *2-3h* ☐ *more than 3h*

How do you feel about spending time at the beach?

○	○	○	○	○

"I love it"   *"I don't know"*   *"I hate it"*

How regularly do you normally spend time at the beach during summer?

☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Whenever I can	*often*	*sometimes*	*rarely*	*never*

In a typical week, how often do you use the following media channels?

	Several times a day	Once/ twice a day	I don't know	Several times a week	Less than once/twice a week
TV	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Print Media (magazines, newspapers)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online News	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facebook	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Twitter	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Instagram	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Thank you for participating in this focus group discussion! ☺
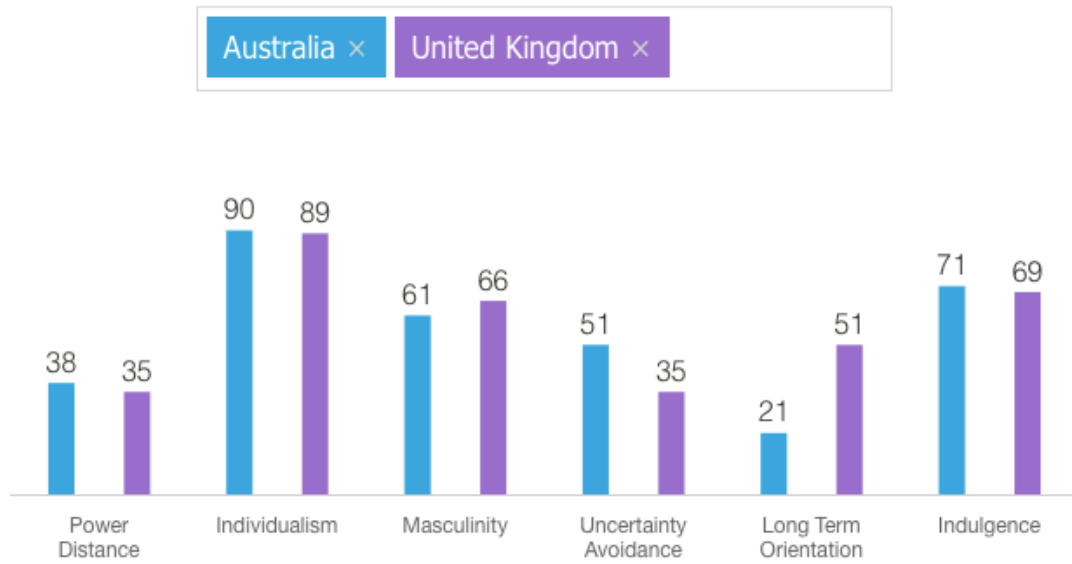*Your personal details will be handled completely anonymously.*

Appendix E: Coding Process of Focus Group Data

Overarching Theme	Subtheme	Example	Researcher's interpretive summary
Beach body internalisation	The beach body as a summer appearance ideal	"Like in Russia for example, you're getting prepared not for the beach, but for the summer!"	Views of the beach body as a summer or all-year appearance ideal link to participants' area of living. That is,
	The beach body as a year-round ideal	"In Brazil, we do [try and be beach body ready] like almost the whole year because it's always summer for us."	
Beach body experiences on social media	Viewing of normative beach body content on SNS	"Have you seen that new trend that they are posting about on Facebook now? The protruding rip trend? It's like you're taking a picture of your ribcage. So, it's like you're lying down in a bikini at the beach or something, you know… and your ribs pop out!" "Yeah, you just like arch your back and your ribs are like this" "Yeah, that's the thing to do that!" "You just look tiny!"	Viewing of normative beach body content on social media can be identified as one stimulus that triggers beach body-related psychological outcomes. (Self-)exposure is linked closely to cultural views about public nudity and self-sexualisation.
	Selfie-posting	"No Korean posts about the beach body like in swimwear…"	
Beach body behaviours prior to summer	Stimuli triggering beach body-related concerns	"I feel it's like shaming [on social media]" [frustration in voice]	Stimuli refer mostly to family, peers and social media, hence offer a link to the Tripartite Influence Model. Behavioural decision-making ascribed to the decision of whether and how to get beach body ready is complex and marked by several states of cognitive dissonance. Body image outcomes are closely related to internalisation of the beach body ideal.
	Behavioural decision-making process	"It's like you can't achieve your beach body if you miss one [exercising] session and you get really all tired about it. And it's like "now I have to start eating better!""	
	Body image outcomes	"…even if you feel good, you will never feel perfect…"	
Experiences of embodiment at the beach	Viewing of swimwear-clad bodies at the beach	In Russia […] in the countryside […] there is no need for a beach body. Because nobody cares. Because everybody is more awful than you anyway" [sarcastic tone followed by laughter]	The viewing of flawed bodies at the beach relates to positive state body image. The clashing of divergent cultural norms and values is central to experiences of embodiment at non-Western beaches.
	Experiences of embodiment at non-Western beaches		

Appendix F: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Australia and UK)

Retrieved from https://www.hofstede-insights.com/fi/product/compare-countries/ [Date of access: 13.01.2021]

Appendix G: Survey Items

Have you spent the past summer season in the UK*/ Australia*, i.e., have you been living there most of the time this past summer (regardless of holidays spent abroad etc.)?
1. Yes
2. No

Please select your sex.
1. Male
2. Female

How many days do you estimate to have spent at the beach this past summer season, in which you wore a typical swim- or beach outfit (e.g., bikini, tankini, swimsuit, wetsuit or anything else you normally wear at the beach)?
• _____ Days spent at the beach this summer

UK-survey only:

What percentage (%) of those days did you spent at beaches…
1. …in the UK?
2. …outside the UK?

If outside the UK, where have those beaches been located? Please insert the respective country name(s).

_____

If 0 days were selected: Please indicate why you haven't spent more time at the beach (e.g. no time/money, appearance concerns etc.).

_____

How many hours did you usually spend at the beach during a typical visit?
_____ Hours spent during a typical beach visit

How many minutes does it take you to get to the beach from where you usually live? Please insert a number.
I live _____ minutes from the beach

What is your age?
_____

What is your sexual orientation?
1. Heterosexual
2. Lesbian
3. Bisexual
4. Transsexual
5. Other
6. Prefer not to say

What is your current relationship status?
1. Single
2. Married
3. In a relationship
4. Other
5. Prefer not to say

Please choose one category that best describes your ethnicity:
1. White
2. Asian/Asian British
3. Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
4. Other
5. Decline to respond
6. Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Backgrounds

Have you got any visible differences or disfigurements, such as disabilities, congenital conditions (e.g. cleft lift, birth marks), burns, scars etc. that become visible when you're wearing a swimsuit/bikini?
1. Yes
2. No

If yes, which one(s)?

Have you got any children?
1. Yes
2. No

Are you currently pregnant?
1. Yes
2. Prefer not to say
3. No

What is your height (in cm)?

What is your weight (in kg)?

Have you ever had an eating disorder or suffered from disordered eating behavior?
1. Yes
2. No

In your own words, how would you describe your beach body, i.e. as it actually was this past summer?

Please describe your beach body based on the following attributes:

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unattractive						Attractive
Thin						Fat
With visible imperfections						Flawless
Flabby						Muscular
Tanned						Pale
Hairy						Hairless

How satisfied have you felt about your beach body this past beach season?

Very unsatisfied   1   2   3   4   5   very satisfied

How important is the beach for your leisure life?

Not at all important   1   2   3   4   5   extremely important

How have you been dressed during a typical beach visit?
1. Fully dressed (e.g. long sleeves, long trousers)
2. In light summer clothes (e.g. summer dress, shorts or skirts with top or t-shirt)
3. In beachwear, but with a scarf/shirt/towel/etc. wrapped around my body)
4. In a one-piece (e.g. swimsuit, wetsuit) or tankini
5. In a bikini or less

What was the majority of other women you have been seeing at the beach wearing?
1. They were fully dressed (e.g. long sleeves, long trousers)
2. They wore light summer clothes (e.g. summer dress, shorts or skirts with top or t-shirt)

3. They were dressed in beachwear, but with a scarf/shirt/towel/etc. wrapped around their body
4. They wore one-pieces (e.g. swimsuit, wetsuit) or tankinis
5. They wore bikinis or less

What would best describe the bodies of the other women you have been seeing at the beach?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Tanned						Pale
Muscular						Flabby
Flawless						With visible imperfections
Hairy						Hairless
Thin						Fat
Unattractive						Attractive

The following statements refer to your personal beach experience this past summer.
Please indicate to what extent you agree.

	1 (definitely disagree)	2	3	4	5 (definitely agree)
When I was at the beach, I compared my beach body to the beach body of others.					
When at the beach, I sometimes compared my figure to the figure of other beachgoers.					
When at the beach, I compared how I was dressed to how other people were dressed.					

During a typical beach visit, how often did you engage in physical activity, such as swimming, surfing, doing Yoga, playing ball etc.?
Never   1   2   3   4   5   always

How much can you generally relax/ feel good at the beach?
Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   very much

This past summer, how often have you avoided going to the beach because of the way you felt about your look?
Never   1   2   3   4   5   very often

On a typical day, how much time do you spend using any one of the below media types?
1. TV entertainment programmes (e.g. TV on demand, broadcasts) _____ hours
2. Newspaper/Magazines _____ hours
3. Social Media _____ hours

How frequently have you seen images of women wearing swimwear (e.g. swimsuit, bikini) in these media this past summer season?

	1 (never)	2	3	4	5 (always)
TV					
Newspaper/Magazines					
Social Media					
Public Advertising, e.g. on billboards along the road, in shops or in public transportation					

Which of the following social media platforms have you used most frequently this past summer? You may choose more than one.
1. Facebook
2. Instagram
3. Twitter
4. Pinterest
5. Tumblr
6. Blogs (e.g. Wordpress)
7. Snapchat
8. Youtube
9. Dating Apps (e.g. Tinder)
10. WhatsApp
11. Others

This past summer, how frequently did you engage with any media whilst at the beach, e.g. read a magazine, take and/or post pictures with your smartphone, text-message with other people or otherwise check your social media account(s)?

Never   1   2   3   4   5   Always

Over the past beach season, how often did you post beach body selfies on social media?
Never   1   2   3   4   5   Daily

What did you usually wear in these pictures?
1. I was fully dressed (i.e. long sleeves or trousers).
2. I wore light summer clothes (e.g. summer dress, skirts or shorts and a t-shirt or top).
3. I wore beachwear, but with a scarf/towel/shirt wrapped around my body.
4. I wore a one-piece (e.g. swimsuit, wetsuit) or tankini.
5. I wore a bikini or less.

Which parts of your body did you usually show in these pictures?
1. Just my face
2. Face to shoulders
3. I don't know
4. Face to waist
5. My full body

How often did you edit those photos before posting them (e.g. by adding a filter, adjusting the lighting, or retouching the picture)?
Never   1   2   3   4   5   Always

This past beach season, how often did others (e.g. friends or family of yours) post pictures of you in beachwear?
Never   1   2   3   4   5   Daily

How often did you see beach body pictures posted by your "friends", people or pages you follow on your newsfeed?
Never   1   2   3   4   5   Daily

How would you best describe the beach bodies you have typically seen on your social media newsfeed?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Thin						Fat
Muscular						Flabby
Hairy						Hairless
Pale						Tanned
Attractive						Unattractive
With visible imperfections						Flawless

How often did you actively engage with others' beach body postings, e.g. "like" them, share them or comment on them?

Never   1   2   3   4   5   Daily

The following statements refer to your personal experience of beach body photos you were exposed to on social media this past summer. Please indicate to what extent you agree.

	1 (definitely disagree)	2	3	4	5 (definitely agree)
When using social media, I compared my beach body to the beach body of others.					
When using social media, I compared, how I was dressed at the beach to how other people were dressed at the beach.					
When using social media, I sometimes compared my beach figure to the beach figure of other users.					

Almost done - Only 4 questions left. Please note, the following statements refer to your personal perception of your body this past summer.You are asked to indicate how much you agree.

	1 (definitely disagree)	2	3	4	5 (definitely agree)
My body was sexually appealing.					
I liked my looks just the way they were.					
Most people would consider me good-looking.					
	1	2	3	4	5

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	(definitely disagree)				(definitely agree)
I liked the way I looked without my clothes on.					
I liked the way my clothes fit me.					
I disliked my physique.					
I was physically unattractive.					
I rarely thought about how I looked.					
I thought it was more important that my clothes were comfortable than wether they looked good on me.					
I thought more about how my body felt than how my body looked.					
I rarely compared how I looked with how other people looked.					
During the day, I thought about how I looked many times.					
I often worried about whether the clothes I was wearing made me look good.					
I rarely worried about how I looked to other people.					
I was more concerned with what my body could do that how it looked.					
I wanted my body to look very thin.					
I wanted my body to look like it had little fat.					
I thought a lot about looking thin.					

	1 (definitely disagree)	2	3	4	5 (definitely agree)
I wanted my body to look very lean.					
I thought a lot about having very little body fat.					

The final question is: Would you say you feel differently about your body during summer than during the rest of the year?
1. Yes, I feel more positively about my body during summer.
2. Yes, I feel more negatively about body during summer.
3. No, I don't feel differently about my body during summer.
4. I don't know.

Thank you very much for your participation! If you would like to engage into a lottery to win one of 30 Amazon vouchers, please enter your e-mail address below. To grant anonymity, your e-mail address will be separated from the rest of your answers immediately and permanently deleted once all winners have been informed.
Take care and have a lovely day, Anke