“It’s like ‘Strong is the New Skinny,’ but you can’t be too strong”: Negotiating and decoding the healthy and fit female body online

by

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BEd, University of Victoria, 2015
BA, University of Victoria, 2011

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Research has explored the increasing muscularity of male bodies in popular media, the cultural ideal of masculinity, and its effect on body dissatisfaction in young men, but similar research with young women nearly always focuses on "thinness as the cultural ideal for femininity" (Eisenberg, Wall, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2012). This study addresses the lack of research exploring the increasing muscularity of female bodies in popular media and explores the depiction of the healthy and fit female body via health and fitness content on social media platforms. In particular, it discusses this particular bodily presentation's potential to play a bigger part in body satisfaction, body image concerns, and the cultural ideal of femininity today than it has previously.

This study examines a group of young women's (ages 17-22) perceptions of health and fitness media online via five focus groups and one interview. This research was conducted to explore their understandings and interpretations of health and fitness content on social media, with particular attention to the representation of the healthy and fit body on Instagram. The data reveal how the girls negotiated, and often critiqued, the limited representation of the concepts of health and of fitness. In spite of some of the affordances of social media, in particular the ability for users to contribute content that might challenge traditional and/or stereotypical media representations, numerous constraints appear to normalize a particular body that is deemed healthy and/or fit. It would appear that certain bodies (are allowed to) perform health and fitness in specific ways and these representations have implications that relate to gender, race, ethnicity, class, and consumption.

Keywords: health and/or fitness, social media, representation, body image, technology, femininity.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Research has explored the increasing muscularity of male bodies in popular media, the cultural ideal of masculinity, and its effect on body dissatisfaction in young men, but similar research with young women nearly always focuses on "thinness as the cultural ideal for femininity" (Eisenberg, Wall, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2012, p. 1020). However, a 2012 study by Eisenberg, Wall, & Neumark-Sztainer of approximately 3,000 teens published in *Pediatrics* found more young men and young women engaging in "muscle-enhancing behaviors" like changing diets, exercising more, and using protein powders, steroids, and other substances than previously reported (p. 1019). The enhanced focus on increasing tone and muscularity for girls may be playing a bigger part in body satisfaction today than it has previously and it may be that there has been a shift in the way body issues are expressed and femininity is interpreted, particularly in teens and young adults. The influence of media depictions of *muscularity* on women's body dissatisfaction, however, seems to remain mostly unexplored (Benton & Karazsia, 2015, p. 22). Rather than excessive thinness, body image issues and cultural ideals may be expressed via health and fitness discourses, but there is currently a lack of research/literature that engages with young women as both consumers and producers of this content online. This is of particular importance in a social media context since young women are, more than any other demographic, "liking" and "following" health and fitness content on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter (Carrotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015).

One digital space in which health and fitness content is particularly popular is Instagram. And its popularity appears to be greater among women. In particular, young women and girls are substantially more likely to be using Instagram regularly than boys and young men. In 2015, over "half (52%) of all teens report using Instagram to share photos and video with friends, with girls substantially more likely to use it than boys (61% to 44%)" (Lenhart, 2015, p.28). Of teens age thirteen to seventeen, "girls use social media sites and platforms — particularly visually-

oriented ones — for sharing more than their male counterparts do" (Lenhart, 2015, p.5). In the 2016 Social Media Update,[1] the Pew Research Center notes that Instagram use is especially high among young adults: use among those 18-29 was almost double the use among those 30-49 (59% to 33%) (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016, p. 5). This demographic information is in part why I have focused my attention on the visual display of health and fitness content online, its display on Instagram in particular, and on the Instagram platform itself, throughout my research. When I refer to health and fitness content online or on social media, it should be noted that I am referring most specifically to Instagram and peripherally to other visually-based social media platforms (for example, Pinterest).

While there are few studies that explore and engage young women in conversations about body image, muscle definition, and the way health and fitness is displayed on contemporary social media platforms, both Cohen (2008) and Luff & Gray (2009) note that, in teen magazines, an emphasis on dieting and weight-loss or weight maintenance implies that even if teen girls are thin, they should be conscious of their weight, diet, and physical fitness. Luff & Gray's (2009) research focuses on a content analysis of two teen magazines, *Seventeen* and *YM* (originally *Young Miss* then *Your Magazine*, but commonly referred to as *YM*). Their results suggest that though cover models may not consistently promote the thin ideal in the same way women's magazines do, there is an increase in editorial content that promotes dieting, exercise, or both over time. So even in instances where the thin ideal may not be as explicit, content may still promote that message to teen girls. The authors identified a need for further research regarding the interpretation of these images and editorial content. Since Luff and Gray's (2009) study was limited to analysis of two teen magazines directed at girls, and much of the content accessed by girls today is being accessed online on visually-based social media platforms, it is important to extend this work to digital spaces devoted to fitness, health, and healthy body discourses particularly as the predominant consumers of health and fitness-related social media content are teenage girls (Carrotte et al., 2015).

Additionally, if seventy percent of Americans are overweight or obese (Schreiber, 2015, p. 35), and body fat itself has come to symbolize the out of control, unproductive, and morally inferior worker/citizen (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 70), the depiction of women's bodies as healthy, athletic, fit bodies could be interpreted as a welcome response to inspire more people to be active yet this shift may be just as problematic. Partly a response to, and rejection of, trends associated with social media tags such as "#thinspiration," a focus on excessively thin models in media advertising, as well as the "collective banning of proanorexia and #thinspiration social media pages by the big social media sites" (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 69), "#fitspiration" and slogans such as "Strong is the new Skinny" or "Fit Not Thin" with accompanying imagery have gained momentum, particularly in digital spaces and social media (Schreiber, 2015). Emerging research suggests a cultural shift in the depiction of an ideal female body to now be very thin *and* extremely fit: low in adiposity, fewer curves, more angular shapes, and well-defined musculature or muscle tone (Benton & Karazsia, 2015; Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012). While this may differ from the earlier focus on thinness alone, researchers also suggest that the new ideal of thin plus muscular is just as unrealistic as the thin ideal has traditionally been (Schreiber, 2015, p.35). And given that some studies link consumption and exposure to depictions of thinness or the "thin ideal" in mass media with negative body image (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 65), some authors suggest fitspiration images may be even more potent. Consumers may not "process fitspiration images as critically as they do thin-ideal images [though I would suggest that this is perhaps because this shift has not been under scrutiny in the same way], or perhaps adding tone and strength to thinness cumulates to provide women with more ways in which to feel inadequate" (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015, p. 65). But is exposure to fitspiration images and other online health and fitness content interpreted by audiences/consumers as being problematic, leading to feelings of inadequacy as suggested, or might it be perceived as empowering? This study begins to explore this phenomena.

Exploring the shift to Fitspiration and online health and fitness culture

For the purpose of this thesis, what is meant by an online health and fitness culture (acknowledging that the concept of culture is not stable), is drawn from Jong & Drummond (2016). They write that online health and fitness culture is defined and created by online communities focused on concepts of health and of fitness where specific attention is paid to:

> . . . diet and food, inspiration, exercising, the body and weight and representations of fit bodies . . . . These underlying messages create unique 'practices, attitudes, modes of thought, and values' . . . that are circulated through online communications. This distinctive culture is developed and maintained through these communications (e.g. images, videos and/or comments). These are shared within the community by 'posting', 'liking', 'following' and 'sharing' information involving health and fitness. (p. 760)

Instagram is one space in which online health and fitness culture appears to be very active. At the time of writing, #healthy had over 110,000,000 posts on Instagram, #fitness had over 233,000,000 posts on Instagram, and #fitspo (short for fitspiration) had over 50,000,000 posts on Instagram. Robinson et al. (2017) note that "[t]his shift in the popularity of the athletic [bodily] ideal has, in part, been due to the global social media movement known as 'fitspiration' . . . a social media source which many women now use for health-related information and inspiration related to diet and exercise" (p. 65). A combination of the words fit/fitness and inspiration, fitspiration is also commonly referred to as "fitspo."

The fit ideal is communicated to social media audiences in a number of ways. For example, a writer for *The Guardian,* Roisin Kiberd (2015) notes that the "mainstream use of the word 'strong' is worth considering; the mantra 'strong is the new skinny' has been gaining currency online . . . . Its everyday popularity – popping up on Facebook, slogan shirts and fitness books – signals a move away from 'thinness' in favour or a more achievable, 'real' body, led not by magazines but by social media" (para.2). Real, fit, healthy, authentic, all have been appropriated by hashtags, which Kiberd says is "another act of Manichean hashtag logic, where bodies become either real or fake, fat or thin, toxic or healthy" (para.12). Jong & Drummond

(2016) appear to agree: "the way in which fatness or overweight bodies are shamed in before and after or transformation pictures . . . creates a restricted view of what it means to be healthy" (p. 763). And beyond hashtags and transformation pictures, social media platforms themselves may be contributing to a restricted view of bodies that may be deemed healthy and/or fit.

My work with young women extends the work of a number of researchers in the area of traditional print media related to health and fitness, to digital culture and social media. First, Dworkin & Wachs (2009) investigated health and fitness imagery and discourses in print media from 1998-2007 to explore the relationships and ideologies that link gender, race, class, consumption, the body, and sexuality, but whose work lacks audience analysis (p. 26). Young (2011) summed up their conclusions by saying that "some bodies count and others' don't…white, thin and straight equate to 'healthy' in ways that non-white, non-thin, and gay do not" (p. 1695). I also extend the work by Luff & Gray (2009) who examined messaging and imagery regarding thinness, dieting, and exercise in teen magazines, and I explore the more recent research by Eisenberg, Wall, & Neumark-Sztainer (2012) regarding an increase in "muscle-enhancing behaviors" like changing diets, exercising more, and using protein powders, steroids, and other substances than previously reported (and emphases on muscularity, particularly among young women). Finally, this work also extends the work of Carrotte, Vella, & Lim (2015) who note that young women are the demographic most likely to be "liking" and "following" health and fitness content online and suggest further research to "consider the role of health and fitness-related social media content in the formation of body image, health ideals and behaviors" (para.27). The present study sought to fill a gap in this work by engaging in conversations with young women about health and fitness content in social media, and their perceptions of online health and fitness culture since audience readings and meaning-making is lacking in research on health fitness media (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2012; Luff & Gray, 2009). This research also moved away from a focus on disordered eating (for example, Boepple & Thompson, 2014) and body dissatisfaction primarily measured by psychological tests, to conversations about larger societal discourses of health and fitness. This

may be the first, or one of few, qualitative studies that explores and engages young women in conversations about body image, muscle definition, and the way health and fitness is displayed on contemporary social media platforms.

In *Bodies*, Susie Orbach (2009) notes that "the binary of good body and bad body has not dissolved…. Few proclaim anything other than that fat is bad and thin is good. In the discourse about self-created identity, the body is central. It is central because it is a vehicle to assert one's place as a member of a class, a group, a sexual practice, an aspiration" (p. 141-142). But it is possible that now fat and thin are both "bad" in popular consciousness and social media platforms, and only fit is "good." A particular depiction of the fit body may also be a vehicle to "assert one's place as a member of a class, a group, a sexual practice, an aspiration" (Orbach, 2009, p. 142). Given media depictions of men's and women's bodies as increasingly muscular (Eisenberg et al., 2012), and the shift towards an ideal that is also thin, the influence of media images on sociocultural body ideals along with the perception that health and fitness imagery is better than thin ideal images (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 65), it is important to continue to explore this trend particularly as emerging research suggests an increase in body dissatisfaction from viewing these images.

The aims and outline of the present study

As the sole researcher in this study, I came to this research with a personal interest in sport and physical activity. I have been involved in team sports throughout my life and in my young adult life, I have pursued various fitness activities including weight lifting and CrossFit. I would characterize my involvement in these spaces as being very positive and throughout my life I have not known significant barriers to participation. This research was also influenced by some of my experiences as a student teacher and later as a K-12 public and alternative school teaching certificate holder. Between the impact of technology in the classroom to the habits of the young people I have taught, to my experience teaching Physical and Health Education as a student

teacher and teaching kickboxing classes to both students and adults, this research brings together my interests in sport, in technology, in education, and fuels my curiosity in the growing popularity of online health and fitness culture.

The primary aim of the present study was to help us better understand how visual images and social media content shape women's understandings and feelings about health, fitness, and their own bodies. It provides insights into whether or not young women themselves feel that there is an increased focus on muscularity for girls, particularly on social media, and whether or not that seems to be playing a bigger part in body satisfaction today than it has previously. It is unique in this regard as no research that I have uncovered appears to engage young women in this conversation. Do young women feel that there is a shift in the way body issues are expressed and femininity is interpreted? In this study, my goal is to explore the following question(s): how do young women and girls access, view, produce, and interpret health and fitness content on social media? Do these images and narratives align with, or influence, their own perceptions of femininity, health, fitness, and a healthy body? And (how) do they intersect with issues of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality? McIntosh & Cuklanz (2014) write that "ideas about gender in mainstream mass mediated texts can tell us something about the dominant ideologies of their culture of origin" (p. 267). Similarly, I think ideas about health and fitness, and what constitutes a healthy body, in media texts can tell us something about the dominant ideologies of their culture of origin:

> texts are constructed within a particular set of cultural, social, economic, and political contexts, and they inform the values audiences receive about themselves, others, and the world around them, [so] their analysis can reveal much about the social [and cultural] context in which they are produced and received. (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 268)

I would argue that when we are referring to mass media texts today, we must include social media in this reference even if this type of media does not possess the same "easily delineated boundaries" as conventional media (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 272). If young women are

accessing it as their main form of media and it has become more popular than conventional media among this group (Slater et al, 2017) it is, I think by definition, mainstream media. And all of these questions and ideas inform, similar to Dworkin and Wachs' (2009) research in print media, which bodies count and which don't in digital spaces that are coded as healthy and fit.

Drawing from Rose's critical visual methodology (2007, 2012), the primary focus of this research was the viewing sites of audiences (consumption), and the site of the image itself (representation) with a peripheral focus on the site of image production (Ownby, 2013). I drew from an earlier completed study, during which time I collected a convenience sample of health and fitness content on Instagram twice weekly over the course of one month. Data was collected at all times of day at random reflecting a similar snapshot of what a user would encounter while browsing social media. Only publicly available images were collected using a research account (neutral – no followers, no following) and these were drawn from what appeared to be the most popular and widely circulating images as categorized on Instagram as "Top Posts." These images were used as discussion prompts for the participant research portion of this project under the following hashtags: healthy, fit, fitspo. The question of algorithm is important here because Instagram's (seemingly proprietary) algorithm for organizing image content, especially those deemed "Top Posts," curates and places the images in the viewer's view in particular ways. What constitutes a "Top Post" and what data is used to categorize it as such is unknown to me. I was unable to uncover what criteria must be met in order for a post to be deemed one of the "Top Posts" under any given hashtag.

The viewing site of audiences was the main focus of the participant research portion of this thesis. As noted above, there is little research that engages with young women about their perceptions and interpretations of this content even though they are identified as most actively engaged with it, so I invited young women in their first and second year of studies at the University of Victoria to contact me directly if interested in participating in a study about health, fitness, and social media. Data collection was done via five semi-structured focus groups and one interview. These discussions were audio recorded and then transcribed. Analysis of the data

began after transcription with a critical reading and thematic coding of participant responses and conversations. This led to a discussion of themes that arose from the focus groups as they relate to the current literature. For a more fulsome account of the research design and ethics, please see Chapter 3, Methodology as well as the Appendices.

Summary

In sum, while there has continued to be a focus on the ways in which girls/women are shaped to think about their bodies in a variety of popular culture texts, there may be an important shift happening among young girls who are now focused on health and fitness discourses – which may have equally problematic outcomes – rather than excessive thinness. There does not appear to be any specific qualitative research related to muscle-enhancing behaviours and a visual focus on muscularity in social media among young women, so this research sought to interrogate these gaps. This study has developed a better understanding of what kinds of images related to health and fitness are presented to audiences on social media, with particular attention to Instagram given its popularity among young audiences. It has also begun to document and understand young women's readings and interpretations of health and fitness imagery on social media. In this study, my goal was to explore how young women and girls access, view, produce, and interpret health and fitness content on social media. I wanted to know if these images and narratives align with, or influence, their own perceptions of femininity, health, fitness, and a healthy body. And if so, how (or if) they intersected with issues of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. My research begins to answer these questions.

Chapter Two, the Literature Review, will situate my study more fully within the existing scholarship, literature, and cultural context related to how young women form an understanding of their body and the social/cultural norms which shape their interpretations and perceptions of health and fitness. In particular, a review of how these beliefs and understandings may be constructed and reinforced in social media and other visual texts is required (by analyzing the literature associated with fitspiration and earlier print media related to health and fitness more

generally). Following that, I turn to Chapter 3, Methodology, where I summarize my research design and provide a rationale for that design. I also discuss more generally the qualitative paradigm and the notion of authenticity or "trustworthiness" in qualitative research before moving to Chapter 4, Analysis and Interpretation. In Chapter 4, I explore the research questions, as noted above, and offer a thematic analysis of participant responses from the focus groups and interview I conducted. The analysis centers on three key themes: constraint, production, and authenticity. Finally, in Chapter 5, Conclusion, I highlight some of the key findings, limitations, and reflections on this thesis before discussing possible avenues for future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this chapter I have situated my study more fully within the existing scholarship, literature, and cultural context related to how young women (and all people) form an understanding of their body and the social/cultural norms which shape their interpretations and perceptions of health and fitness. In particular, a review of how these beliefs and understandings may be constructed and reinforced in social media and other visual texts is required. And perhaps more importantly, I have also reviewed the numerous discourses that work together and/or compete to discipline the body and to normalize a particular representation of which bodies count and which do not within the context of health and fitness.

I have organized this review into three main parts. The focus of Part 1 is mainly on the research literature and findings of empirical research; that is, research with human participants or at least large data sets. This includes fitspiration-specific research, a small body of emerging qualitative work on online fitness culture, older work in health and fitness print media, followed by a brief discussion about the demographic and social media platform I worked with for my study. The focus of Part 2 is on the theoretical issues and considerations that emerged throughout the literature I reviewed. These theories and concepts seem to have influenced or informed at least some of the research I reviewed, but they also inform the analysis of my own data (Chapter 4). Finally, Part 3 concludes with an overview of alternative interpretations of these media, some of the limitations of the literature I reviewed, and gaps to be considered.

In organizing this chapter into three parts I hoped to provide a more fulsome consideration of trends, issues, analyses, and considerations regarding the portrayal of the healthy and fit body in online spaces. I also sought to develop a more comprehensive literature review in order to better understand, read, and apply these ideas to the qualitative data that I collected and subsequently analyzed for this project. I now turn to Part 1 and a focus on the research literature and findings.

Part 1: Survey of the research literature and an overview of findings

This first part outlines a small body of fitspiration-specific research, emerging qualitative work on online fitness culture, older work in health and fitness print media, and concludes with a brief discussion about the demographic and social media platform I worked with for my study.

Fitspiration-specific research. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, emerging research on the trend of "fitspiration" (a combination of the words fitness and inspiration, also referred to as "fitspo") seems to be on the rise in academic literature as a subset of health and fitness studies more generally. In 2015 I noticed only one academic article using the keyword "fitspiration" in the University of Victoria databases whereas, at time of writing, my search for the term yielded 49 results.

To date, the results of viewing fitspiration images and images of the "athletic ideal" (defined by Robinson et al. (2017) as lean, toned/muscular, and low body fat) appear to be linked to greater negative mood and body dissatisfaction, lower appearance self-esteem, and a drive for thinness (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2017; Robinson et al. 2017; Tiggeman & Zaccardo 2015). However, Fardouly et al. (2017) note that viewing these images did not result in greater self-objectification. One possible explanation is that fitspiration images may not *only* emphasize appearance, but also include things like fitness and strength as well – and these might cancel out strict appearance comparisons and subsequent self-objectification (p. 11). Robinson et al. (2017) also note that exposure to the "muscular ideal" (defined as overt musculature, well-defined muscle, still generally thin) did not produce an increase in body dissatisfaction, so the athletic or "fit" ideal appears to be a very specific and narrowly defined bodily ideal that may have more of an impact on body image concerns. The display of overt musculature may still be considered taboo and have less impact on body image concerns.

Even if fitspiration viewers report being inspired to get fit and eat healthily, it does not appear to motivate participants to exercise more or alter their exercise habits, according to Robinson et al. (2017). Their measure of exercise habits, however, is based on how far

participants travelled on a treadmill for ten minutes after viewing fitspiration images (p. 66). While such a study might be the basis from which to consider the impacts of image on exercise habits, I do not see this as a particularly good or realistic measure of exercise behavior considering the setting (a lab), the type of exercise chosen as a measure, the time spent exercising afterwards (ten minutes), and the lack of follow-up. The authors note that among other limitations, testing was done in an artificial lab setting and there was no neutral control group. Further testing should be done, but this study and others suggest that fitness imagery that may be intended to inspire (hence fit + inspiration) may actually result in the opposite effect and lead to a decrease in body satisfaction (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 69).

Of note, one study by Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs (2017) compared findings across women viewing fitspiration images, self-compassion images, and neutral/control images. They write that women viewing fitspiration images reported less self-compassion than women who participated in their control group. As such, the images do not appear to be benign. However, Slater et al. (2017) did not replicate the experimental findings of Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) with fitspiration as its focus: they did *not* note differences in body satisfaction, body appreciation, or negative mood between participants who viewed fitspiration images and participants who viewed neutral images (pp. 92-94). But the authors compared the results to women who viewed self-compassion images and women in the self-compassion group had significantly greater body satisfaction, body appreciation, self-compassion, and less negative mood than the control group (pp. 92-93). Of particular interest are the results from the group who viewed a combination of fitspiration (15 images) and self-compassion images (5 images). This group reported greater body satisfaction, body appreciation, and self-compassion and less negative mood than the group who viewed fitspiration only (pp. 92-93).

The very limited experimental research, and research in this area in general, and the inconsistent findings to date suggest a need for more research “to fully elucidate the impact of exposure to this particular type of imagery” (Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017, p. 94). Despite this conclusion, some of this research, particularly explorations of self-compassion, may offer an

interesting approach and basis for future research on the impact of social media on women's body satisfaction. It suggests possible avenues of intervention of negative outcomes related to health and fitness media (Slater et al., 2017, p. 87). And given the small body of research, and its focus on correlational, experimental, and content analyses, these sometimes conflicting results indicate the need for more diverse research such as qualitative/narrative inquiry. It would appear that statistical analyses may not be able to fully elucidate how people think and what they feel, and in particular how this media and imagery is negotiated by audiences.

Representation in (print) fitness media. Since I began by highlighting some of the potential issues with online health and fitness content, and fitspiration media in particular, it is also helpful to provide a brief overview of similar content in print media that also informed my analysis and study.

Gendered differences. After reviewing ten years of print content in health and fitness media, Dworkin & Wachs (2009) write that women's health and fitness magazines feature women who are usually white, toned, like their male counterparts, but lacking "visible rips or cuts" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 1). They refer to the gendered upper body - lower body divide (pp. 79-80), noting "the cautions aimed at women's lower bodies and the restrictions on their size indicate the potential for cultural devaluations of women's strength" (p. 80). They also write that the differences between "typical" male and female covers/fitness models follow fairly strict binaries (big – little, wide – narrow, bursting – contained). Women, they argue, are disproportionately presented as engaged in "sex-typed" activities such as aerobics, tennis, lifting light weights, and media have a tendency to erase physically strong and competent women (p. 2). They also write that heterosexuality is repeatedly invoked across fitness media (p. 167). Given that this work is now eight or more years old, it may be that there is slightly less restriction on this female cultural ideal as is evidenced by more recent studies, but there certainly appear to be similarities across previous print media and now user-generated (though not always free of corporate content) media online.

Washington & Economides' (2016) overview of print media note similarities in the framing of women within that content. They write that women are underrepresented in *Sports*

Illustrated, allowing "only very specific and narrow stereotypes to proliferate" (p. 146); in *Shape* magazine and *Fitness* magazine "health is bypassed for the sake of beauty" (p. 146), and looking good is privileged over feeling good. Also, in *Shape* and *Self,* "the rhetoric of individual empowerment" (p. 146) may contribute to disorders of body image and self-blame due to an inability to achieve the beauty and body standards presented (p. 146). An alternative to these representations is Dworkin & Wachs' (2009) discussion of *Women's Sports & Fitness*. They write that "unlike other magazines that defined 'problem areas' in terms of large thighs or butts, this magazine spoke of problem areas in terms of improving sports performance, media coverage of women's athletics, and inequitable access to sport" (p. 130). However, *Women's Sports & Fitness* was acquired by Conde Nast in 1998 and once acquired, it began to mirror the other magazines discussed above, becoming "a repetitive player in an increasingly homogeneous" landscape (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 130). The homogeneity, perhaps, is a result of the merging of multiple, and somewhat diverse, publications under the umbrella of fewer companies and this may be something that we see mirrored in online health and fitness content over time.

Racial differences. To expand on the issue of race, Dworkin & Wachs (2009) note that the lack of non-white individuals on covers and in articles is in contrast to their representation in advertisements, bonded and united thanks to the products being sold (p. 55). Their inclusion in this way plays a very particular role, "that of featuring the progressiveness of the advertisers or the consumers of the products being marketed while the key players in the magazines remained a clear white majority" and furthering the consumption narrative (p. 163). This produces a situation in which people of color are "left out of the frame" and, at least in part, become associated with the negative stigmas linked to unhealthy bodies (p. 164). How health and fitness media and more general conceptualizations of the terms are shaped by issues of race and racialization is an important topic which I will return to in other areas of this literature review. This topic is also discussed in the analysis of the data that I collected in the focus groups and interview I conducted.

Fit, but not particularly inspiring? Returning to fitspiration, what explanations might there be for the above negative outcomes related to fitspiration media and, likely, more general health

and fitness media? According to researchers, images, videos, and hashtags for fitspiration "often reference or imply the need for self-control, [dietary restraint], and discomfort to achieve goals, and can therefore contain guilt-inducing messages" (Slater et al., 2017, p. 94) similar to "thin ideal" or "thinspiration" messages. Additionally, idealized fitness imagery or presentation of the "athletic ideal" promises that it is just a matter of putting the time and effort into achieving this healthy lifestyle, and ultimately this particular physique (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 69). The popularity of these images, and subsequent saturation, may make this particular bodily presentation "both attainable and normative, desensitizing women from their generally unobtainable nature" (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 69). And this very popular bodily presentation potentially commands even greater restrictions than other idealized bodies in media (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 763).

It is also possible that the link between viewing fitspiration images and body image concerns are "bidirectional, in that women high in body image concerns may choose to view more fitspiration images on Instagram, which may then increase their concerns with their body" (Fardouly et al., 2017, p. 12). There is also the issue of the reinforcement of gendered body ideals: "fitspiration on social media often encourages exercises in order to reach an appearance aligned with gendered body image ideals" (Carrotte, Prichard, & Lim, 2017, p. 7). Not only might the content suggest that only thin and toned bodies equate to healthy and fit bodies (Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), it also suggests that healthy and fit is "equivalent to fitting in with current masculine and feminine body ideals; in many posts fitness and beauty were depicted as being essentially the same concept" (Carrotte et al., 2017, p. 7). Most of the content reviewed by Boepple, Ata, Rum, & Thompson (2016) emphasized physical appearance and the messages related to exercises were in the context of doing so for appearance-related reasons rather than for health or pleasure (p. 134). As this review will make evident, exercising for appearance-related reasons is also associated with negative outcomes. Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) write that social comparison to fitspiration images may be higher given that the women presented, at least for the most part, are not models, but rather "everyday" women (p. 62).

The vast majority of these analyses and discussions, however, arise from research that does not engage in discussion with the demographic that is most often engaging with this imagery. That is,

they are mostly correlational, experimental, or the result of content analyses. Of the studies I reviewed, only two involved in-depth qualitative research, and the analyses are much more nuanced, though less specific to fitspiration.

Qualitative research – online fitness culture and technologies. Though neither of the following studies draw on qualitative data centered on fitspiration specifically, both engage young women in discussions of online fitness culture and digital health and fitness apps and therefore are relevant to this discussion.

First, Jong & Drummond (2016) combined a "netnography" along with semi-structured individual interviews with female participants in Australia between the ages of 18-24. They sought to examine the "growing impact of the online fitness movement" and used social networking services (SNSs) in gathering health information (p. 758). In this study, participants had either Facebook or Instagram accounts. They also had to identify with, and consider themselves to belong to, the online fitness community (p. 762). Their findings suggest that there is still work to be done in promoting "the idea that healthy can be embodied in diverse shapes and sizes" (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 767). Despite the opportunity for fitness accounts on SNSs to "offer differing notions to present alternative and competing realities, users predominantly chose to follow the normalized and dominant health discourses" (p. 758). Of note, their research and participants suggest that the responsibility for adhering to "norms of correct healthy practices and choices" (p. 758) very clearly falls on the individual as per the messages in health and fitness content, a theme that will be discussed later in this review.

Depper & Howe (2017) also conducted focus groups. In this study, they interviewed "Sports Leaders" at an English State grammar school between the ages of 14-17 to explore their use of health and fitness apps. They write that "the girls negotiated, and at times critiqued, the multiple health discourses that are manifest through digital health technologies and performative health culture" (p. 98). One of the reasons for this particular study is the lack of in-depth analysis of individuals' experiences of mobile health (m-health) (p. 108). But given that these girls are Sports Leaders in their schools, the authors are clear that this group is not representative of all

teens. The participants in this study enjoyed socializing and PE, but this is certainly not all girls' experience and, indeed, research indicates that many girls "feel self-conscious, unhappy and uncomfortable within PE classes" (p. 108). Given the emphasis on their own physicality as Sports Leaders, it is possible that these girls may be more physically self-aware, and discerning towards the images promoted by the aps, given their lived experiences as athletes.

The participants in the Sports Leader group criticized the focus on the individual (a theme that runs through Jong & Drummond's 2016 study), the promotion of narrow health ideals, and the reduction of the social aspect of health and fitness activities (p. 105). Though they did not refer to health in terms of being free from illness or "slender," the girls did move beyond the discourses often emphasized in schools and in digital health and fitness spaces and media, to emphasize the social, emotional, and physical dimensions of healthy lifestyles (pp. 104-105). They were critically aware "that individuals might strive to appear to engage in self-discipline to gain the supportive effects of conforming to an 'ideal' body" (p. 103) and it is here that this particular study makes a link to the fitspiration trend as the authors write that this notion resonates with 'fitspiration' discourse (p. 103). The girls are also critically aware of the promotion of an "ideal" body in the apps, and that the bodies that are represented were unrealistic and may demotivate other girls (pp. 106-107). It is important to keep in mind, however, that the experience of the body and perceptions of health and/or fitness may have been wildly different for girls outside of the Sports Leaders program and would have been an interesting comparison.

Depper & Howe (2017) sought to move beyond the understanding of health and fitness apps as 'technologies of dominance' and tools for health intervention in schools. Instead they "capture the repressive yet also creative opportunities, uncertainties and contradictions within digital health . . . [and explore] the girls' negotiation of numerous discourses of health embedded in digital technologies" (p. 102). They move beyond the view of adolescents as cultural dupes to individuals able to "resist performative ideals of the virtuous bio-citizen" and conclude that their

analysis is in line with Foucault's belief that "discourse can be created, negotiated and resisted" (pp. 107-108). I will turn to Foucault again in Part 2 of this review.

Demographic considerations and platform considerations. Emerging research shows a correlation between time spent on *Facebook* and poorer body image among adolescent and adult women. This includes body dissatisfaction and internalizing the thin ideal (Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). The amount of time spent engaging in photo activity (liking, commenting, sharing, viewing) in particular has been associated with body image concerns (Slater et al., 2017; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Perhaps unsurprisingly, social comparison is a strong factor in the association between body image concerns and Facebook usage (Fardouly et al., 2017, p. 3).

Instagram, given its focus on visual content (primarily photos and videos), is the source of recent research around body image concerns (for example: Fardouly et al., 2017; Slater et al., 2017, p. 88; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). It is possible that Instagram may have stronger associations with body image, whether positive or negative, than other platforms given its unique focus on photo activity and the way this media is transmitted and accessed versus older platforms and conventional media (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015, p. 65). Fardouly et al. (2017) note that "[g]reater overall Instagram use was associated with greater self-objectification" (p. 1). There may, however, be a difference in social comparison across Facebook and Instagram, given the ease and frequency with which users can follow and observe celebrities and models on Instagram versus the peer-based Facebook (Fardouly et al., 2017, pp. 3). Also of note, Fardouly et al. (2017) linked Instagram use with self-objectification, but not a body dissatisfaction/drive for thinness. This is in contrast to research on other social media platforms. One possibility for this discrepancy offered by the authors is that women on Instagram may view more images of celebrities than on Facebook and if looking like a celebrity is deemed less attainable than the appearance of peers, that type of social comparison may have less influence on body dissatisfaction/drive for thinness, although this is speculative (Fardouly et al., 2017, pp. 10-11). Ultimately, the study by Fardouly et al. (2017) suggests that "Instagram usage may negatively influence women's appearance-related concerns and beliefs, particularly if they have internalized

the beauty ideal and if they make appearance comparisons to others on Instagram" (Fardouly et al., 2017, p. 13).

Social media practices in health & fitness. With regards to online information searching, Jong & Drummond (2016) write that "information found online is highly trusted [though it is unclear whether social media is explicitly included], with young people modifying their behaviour on the basis of the information gathered" (pp. 758-759). They also suggest that social media is a relevant factor in influencing health behaviours. In particular, the impact on health behavior is emphasized by the relationship between peer influence and the interactive nature of social media platforms (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 759). Emphasizing the ease of access to health and fitness information/content, one participant in Jong and Drummond's (2016) study says:

> 'back in the day if you wanted a gym program you couldn't just jump online and have a look at people's pages and see what the best thing to do is, you actually had to go and speak to a trainer. Whereas these days you can jump onto any social media and get a whole list of anything you can do.' (p. 763)

It is unclear, however, whether jumping online to "have a look at people's pages and see what the best thing to do is" is referencing an "expert" or someone who simply has health and fitness-related information on their social networking site. Given the proliferation of health and fitness content online, and the proliferation of fitspiration content, extending research related to health and fitness media to social media (and beyond fitspiration-specific spaces) is particularly important given the ease of access, especially among young women, and the assertion that social media is now more popular than legacy/conventional media (Slater et al., 2017, p. 88).

Part 2: Theory, discipline, and discourse

In order to expand on the topic of health and fitness content in social media, and Instagram in particular, I have chosen to include a more in-depth analysis of theoretical issues and concepts, many of which have been woven through much of the literature described in Part 1

of this review. This will also be helpful in analysing and discussing the participant data of this project in Chapter 4. I have organized this particular section by first reviewing multiple layers of dominant (disciplining) discourses that may contribute to shaping fitness and health media and the conceptualization of the healthy and fit body. These discourses tend to overlap and work in tandem with one another, but I have broken them down into subsections in an attempt to address them more cohesively. I end this section by considering how these discourses intersect with other discourses and concepts of discipline and control. Many of these layers appear to be influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, which I will address more explicitly at the end of this section.

The moral, the political, and the individual. The fit body has moved far beyond the actual reality of fitness in the physiological sense. It "has become a critical determinant of social status and a factor that is self-policed by individuals as they negotiate social positions" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 12). Researchers have discussed and argued that "the right kind of body reinforces not only privileged social locations, but types of moralities" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 11). And in thinking more about morality, scholars like Crawford (1980) use the term healthism. The concept of healthism has little to do with actual health and refers to "the ways in which contemporary capitalist culture is infused with notions of 'health' and health promotion that reveal assumptions about normality, well-being, and morality" which are situated "at the level of the individual. [And s]olutions are formulated at that level as well" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 11; O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, pp. 196-197). Lacking in physical health becomes lacking in moral health. And this notion of the individual is something that we see across work in the area, but also in the qualitative work I reviewed.

The pursuit of body work, particularly in pursuit of the appearance (or image) of health, within the context of morality and individualism may also produce a socially depoliticized subject:

> The importance of bodily display as a means to internalize individualized solutions to structural problems is problematic, as it is likely that muscles, strong abs, and a new tie or shirt cannot resolve ongoing global complexities. Just as corporations profit from offering

> the most privileged women 'Just Do It' (e.g., Nike) slogans which tout empowerment to women by selling liberal feminist ideologies of freedom through an individualized, fit bodily politics . . . men too are falsely sold masculinist promises that fit bodies will likely not bring. (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 103)

Paterson (2006) also writes that the acceptance of an ideology of consumerism that centers on creating and promoting "the need for things not strictly necessary for survival ['false needs'] . . . leads to a depoliticised conformity, effectively limiting our goals and actions only to those realisable within the framework of capitalism" (p. 27). This renders political choice all but meaningless. Within discourses of sport, fitness, and holistic health, body work might have a similar effect, also leading to a depoliticized conformity: "the social, political and economic forces constricting women's lives are imagined as 'something that can be overcome by working out and on the body,'" (Heinecken, 2013, p. 32). I would extend this by arguing that working on the body in the face of economic and political instability acts as an accessible and tangible distraction, and offers an immediate sense of control.

Maguire (2006) discussed the disciplining and control of the body in the context of economic and political instability following 9/11. At a time of hyper insecurity, risk, doubt and danger, gym memberships boomed. Maguire writes that, at these moments, "the body becomes all the more precious as a vestige of individual competence and control" (p. 127). Another example is noted in the copy of Title Nine apparel following the economic collapse in 2009. It encourages consumers to simply go for a run: "I can stop worrying about my fiscal fitness and actually do something about my physical fitness. I can't control the markets but I can control my mind, my body, my attitudes. The rest will have to take care of itself because I am going for a run" (Heinecken, 2013, p. 37). In these instances, sport and fitness act as sites of depoliticization and conformity in the broader political and economic context. Heinecken writes that Title Nine's "[s]uggestions that readers will realize their 'best self' only when they give *up* attempts to control larger external circumstances and simply 'go for a run,' . . . advocates an apolitical and solipsistic identity for the female athlete" (Heinecken, 2013, p. 37). Not only is there no need to

engage in political activity or even to ask questions as these examples suggest, there is no time. The project of bodily discipline is a time-consuming project.

Consumer narratives and discourses. Washington & Economides (2016) highlight the relationship between "consumer culture and the emphasis on looking good through fitness" (p. 146). Fitness was once a function of everyday life, but we are now simulating it artificially (in many instances) since we are no longer particularly active (keystrokes versus physical labour). Drawing on Coffey (2013), Markula (2001), and Duncan and Klos (2014), Washington and Economides (2016) write that in a Western, "industrialized, and consumerist society," body work is highly valued (body work as maintenance and modification). They note that contradictory discourses regarding diet and fitness in fitness magazines were 'essential.' For "'women to achieve their proper womanly status, they *must* . . . feel that their femininity emerges by becoming the best they can be through purchase of appropriate products and services'" (p. 146). So here we see not only the consumption narrative, but also the narrative as it relates to stereotypical gendered ideals.

Drawing on Featherstone (1991), Dworkin & Wachs (2009) write that "[t]he production of gendered bodily ideals that require daily practices and purchases to cumulatively form and sustain them is part of the shift to perspectives of the body as consumer in the postindustrial period" (p. 8). Our bodies are now judged as our capacity for individual production; they are our "calling card vested with showing the result of our hard work and watchfulness or, alternatively, our failure and sloth" (Orbach, 2009, p. 5). The body of the manual worker used to be "easily identified through brawn and muscle, now it is the middle-class body that must show evidence of being worked on at the gym…or any number of body practices which aim to display what the individual has achieved through diligent exercise" (Orbach, 2009, pp. 5-6). The pre-industrial body was something that differentiated the slave/labourer/working-class individual from the middle, or upper class ruling elites: sun, visible musculature, etcetera. Their labour was inscribed on their bodies. The post-industrial body of the middle and upper classes is now more clearly marked than ever by the same inscription that once belonged to lower classes. To achieve this

healthy and fit body, the one of tan, brawn, and muscle, one must have time, money, and other resources available, particularly if this body is not the product of physical labour. And the capacity to produce is as much tied to the economy as it is to the body, and both reflect a particular class stratification.

The tension between labour, servitude, and liberty described by O'Brien & Szeman (2014) as part of the Industrial Revolution might be similar to the tension between discourses around the body and its discipline as liberatory. The body comes to signify both capital and morality (as discussed above), particularly in its display via health and fitness media. Every body part, it would seem, "is part of an endless process of marketplace definition. . . . the consumer begins to see his or her body as an alien object that must be constantly managed through consumption to preserve position and identity" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 10), morality and control. I use the term control because I think it both signifies (internal) self-discipline to shape the body as well as external (often consumer) discourses that define only a particular body as healthy and fit and frame its achievement as a type of freedom.

The intimacy of the body and the pleasure of exercise is confined "within a language of self-discipline…. Bodily discipline in one sphere (exercise) becomes the alibi for indulgence in another (shopping)" (Maguire, 2006, p. 126). This link between bodily discipline (exercise) and pleasure and consumption is highlighted when Paterson (2006) describes the connection between the rise of the individual, "an unashamed commitment to pleasure" and Romanticism: it was Romanticism that "provided that philosophy of 'recreation' necessary for a dynamic consumerism" (p. 24). Keeping fit today, seemingly one of our favourite recreational pastimes, is one avenue to consume tomorrow. Even though the notion of pleasure may not be immediately associated with discipline, Maguire (2006) argues that "self-discipline and self-gratification are not irreconcilable," particularly in the fitness discourse because they are configured as "temporally and spatially separate aspects of the same lifestyle: do two more sit-ups now, so you can buy the new dress, new sneakers, or new watch later" (p. 126). In a world that is seemingly obsessed with instant gratification, the relationship between self-discipline (fitness) and self-

gratification (consumption) may be one relationship in which gratification is both instant (endorphins) and delayed (consumption).

Advertising. Over the ten years that Dworkin & Wachs (2009) evaluated health and fitness magazine content, they note the blurring of editorial content with advertising and the seamless merging of the imagery, noting that "one cannot meaningfully separate magazine content from ads in many places" (p. 36). This is an important distinction that can be extended to the social media context because sponsored content is not necessarily explicit and framed as such. If users scroll through images without engaging with the text, hashtags, or links, one cannot know what is advertising or not (and often it could be both). Sponsored content or product endorsement can appear the same as a personal photo, particularly as more and more bodies become brands in themselves. Also, if a user does not disclose that their apparel or products are sponsored, it can be nearly impossible to know which images contain corporate content.

Jong & Drummond (2016) echo this conclusion in their study of online fitness culture: the "idea of health online is increasingly being governed by a hybrid mix of popular participants and advertising companies with business interests" (p.765). Personal content versus sponsored or corporate content is not always easy to distinguish. And though audiences may be aware of the commercial aspect of social media and online apps, as well as critical of apps that "make money on individuals trying to lose weight," health and fitness monitoring apps appear to be "perceived as appealing business investments" (Depper & Howe, 2017, pp. 105-106). Most media requires advertising to generate profit, so it is no wonder that "aesthetically oriented consumption" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 178) is so appealing (and valuable) for advertising purposes, which I will discuss next.

The appearance of fitness as visual discourse. As an extension of the commercial aspects of health and fitness media, appearance as a marker of health and fitness makes sense. Emphasizing appearance markers (appearance-based fitness or aesthetically-oriented fitness) over achievement or functionality markers ties "more centrally to individualized consumption

narratives," and allows the body to be nothing more than an object of consumption and site from which to consume (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, pp. 23, 152-153). In terms of outcomes, research suggests a link between engaging in exercise or health-behaviors for appearance reasons with negative outcomes, such as negative body image and eating outcomes and higher levels of body shame. Exercising for other reasons, such as health, enjoyment, or functionality though, is associated with decreased body dissatisfaction (Boepple et al. 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo 2015).

So it is a problem, as discussed by Jong & Drummond (2016), that online fitness accounts reinforce "the use of exercise in the quest for thinness, and further the association with thinness and healthiness" (p. 762). This creates a clear link between fitness accounts and exercise or health-behaviors in the pursuit of appearance goals. Not surprisingly, achieving a healthy body is often visually determined by online fitness communities and the discourse that ensues is one that associates weight with health and body shape with health, which ultimately emphasizes the appearance of the body (p. 763). This is likely even more so on specific media platforms such as Instagram given the emphasis on photos. Depper & Howe (2017) also note how "transformation discourse," and the "before and after," is a common theme in online fitness media (p. 104) in their study with adolescent girls. It is important to note, though, that even if exercising or engaging in health-behaviors can be appearance motivated and may serve as a vehicle for consumption, doing so may also be perceived as positive. The girls in Depper and Howe's study note that "illustrating the transformation of a body could significantly motivate other individuals to engage in fitness pursuits" (p. 103). Given the visual nature of many social media platforms, Instagram in particular, appearance-based or aesthetically-oriented fitness media is worth investigating.

Gender and femininities. The following sections analyze discourses that center on gender and femininity in the context of fitness and sport in particular. The discussion engages with some of the disciplining discourses described above. It also centers on the ways in which disciplining discourses are shifting and adapting to include a wider range of femininities and the

(possible) shift towards increasingly muscular bodily representations or athletic femininities in popular media.

Sport and fitness as a marker of contemporary feminine success. Azzarito (2010) describes *The Future Girl* as one of two emerging, and monocultural, discourses of "powerful sporty, fit and healthy femininities that contradict discourses of the traditional feminine docile body" (p. 261). The sporty, healthy, fit, globally available, and ultimately achievable Future Girl "emblematically represent[s] new femininities, self-made, ambitious and independent girls, to whom sport and career paths are the most important areas of self-definition and of success in society" (p. 266). Sport is proposed as "'a perfect vehicle for normalizing girls to occupy some of the higher managerial positions," as a "site of transformation . . . of self-discipline and regulation for the global market place" and a site in which "[i]Inactive, fat, unhealthy girls, girls who 'throw like girls' become 'losers' in the eyes of the Future Girl" (pp. 266-268).

To ensure minimal burden on the state, the Future Girl constantly reinvents herself. Tied to the project of globalization, "discourses of the Future Girl rely on the promotion of an image of girls' success in sport concurring with the projects of the global economy; her success in sport reflects a projection of girls' future success in the corporate world" (pp. 267-268). As such, sport may be the perfect vehicle by which to produce a good corporate citizen. The representation of an empowered, sporting femininity "creates the illusion that the new feminine body ideals are available to all girls, and paradoxically neo-liberal images of an achieved gender equity obscure the ways that some girls' physicalities are constrained by poverty, or lack of access" to (Western) standards of health and physical activity (p. 270). It is the "fantasy of total choice, freedom and opportunity," where one simply must decide that she, too, can achieve the same body ideals and therefore success (pp. 267-268). The question of race is less explicit, but Azzarito (2010) argues that these [sports] "images subsume race, class, religion and disability" (p. 261), which defaults to able-bodied, Western, and primarily white. In spite of continued gender inequality in sport participation and inequality among race and class categories (p. 262), the fantasy of opportunity and equality afforded girls via sport persists.

Whose femininities? Considering third wave feminism. Based on Azzarito's (2010) description of the sporty 'Future Girl' femininity, it seems that girls who already are "the most institutionally privileged are most likely to be able to garner the benefits from successfully acquiring signifiers of the fit body" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 104). As noted by Azzarito (2010), sport and fitness participation has become a sign of the successful woman complete with the apparel, the equipment, the supplements, and other accessories. However, participation is limited to those who can afford it.

I think, at least in part, both Dworkin & Wachs (2009) and Azzarito (2010) are referring to commodity fetishism. The objects and commodities that signify a healthy and fit lifestyle are divorced from the human labour that produced it. The divorce of value from utility and labour means that labour becomes hidden, as do the laborers: "the real producers of commodities remain largely invisible…. Since we only ever relate to those products through the exchange of money, we forget the 'secret hidden under the apparent movements in the relative values of commodities' that is labor" (Felluga, 2011, para. 2). The *representation* of a healthy and fit body conceals the human relations and realities of the economic *production* of the "healthy body" and the mythology around a healthy lifestyle (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 27). Couched in a rhetoric of empowerment, the visual culture surrounding the healthy (Western) body may rely on bodies that may labour under conditions of economic and other forms of exploitation. Beyond the labour of the body (body work), whose labour makes possible the bodies we see most frequently? I think it is worth exploring if those whose labor makes this particular bodily presentation possible are also those who are not represented in the media that displays this depiction of health and fitness.

Third wave feminism. Third wave feminism may offer a way to address and to engage with some of the problems outlined above. Consider the way it is described by Dworkin & Wachs (2009): third wave feminism "problematizes that the ways that some women work to acquire privilege can be part of a system that oppresses others . . . [and] broadens the fight to recognize that equity is a multifaceted problem" (p. 139). The liberatory potential, whether real

or imagined, and the discursive tension around body work and discipline as liberatory, is most often available to first world women via consumer culture and relies, at least in part, on "the disenfranchisement and, in some cases, virtual enslavement of women in other regions of the world" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 140). But to suggest that all body work and contemporary health and/or fitness practices and media is bad, full stop, is not helpful.

Third wave perspectives on fitness and sport engage with the complications outlined above and may offer a way to promote discussion about the ways in which some women may find liberation at the cost of the disenfranchisement of other women in the context of health and/or fitness. Or perhaps a way to think about whether or not this bodily presentation can be liberatory if it relies on disciplining and consumer discourses. It would appear that as "women's market power grows, middle-class women gain social power and prestige, but this is a small subset of women" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 140). One perspective is that ideas and bodily ideals associated with sporty and fit femininities broaden the possibilities for, and include a wider range of femininities, than might previously have been allowed. But Dworkin & Wachs (2009) note that "[w]hile women's new fit bodies are celebrated as normalizing a wider range of beauty ideals for women, research suggests the parameters of femininity still contain significant size requirements" (p. 77). Given that they were writing almost a decade ago, it is difficult to know if the parameters they are referring to are quite as constrained today. However, it may be possible that the parameters of femininity and the range of possible beauty ideals for women in media is broadening in part via the popularity of sport and fitness discourses, but there are, undoubtedly, numerous complications and tensions associated with shifting femininities. The next section provides an exemplar of this tension.

Shifting femininities: the CrossFit^2 example. Women's participation and depiction in CrossFit (a high-intensity training program focused on gymnastics and Olympic weightlifting and powerlifting) may be a good example of the complications and tensions associated with possible shifting femininities and changing bodily ideals via fitness and sports media. Washington & Economides (2016) explored whether or not the framing of women in CrossFit

(CF) would offer "a counter to traditional narratives about the masculinity/manliness of women in competitive sports focused on the body like weightlifting and bodybuilding or contact sports like rugby or hockey" (p. 144). They concluded that, though "CrossFit expanded possibilities for the female body," it continues "to mirror the hegemonic archetype of attractive and heteronormative femininity" (p. 143).

The authors examined the rhetoric used by CF (mostly corporate content) through the CrossFit YouTube channel, the CrossFit website, and some Instagram data to "articulate" their ideal woman to participants (p. 143). While CF prizes strength and performance, Washington & Economides (2016) describe how the reverse is often true in its depiction of women. Women serve to legitimize CF's effectiveness by showcasing women competing against elite male law enforcement/military personnel. And while showcasing "competency, strength, and skill" is a good thing, the authors provide numerous examples of the tension between performance/strength and beauty ideals and corporeal aesthetics in the CF narrative. For instance, language like "not just a pretty face," "easily mistaken for a model," and "perfect combination of beauty and strength," describe CrossFit's more traditionally feminine athletes. Women who are less overtly feminine or who do not as neatly subscribe to the "stereotypical" feminine displays (tight clothing, makeup, hair) are treated differently in official CF rhetoric. Despite their success in competitive CrossFit competitions, they receive less coverage than other competitors (Washington & Economides, 2016, p. 156) and their feminization is created via their description as nurturers and mothers. Valerie Voboril, a mother, teacher and older competitor by CrossFit standards, and Julie Foucher, a medical student, both typically compete with little to no makeup and wear more clothing. They are two examples of women who do not fit the feminine CrossFit norm and their treatment appears to be different: "marginalized by the promotional machinations of CF for failing to offer up her body to the gaze" (Washington & Economides, 2016, pp. 152-153).

Washington & Economides (2016), similar to Dworkin & Wachs' (2009) assertions about print media, write that as a business and sport, CF "traffics almost exclusively in

heteronormative Whiteness" (p. 153). The most successful woman of color in CrossFit competitions is American Kris(tan) Clever (who is both queer and Asian). They write that her "buzzed hairstyle combined with her choice to compete in long, loose shorts and t-shirts means she is framed differently from the other elite athletes. Of all the women athletes we focus on, Clever is shown almost always in action or talking about her performance," which is more overtly compared to men's performances (Washington & Economides, 2016, p. 155). Ultimately, the authors conclude that CF's discourse on its ideal participant "interpolates very specific kinds of women. These women are not too old, already or formerly very active, overwhelmingly white, and have access to the resources needed to be successful, especially money, time, and energy" (Washington & Economides, 2016, p. 155). So even if in some instances CrossFit expanded the possibilities for the depiction of femininity in popular sports and fitness media, it would appear that successful femininity in CrossFit media is still constrained by discourse related to race and ethnicity, class, and consumption.

Strong, but unruly? Natural, but pathological? Drawing on Gill (2007), Washington & Economides (2016) write that women's bodies are "'presented simultaneously as [a] source of power and as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness" (p. 150). Magazines, according to Dworkin & Wachs (2009), also present bodies as natural while simultaneously requiring "constant interference" (p. 177). Both seem to suggest that the pre-fit/pre-sporty *and* post-fit/post-sporty are pathological and require discipline and control. This reminds me of the double bind described by Cooky (2006) in which sports participation by "real women" is a threat to their femininity. The female athlete or "fit female" requires "more surveillance due to the fact that sport constitutes a pathological body [in terms of sweat, dirt, and odor] which requires maintenance surpassing traditional technologies of femininity" (Cooky, 2006, pp. 103-104). This discourse is echoed by Heinecken (2013) when she argues that Title Nine, the athletic wear company and sports bra "experts," frames the female body as strong and empowered, but company discourse "encourage[s] readers to understand their

'pre-sport' identity as pathological and in need of holistic discipline" (p. 41). So not only is monitoring, discipline, and remodeling of the body required to meet the sporty or athletic ideal, so too is internalizing the pre-sport or pre-fitness body and the sporty/fit body as still pathological (sweaty, dirty, smelly), requiring a second disciplining process to reign in the fit/sporty body. Talk about tension.

Drawing on Foucault. A number of the studies I reviewed reference and extend Foucauldian ideas, including surveillance and docile bodies, discipline, and biopower. As a final subtheme I would like to discuss some of the ideas and theories that are referenced and extended in the literature I reviewed. In considering the layers of (disciplining) dominant discourses related to health and fitness I have described above, it is worthwhile to consider these Foucauldian concepts as they bring together both discipline and discourse as well as illuminate some of the aspects of new media technologies that may reinforce such discourses and disciplining processes.

Surveillance and docile bodies. Reciprocity features prominently in social surveillance, just as it does in social media. Marwick (2012) describes reciprocity as one of three axes that distinguish it from traditional forms of surveillance (along with power and hierarchy). In order to differentiate social surveillance from other, more traditional concepts of surveillance, power (drawing on Foucault's theory of capillaries of power) must be conceptualized as "intrinsic to every social relationship, as micro-level and de-centralized, rather than as dualistic or modernistic," (p. 379). The hierarchical structure of social surveillance must be conceptualized as symmetrical, between individuals, rather than the asymmetry of traditional models of surveillance "in which individuals are surveilled by structural entities, [and] the balance of power [is] overwhelmingly tipped in favor of the surveillor," (p. 380). Finally, social surveillance must be conceptualized as reciprocal: each individual participant "is both broadcasting information that is looked at by others and looking at information broadcast by others" (Marwick, 2012, pp. 379). This reciprocity requires a push-pull of disclosure and concealment (Marwick, 2012, p. 390). This is echoed by Dworkin & Wachs (2009) in describing the transition to contemporary

society in which power, like traditional notions of surveillance, is not monopolized by one group and used to oppress and dominate another, but is rather "dispersed and involves a willingness to internalize the gaze of a generalized other who may be watching" (p. 15), which is similar to how I imagine social surveillance.

Social Surveillance. Social surveillance can have effects similar to the concept of the Panopticon, where "the potential of being watched by others contextualizes [one's] own surveillance" (Marwick, 2012, p. 379). But rather than conceptualizing a more traditional model of surveillance as a mechanism to "manage, control, or influence a particular population, social surveillance leads to self-management and direction on the part of social media users" (Marwick, 2012, p. 381). As such, the reciprocal nature of social surveillance, and the expectation of being watched, might then be better characterized by a slightly different type of power in which "the many watch the many," referred to by Jurgenson and Ritzer as the 'omniopticon' (Marwick, 2012, p. 383). Social media can, depending on its structure or features, create communities that are characterized or defined most markedly by surveillance practices, particularly those in which bodily discipline, common in health and fitness communities, is central.

If individuals and societies use monitoring to normalise individuals into docile bodies, we need to consider how monitoring the body through health and fitness media, particularly digital apps that track user information, is used to fashion docile bodies (Depper & Howe, 2017, p. 100). The concept of docile bodies is also relevant in relation to the shift from sports media to fitness media. If fitness media is, indeed, more focused on appearance markers and a continual quest for self-improvement associated with rules and regulations around self-governance to achieve these markers, the production of docile bodies is perhaps a logical extension of this shift. The creation of a "passive subject focused on display is part of this process [of creating docile bodies]" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 155), and passivity may well be a marker of fitness media at least compared to sport. If you're busy working on your body, what aren't you doing? This leads us back to the notion of depoliticization. And what happens when your data does not conform to the norm? An extension to this would be to consider what happens when not only

does your data not conform to the norm (however that is calculated), but what happens when your (non-conforming) data is made public? In 2014, Parmy Olson, a writer at Forbes, indicated that employers were starting to use data recorded by wearable fitness trackers to hold "insured staff to account" in terms of rewards as part of corporate wellness programs and as a means to explore punishments for bad behavior (para. 3-4). Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of Fitbit's largest growth areas in terms of sales are sales to employers (para.4).

Biopedagogies. If we conceptualize online fitness culture more generally, and digital health and fitness apps more specifically, as a platform whereby "certain disciplinary and regulatory strategies (of health and the feminine body) are effectively promoted," we can link it to the concept of biopedagogy. Biopedagogies, according to Wright (2009), draws on Foucault's (1984) concept of biopower: "the governance and regulation of individuals and populations through practices associated with the body" (p.2) or, more simply, training bodies how to live. Drawing on Wright (2009), Jong & Drummond write that the term 'biopedagogies' refers to the "'disciplinary and regulatory strategies that enable the governing of bodies in the name of health and life'" (p. 760) and, in particular, the "normalizing and regulating practices in schools" and in other media (Wright, 2009, p. 2).

If we consider the social media landscape, Jong & Drummond (2016) explain how biobedagogies can be created via hashtags:

> By populating news feeds with images of healthy food, fit bodies and video exercises, accompanied by a proliferation of professional and unprofessional advice, the use of hashtags can be viewed as another strategy for consumption of health messages. For example, through the use of the hashtag 'fitspiration,' a biopedagogy is created as the health messages circulated act as 'instruction' which direct users to regulate their body by eating healthily and staying active. (p. 764)

Further, hashtags can be conceptualized as cognitive organizers in much the same way headlines can be in traditional print media. Yasmin Jiwani (2012) draws on van Djik (1991) in describing headlines as cognitive organizers: "they organize information, making it possible for

audiences to apprehend immediately how such information should be read and remembered . . . they organized the information so that the reader could anticipate what was to follow and how it should be read" (p. 118). Based on my research and review of the literature, the same is true for hashtags, particularly if we consider them through the lens of biopedagogies.

Agency and/or the gaze. In discussing celebrities in particular, agency, according to Dubrofsky & Wood (2015), seems to be attributed disproportionately to celebrity white women self-representing and displaying their bodies online through the labor associated with being fit and healthy: "while white women are presented as actively fashioning their bodies for public display (through exercise and diet), the few bodies of celebrities presented as women of color . . . are positioned as always already gaze-worthy, reducing their agency" (p. 94). So, where white women are described as laboring for the gaze with diet and exercise, women of color are framed as being already, innately, gaze-worthy. Earlier in this chapter, I noted that Dworkin & Wachs (2009) concluded that people of color are "left out of the frame" of health and fitness print media unless for the purpose of furthering the "progressiveness" of advertisers and promoting the consumer narrative. Here, Dubrofsky & Wood (2015) are distinguishing the ways in which the gaze appears to operate within the context of health and fitness, and note that women of color are positioned as already gaze-worthy versus their celebrity white counterparts. In both instances, the possibilities for people of color to be framed as healthy and/or fit (and agents) are limited if not negated. The likelihood of people of color being associated with the negative stigmas linked to unhealthy bodies or the stereotypes associated with sexualized bodies becomes exponentially greater as a result.

From here, I think discussion of the male gaze is important (see Mulvey, 1975), and certainly helpful in an analysis of how mainstream media portrays women, but I wonder if it is possible to extend the notion of the male gaze in social, participatory, media. Ann Kaplan argues that "even though one does not literally or necessarily have to be 'male' to own and activate the gaze, the male gaze functions as 'masculine' . . . it occupies a masculine subject position – one that objectifies the image gazed upon" (Dubrofsky & Wood, 2015, p. 97). I am not convinced

that this is always the most helpful perspective, particularly when talking about women actively fashioning their bodies through diet and exercise for public display online. Particularly in spaces where women gaze at women, while there may be elements of objectification at play, a more nuanced approach might be to conceive of the gaze as reflexive. Similar to how Rachel Hall refers to body fashioning as "'a gendered model of reflexive governance' . . . that is, women self-reflexively participate in and regulate the display of their bodies" (Dubrofsky & Wood, 2015, p. 101), there is a space in which the gaze, objectification and all, functions more fluidly and is not uniquely masculine even if elements of the male gaze are present. Social media platforms or online "communities" that are built around accountability and self- and co-monitoring of the body certainly invite a gaze, but it seems as though it might be helpful to think about the ways in which it might differ from that which objectifies women specifically for male pleasure. And as more and more men feature prominently in similar ways to how women have traditionally been portrayed in media (and in particular now that they seem to feature almost as prominently as women in sexualized and objectified positions in health and fitness media online), it might be time to revisit how we conceive of the gaze.

Part 3: Alternative interpretations, limitations and gaps

Before addressing some of the limitations in the literature reviewed here, and discussing the current gaps, it is important to discuss the possibility that health and fitness media in general, and health and fitness media online more specifically, may be a very positive experience for some audiences.

Positive possibilities. In spite of the criticism of the ways in which women who do CrossFit[2] (CF) are framed via the official rhetoric, the representation of strong women can certainly be empowering and positive. One teen CF participant describes "the struggle she had with her appearance and health before joining her local CF gym" and because of the assertion that sports performance is privileged over appearance, she says that "the 'community has surrounded teenagers with positive role models, not anorexic bikini models'" (Washington &

Economides, 2016, p. 150). What might be problematic here is that we again see the association of health and/or fitness with appearance-based markers. And while I take issue with the latter statement regarding bikini models, it would be short-sighted to discount the commentary and assertions of women participating in certain sport and fitness regimes regarding their positive experiences and sense of empowerment. Washington & Economides (2016) also conclude that the CrossFit discourse is, as expected, "polysemic and contradictory," and that it draws on a "postfeminist sensibility in regard to its women participants that is both feminist and anti-feminist, which ultimately creates a space for negotiation and possibly resistance" (p. 145). They also note that recent research by Leslie Heywood "frames CF as an 'ideal neoliberal body practice' [and] shows how it reinforces ideal femininity while occasionally disrupting normative gender roles . . . and examines the sociospatial practices that both reproduce and resist ideal femininity and hegemonic masculinity" (Washington & Economides, 2016, pp. 145-146). It may be more worthwhile to analyze the ways in which normative gender roles are (and could be) disrupted within health and fitness media as well as how it creates instances in which normative and conventional depictions can be negotiated and resisted.

Carrotte et al. (2017) also note that, despite the concerns with audiences viewing fitspiration, "it is possible that social media users viewing fitspiration are inspired to exercise, and that they view fitspiration in a positive manner," and appreciate the ease of access to health and fitness information. They acknowledge that in spite of the problems, many fitspiration posts on social media contain what they describe as "balanced approaches to health and fitness" (p. 7). Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) also demonstrate that fitspiration images can lead to feeling inspired, similarly to how travel images can lead to feeling inspired to travel and thus fitspiration can have "their desired effect of inspiring viewers to engage in health behaviours" (p. 66). If fitspiration's general philosophy does emphasize strength and empowerment (or is at least interpreted to emphasize it), fitspiration may have a positive influence on the physical and mental health of people who view and engage with it (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015, p. 62).

As Dworkin & Wachs (2009) indicate, consumer culture can also be interpreted "as a medium through which individuals find/use/deploy possibilities for resistance and social change" and deploy positive agency (pp. 15-16). Previous research "has highlighted how feminism and sport intersect to stretch physical ideals well beyond docility to include physical empowerment, independence, muscularity, and athletic competence" (p. 109). Additionally, the focus groups they conducted with young people in a classroom setting also yielded positive reactions to images of fit and athletic women: boys said they felt the women "could 'protect them'" and girls reported more interest in learning new sports (p. 17). The feminist movement, at least in part, has made it much easier for women "to entertain goals and lifestyles that are not specifically 'gender appropriate'" (p. 157). Though they do caution that those same goals and lifestyles may be "built on neoliberal notions of success, individualism, market power, and fit and sexy forms" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, pp. 156-157), there may still be a number of positive outcomes associated with fitness media.

Slater et al. (2017), in their study of fitspiration versus self-compassion imagery online, argue that "there has been very little empirical consideration of potentially *positive* aspects of the social media environment" (p. 88). Social media certainly allows for access to greater variety and diversity in images and content than traditional media. Women (and men) "who do not fit the dominant thin-ideal standard . . . have also increased in visibility" and young adult media consumers are demanding more appearance diversity in media (Slater et al., 2017, p. 88). An emphasis on "self-compassion has been found to buffer the relationship between media thinness-related pressure and both disordered eating and thin-ideal internalisation . . . [and] a review of 28 studies concluded that self-compassion was consistently linked to lower levels of eating pathology, and was implicated as a protective factor against poor body image and eating pathology" (Slater et al., 2017, p.88). In addition to, or perhaps as an alternative to media education, these "findings suggest that self-compassion might usefully be employed in intervention efforts aiming to reduce body dissatisfaction and/or increase positive body image" (Slater et al., 2017, p. 88). This, perhaps, is why recent research in the field of body image is

shifting to make *positive* body image more of a primary focus than focusing on body image *disturbance* (Slater et al., 2017, p. 88).

Similar to Washington & Economides (2016) and Slater et al. (2017), Jong & Drummond write that health and fitness culture, online specifically, "provides the potential for a 'new' lens through which to view health discourses and for the development of alternative discourses of health . . . as well as opportunities for rebellion and resistance" (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 765). While the participants in Jong & Drummond's 2016 study suggest that dominant health discourses and body stereotypes are not necessarily being challenged overall, there is some evidence of a shift in acceptance of female muscularity (pp. 765-766). So as problematic as conventional fitness media has been and continues to be, and as problematic as digital health and fitness media content might be, I do think it is necessary to highlight alternative possibilities and to create a space in which this type of media might be positive for some audiences. What might be worth exploring in greater detail are the ways in which critical media analysis might be beneficial both to audiences who view this content negatively as well as audiences who view this content positively in order to share perspectives, discussion, and learning around this particular type of media.

Limitations & conundrums. In most of the empirical literature I reviewed, the participants were generally limited to Western (US, Australia, England) countries and were most often young, mostly white, and usually university students. The exposure to images was very short-term and under conditions that are not necessarily representative of the typical use, interaction, and viewing conditions (Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). One paper in particular, Fardouly et al. (2017), conducted a study with both university students and Amazon Mechanical Turk participants (MTurk). MTurk is often used to recruit participants for research studies/surveys on the internet (think crowdsourcing research participants). What I found interesting in their findings is that MTurk participants "were older; had a higher BMI; checked their Instagram accounts less frequently; were less likely to view fitspiration images on Instagram; were less likely to compare themselves to celebrities, acquaintances, and fitspiration

images on Instagram; and were less dissatisfied with their bodies" (p. 7). I wonder whether or not this says something about fitspiration and the student population and whether or not it is possible that most, if not all, results from studies that focus on fitspiration with participants from universities are only generalizable to young adult populations in similar environments. There is also more work to be done with men and with younger populations given the popularity of Instagram with adolescents.

I was also surprised by the number of studies that calculated and included participants' Body Mass Index (BMI). They often noted that participants were within the 'normal' weight range (e.g., Fardouly et al. 2017; Robinson et al., 2017; Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). This, to me, suggests a particular body type/weight is "healthy" or "fit" and reinforces the constraints on what is considered healthy by the authors themselves. This was especially interesting to me while reading Depper & Howe's (2017) research in which the adolescent girl participants were particularly critical when health and fitness apps used BMI to classify weight (p. 107). It was not clear to me why some studies found it necessary or helpful to include this information/ask this information of participants unless it was to illustrate that their participant pool was not considered particularly small or large, but rather of "average" weight. In what ways this impacted their findings, I am not sure. And whether or not this measure was necessary, I am also not sure.

Finally, some of the suggestions about how to intervene in negative outcomes related to health and fitness media included media literacy programs (and specifically the inclusion of social media and fitspiration-specific content), limiting exposure to fitspiration imagery, encouraging users not to follow appearance-related images, and better regulation of information to ensure validity and non-biased content (Fardouly et al., 2017, p. 13; Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015, p. 66; Jong & Drummond, 2016, pp. 766-767). Given the ubiquity of social media and health and fitness content, I am not sure if any of these suggestions is particularly realistic, but it would seem that teaching self-compassion and positive body image messages might be the most novel and potentially more effective approach (see Slater et al., 2017).

Gaps. As mentioned, most of the analyses to date, particularly on fitspiration, are limited to content analyses, disordered eating and exercise considerations, the clinical impact of viewing and participating in online fitness culture, and statistical analysis of correlational and experimental studies. I am more interested in how imagery related to health and fitness, and larger societal discourses, are perceived by young women, particularly as "these images become part of the contemporary media environment for other users of social networking sites" (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017, p. 78). As discussed in Chapter 4, the proliferation and ubiquity of health and fitness content on social media means that even users who do not actively follow this content appear to be regularly exposed to it.

Washington & Economides (2016), in their analysis of CrossFit rhetoric, suggest numerous possibilities for future research and analysis, but one avenue in particular that I would like to point to is the potential to "focus on behavior in the [CrossFit gyms] themselves, and empirical investigations into reactions, feelings, and other affective responses from participants regarding their investment in CF" (p. 156). What they are doing, I believe, is calling for a greater diversity of research that emphasizes affect versus effect. It is reactions, feelings, and other affective responses that I begin to explore in this thesis. And, of note, one of the hashtags I have previously explored, #crossfit, is cross-posted with many of the other hashtags I have tracked (like #healthy, #fit, #fitspo).

Men's experiences and the influence of health and fitness content online on men's body image, and specifically in fitpiration spaces, is also lacking even though "it is likely that fitspiration is reaching men and may influence the body image, exercise, and health behaviors of male followers as well as female followers" (Carrotte et al., 2017, p. 6). In a study of pro-muscularity websites, Murray et al., (2015) among other findings, note the prevalence of "derogatory labeling of the non-ideal body (11.4%)," specifically a "skinny" body (p. 19). I would be curious to know if the same is true of the "non-ideal" female body and a derogatory labelling of skinny in online health and fitness spaces, but this is outside the scope of their research and mine. Anecdotally, though, a previous project I completed suggested that there are

certainly similarities between hashtags on Instagram such as #skinny and #thin versus #healthy and #fit.

Ultimately, given how "individuals may reproduce, resist, or challenge the preferred meanings contained in media representations," a more effective form of research going forward would be audience (qualitative) analysis instead of researchers' own analysis of textual and visual health and fitness content (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 105) or experimental research that does not explore in detail the ways in which audiences perceive the media texts in question and the effect of these images on one's feelings about health and exercise. No examination of the "ways in which different social groups [or any social groups] interpret, use, challenge, or reproduce" messages around fit dominant bodily ideals (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p.26) appears to exist in the literature with regards to health and fitness content on social media. Jong & Drummond (2016) note that "few studies have explored the fitness movement on SNSs, and more specifically, young females' experiences of using it as a means to gather health information" (p. 759). Depper & Howe (2017) add that "the voices of young individuals interacting with these digital spaces are often absent from these accounts" (p. 101). Beyond gathering health information by textual and visual means, how do young women *perceive* the information they come across? And again, given the polysemic nature of texts and possible reading positions, this is an obvious gap. My research contributes to knowledge in this area, which sets it apart from the qualitative studies I reviewed. Both qualitative studies reviewed involve participants who, as a prerequisite or a result of sampling, were already active participants in the fitness community as sports leaders or considered themselves part of the online health and fitness community.

Summary

This chapter has engaged with the existing scholarship, including relevant research literature and findings and the theoretical work that often informs it (including the numerous discourses that work together and/or compete to discipline the body and to normalize a particular

representation of which bodies count and which do not within the context of health and fitness). The studies, theories, concepts, and gaps reviewed here also inform the analysis of my own data (Chapter 4). Before presenting the analysis of that data, I now turn to discussion of my methodology, research design, and the rationale for situating it within the qualitative paradigm.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research design and rationale

The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding of what kinds of images related to health and fitness are presented to audiences on social media, and on Instagram in particular. I also sought to document and understand young women's readings and interpretations/perceptions of health and fitness imagery on social media. Therefore, I believed the best approach to conducting the study was using qualitative research methods, and focus groups in particular. The literature review made clear that there is a lack of audience research, and qualitative research more generally, in the area of health and fitness media, so drawing from Rose's critical visual methodology (2007, 2012), as discussed by Ownby (2013), the primary focus of this project was the viewing site of audiences (consumption) with a peripheral focus on the site of the image itself (representation). In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for this study and the approach taken and outline the method and approach to data analysis. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations and challenges I encountered throughout the process.

The gaps identified in the literature, as well as research by Eisenberg, Wall, and Neumark-Sztainer (2012) on "muscle-enhancing behaviours" in adolescent girls and boys, and the extensive fitness media research by Dworkin & Wachs (2009) brought me to my research question(s). In this study, I explored the following questions: how do young women and girls access, view, produce, and interpret health and fitness content on social media? Do these images and narratives align with, or influence, their own perceptions of femininity, health, fitness, and a healthy body? (How) do they intersect with issues of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality?

The Qualitative Paradigm

As my research is focused on the perspectives of young women, their experiences and perceptions of health and fitness culture, particularly on social media, it is best suited to

qualitative research. It was clear to me very early on as a graduate student with an interest in the ways health and fitness are presented on social media that I wanted to pursue qualitative research for my thesis. Cresswell (2013) writes:

> We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be *explored*. This exploration is needed, in turn, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices. . . . We also conduct qualitative research because we need a *complex*, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people . . . unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (pp. 47-48).

While I agree that we have to *attempt* to conduct qualitative research "unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature," I think we have to first acknowledge that this is a very challenging task given our own positions and biases as researchers. I do not think we can set aside any and all expectations and knowledge of the existing literature. I also think there is value in bringing the two together to develop a more nuanced analysis of the issue. I included questions and insights that were drawn from the existing literature into the focus groups and interview I conducted, as well as the analysis of the data in order to expand on, confirm, and challenge what has already been written. I agree that we should be seeking and exploring issues by talking directly with people and without letting our expectations of what we will find get in the way of what is presented to us, but by bringing some of the issues and questions from the literature to audiences, there is a deeper discussion that emerges.

When I think about the qualitative research paradigm, I think of Guba & Lincoln (1994) who describe a paradigm as a set of basic beliefs: "[i]t represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (p. 107). They also write that there is no way to establish the "ultimate truthfulness" of these beliefs (p. 107). But this "truthfulness," which aligns very well with the concept of validity in quantitative research, will be discussed in the next section.

Within the qualitative paradigm, I would probably align most closely with social constructivism. That is, I believe that reality is constructed, socially and experientially, and is fluid and alterable (and can be constantly revised, particularly as different "constructions" are brought into the fold). Epistemologically, knowledge/the research findings "are literally created as the investigation proceeds" and in the interactions between researcher and participants (p. 111). However, if there is no knowable truth or reality, no objective way of "knowing" or testing validity, of accurately measuring the truth and therefore assessing the goodness or quality of a study (usually the test of validity in quantitative research), how can we assess the goodness or quality of qualitative research? Authenticity and trustworthiness may be the best indicators of goodness or quality.

Authenticity in Qualitative Research

Trustworthiness and authenticity (among other concepts) have been cited as "appropriate qualitative alternatives [and parallel criteria for quality research] to the quantitative goals of validity, reliability, objectivity, and generalizability" (Miller, 2008, p. 909). The two concepts are also linked in that authenticity is important in establishing trustworthiness "so that it may be of some benefit to society" (James, 2008, p.45):

> These concepts suggest that qualitative research can be rigorous in its inquiry into meaning within fluid and continually contested contexts without being held accountable to inappropriate quantitative validity benchmarks (Miller, 2008, p. 909).

James (2008) also notes that the concepts of authenticity and trustworthiness can be seen as a move beyond reliability and validity concerns and towards thinking about "worthwhile" research and "its impact on members of the culture or community being researched" (p. 45). In one of their foundational texts, Guba & Lincoln (1994) discuss authenticity in terms of five criteria: fairness, ontological and educative authenticity, and catalytic and tactical authenticity (p. 114). I think it is important here to evaluate my own research in terms of these criteria.

McIntosh & Cuklanz (2014) write that "[w]ithout the insights of interactions with audiences, the researcher becomes the primary arbiter of meaning in textual analysis" (p. 287). Given the amount of textual analysis already undertaken, as seen in my literature review, plus the lack of qualitative data and audience reception of that textual data, I think that my approach to this research aligns with a number of criteria pertaining to authenticity as outlined above. In particular, and drawing from James (2008), I believe that fairness is aligned with ensuring that participants' voices are well represented, particularly in the dissemination and analysis of the data. This includes drawing numerous illustrative quotations from the data in the analysis rather than summarizing in my own words as it gives the reader opportunities to interpret participants' words in their own way. Also, the semi-structured nature of the focus groups were aligned with the concept of fairness by allowing for less of a stereotypical question/answer researcher-participant relationship. In a way it allowed for the participants to coproduce the data and research. In terms of ontological and educative authenticity, conducting focus groups allowed for at least some discussion regarding the wider social and research context being studied, raising participants' level of awareness of the particular issue. Focus group discussions, being social and interactive, also opened up the possibility for participants to gain a better understanding of, or appreciation for, other (sometimes conflicting) perspectives on the issue, which may have impacted their own understandings or perspectives. Catalytic and tactical authenticity are perhaps less tangible in this instance, but I do think focus group research has the potential to stimulate action and/or empower participants to act. In this case, I think it is influenced by the ontological and educative aspects of authenticity. Discussions regarding the wider social and research context of the issue as well as hearing from multiple other participants and possibly conflicting perceptions of media representations may have stimulated conversations about this topic outside of the research context and in participants' lives. Conflicting or alternative perspectives may also have had a positive impact on how participants view themselves in relation to the media texts being studied.

Finally, I think the transparency of the research process lent itself to an additional layer of authenticity (and therefore trustworthiness) and integrating the themes from the literature with the focus group data added depth to this project. In a way, it allowed the participants to engage with that research and to speak to it. I am hopeful that including the focus group questions at the end of this project, as well as including numerous illustrative quotations in the following chapter has given the reader ample background to situate this study.

Method

In this section I have outlined more fully the type of research I undertook for this study, how I collected the research data, information relating to the study participants, the research setting, and procedures for data analysis. Following that is a discussion of the limitations of this work.

Focus groups and the viewing site of audiences. I chose to work with focus groups in particular because they align well with my understanding of qualitative research and, in particular, social constructivism and the notion of authenticity. Siegesmund (2008) writes that audience analysis, also sometimes referred to as reception analysis, "stems from mass communication studies that seek to explain [and explore] the impact of various forms of media on social life" (p. 39), which is well suited to the qualitative paradigm. Audience analysis and focus group research are very well linked, which is yet another reason why I chose to work with focus groups (Siegesmund, 2008, p. 39). As noted above, the belief that there is an objective truth about social reality that is reproducible and verifiable, fits within quantitative research and validity as test of goodness or quality. I do not believe that such an objective truth exists. Part of the appeal of focus groups as the main source of data collection in this study was the interactive aspect as participants "come to negotiate and construct their own meanings" (Munday, 2014, p. 237).

In terms of interactivity, the interactive and collective nature of focus groups in some ways mirrored the topic of my study and the interactive and collective nature of *Instagram*

specifically, and social media more generally. We can think about all of the ways that audiences engage and interact with digital health and fitness content. It is followed, liked, commented on, circulated, and it appears in users' "feeds" even if they are not specifically following that content themselves (inadvertent exposure). An example can illustrate this: in the focus groups, participants shared the images that they were viewing by circulating them amongst themselves, passing them around (without my instruction to do so) and commenting on each other's images, and in some instances using the language of the platform to indicate their feelings about the images (ex. "I would double-tap that").

Cresswell (2013) agrees that meaning is socially constructed and formed through interaction with others. He writes that "[t]he goal of research . . . is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically" (p. 25). As I mentioned above, one of the drawbacks of media analysis is that it "offers little to no insight into other related contexts, such as production and audiences" (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 289) where the researcher becomes the primary arbiter of meaning. In order to be effective, researchers must work "toward a nuanced, multidimensional engagement of a text grounded in scholarship and data, and not just offer insights based exclusively on their own viewpoints" (McIntosh & Cuklanz, 2014, p. 289). Even though my line of questioning informed the discussions, to at least some degree, meaning was generated through audience interaction with texts and each other, so audience analysis (consumption) should be critical to any media analysis. The semi-structured nature of the focus groups I conducted also allowed for meaning to be generated beyond the initial research questions.

Munday (2014) discusses how focus groups can be empowering for the participants. But it is also important to be aware of the potential drawbacks. If the discussion is one-sided and not all participants share the same views, it can become awkward for participants who may think or feel differently. Conformity rather than consensus should be considered and the notion that the setting can be "unnatural and intimidating," and can constrain participants' capacity to participate is important (p. 255). While I never felt that group think was an issue during our

discussions, I did make a conscious effort to ensure that participants who might not voice their opinions as loudly as others could be heard. I constantly checked in with participants, particularly those who presented as less extroverted. Additionally, I made a conscious effort to be alert to body language that might indicate that a participant wanted to speak, but perhaps not interrupt others. When I noticed this, I offered them the floor to voice their opinion. And I do believe that the social and interactive nature of focus groups within the context of this research on social media and meaning-making was a methodological strength.

Data collection. In order to conduct primary research with human participants, I submitted an application for ethics approval to the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Review Board, which was approved in December 2016 (Appendix B). A second submission with slight modification was approved in April 2017 (Appendix B). The primary research for this project employed a semi-structured qualitative focus group and interview method of inquiry over the course of the spring, summer, and early fall of 2017. I used the same set of questions to guide discussion during each of the focus groups and interview with participants (see Appendix A). In total, I conducted five focus groups and one interview.

Participants. The recruitment strategies for this research relied heavily on poster advertisements (posted across the University of Victoria campus), word of mouth, and snowball sampling in which interested participants who contacted the researcher were asked to pass on the researchers' information to other potentially interested students in order to further recruitment. In some ways, snowball sampling might mirror the object of study in terms of the connectedness of users in social media platforms. Participants used their existing networks (digital or analog) to share information and recruit additional participants in much the same way that they might share other data, making the recruitment process a somewhat similar social method (in addition to the object of study). However, because of word of mouth and snowball sampling, I knew that I had to be aware of the potential challenges related to pre-existing relationships and "hierarchies of status and power" among participants (Munday, 2014, p. 240). Though pre-existing relationships can impact patterns of interaction and data negatively, there are also advantages: "participants

already feel relaxed with one another and need little time to warm up, and . . . discussion can be prompted by reference to shared stories and experiences" (Munday, 2014, p. 240). In my case, as expected, a number of participants were known to one another either because of pre-existing friendships or relationships developed in their university courses. Two of the five focus groups were made up entirely of students who had at least some kind of pre-existing knowledge of one another. The rest were mixed.

Initially I had envisioned an equal number of Exercise Science, Physical, and Health Education (EPHE) students to non-EPHE student participants in order to compare responses across groups. As noted by Munday (2014), "it is common to organize participation along the lines of social characteristics so that data can be compared across groups" (p. 247). I wanted to see whether students with educational backgrounds in health and fitness-related disciplines would yield unique responses compared to students without post-secondary backgrounds in these disciplines. Recruitment did not result in an equal (or near equal) number of EPHE participants to non-EPHE participants, and therefore I did not think I had enough for comparison. However, comparing the two groups may not have yielded significant differences. It is likely that all students who participated had at least an interest in health, fitness, and/or social media. Since focus groups "are focused on a particular topic, the participants need to have some kind of relationship to the issues being investigated" (Munday, 2014, p. 247). This may have been a flaw in my initial research design.

In total, seventeen participants who identified as women ranging in age from 18-22 participated in this study across five faculties. All participants were students in their first or second year of study at the University of Victoria. Unlike previous qualitative research in this area, participants were not required to consider themselves part of the online health and fitness community, nor were they required to be heavily involved in sport, active Instagram users, or actively following health and/or fitness content online. Although I had no requirement that participants either have Instagram accounts, or any other specific social media accounts, or

actively consider themselves part of the online health and fitness community, it can be safely assumed that they all had some relationship to the topic.

In retrospect, it would have been helpful to collect more background and identifying data to locate my participants in order to better contextualize their responses beyond the very basic information I collected. What I can say is that my participants represented a diverse group of women, from various cultural backgrounds, including Asian and Indian students, a diverse range of body shapes and sizes, varying degrees of participation in sport and individual-based fitness pursuits, and varying degrees of social media usage. Some of my participants also reported that they were not Instagram users. My initial concern was ensuring that my participants were on the younger end of the spectrum, and representative of the demographic most actively involved with Instagram and health and fitness content on social media. Whether or not my participants were actively following this content, I felt that it was likely that they would at least be aware of it or inadvertently exposed to it, given its proliferation online. I felt that this would ensure at least some interest in participation, rather than further limiting the participant pool. This assumption proved to be correct, but in future work I would collect more information related to how participants would situate themselves so as to more deeply consider the ways in which such subjectivities shape their relationship to the research.

Research Setting and implementation. All focus groups were conducted on the University of Victoria campus and were audio recorded. Two recordings were made simultaneously in case one recording failed to register. All focus groups followed a semi-structured model in order to allow some flexibility to explore individual experience and to follow up, as well as expand, on themes that arose throughout the audio recorded sessions. I worked through the same set of questions with each group, but not necessarily in the same order depending on the route the groups took. I did not want the discussions to be highly prescriptive, but still needed to touch on the same questions across groups. This flexibility allowed for the groups to interact with each other and with me and to negotiate meaning as we might with one another outside of this setting (though keeping in mind the setting was certainly not natural). And

if, as I mentioned above, reality or knowledge is constructed socially and experientially, then this seemed to be the best approach given the social and experiential nature of focus groups. The interactivity of the focus groups seemed to allow for reflection, negotiation, decoding, and the development of new ideas.

Upon arrival each participant, regardless of whether they had already reviewed the consent form via email, was given a paper copy of the consent form, given time to review it, ask questions, sign, and/or withdraw. No participants opted to withdraw. Participants were informed about Counselling Services on campus and brochures were made available to participants in the unlikely event that any topics (potentially related to body image or eating disorders) that caused concern arose. Even though this research was deemed minimal risk, I felt that this was an opportunity to briefly mention the services available to them on campus.

Once the focus group began, I worked through my questions while displaying a set of publicly available Instagram images that had been coded as #healthy, #fit, and #fitspo as prompts. As mentioned, these images were part of previous research conducted which had examined the content of popular posts on Instagram related to health and fitness. This was done because it was important to understand what kinds of images circulate on Instagram with regards to health and fitness before undertaking this qualitative research study which sought to understand viewers' perceptions of the same type of content. The image samples were selected from the most popular images/top images on Instagram and appeared to represent the most dominant discourses on Instagram, which was later confirmed by participants. This approach adds to the methodological strength of my research design as the images were representative of what audiences are typically exposed to on Instagram.

My goal with this method and series of semi-structured questions, as I explained to participants in the beginning, was to develop a better understanding of how young women perceive images related to health and fitness on social media. As focus groups progressed, some topics that had arisen in previous groups were brought forward to later groups to allow for expanded discussion on topics and themes that were not initially explicit in my own questions.

Each focus group was scheduled for up to 90 minutes. However, the length of the focus group was determined by the size of the group and responsiveness to the questions. The one interview, predictably, was the shortest of the discussions. Although I had indicated the potential to contact participants for a follow-up session if clarification or fact-checking was required, this was only necessary in one instance. Some of my participants discussed the focus group topics in the context of Asian culture so I contacted these participants during the transcription process to ask if they identify as Asian or as having an Asian background. I also asked that all participants respect the confidentiality of the other group members and avoid identifying anyone who participated, particularly when my research is made publicly available and illustrative quotes are included.

Procedures for data analysis. Data produced via semi-structured focus groups and interviews was audio recorded and then transcribed. The initial transcription was a word for word copy of the audio record followed by a review and edit for concision (that is, insignificant words and utterances were removed). Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity during transcription, which will continue as I report on and disseminate the data, and these pseudonyms were used for all illustrative quotations in the next chapter, Analysis and Interpretation.

Similar to Jong & Drummond (2016, p. 762) and Depper & Howe (2017, p. 102), I utilised a thematic analysis and critical reading approach to my qualitative data. I had initially intended to draw codes and themes strictly from the data, but the data is informed by the questions that I put forward to each group (see Appendix A) and the questions I developed are drawn from the literature, the gaps in the literature, and my initial research question and therefore cannot be separated nor analyzed objectively. I therefore did an analysis of the data informed by the themes I discussed in the literature, but the semi-structured nature of the focus groups and interview also allowed additional themes to emerge that came from the participants themselves and fell outside those previously identified. In this respect, the themes identified in the literature review added depth to the analysis of data collected in the focus groups and are

required as part of the analysis since the questions are informed by them. In a way, participants elaborated on them and contributed to them, which I see as a strength given that much of the research I reviewed lacked the voices of young audiences who are reading health and fitness media texts.

After transcribing the focus group and interview audio data, I followed up with a critical reading and initial coding: the transcript was scanned and coded by hand to identify what appeared to be meaningful segments of text (keyword, phrases, segments), which were later sorted into broader themes. I ended up with three principal themes and nine main subthemes across the five focus groups and single interview. I was constantly comparing and contrasting the transcripts and noticed a convergence of topics and repetition in a number of participant responses. The most common themes, along with those drawn from the literature review, relevant to the research questions made up the bulk of the themes and subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data. Once I felt I had reached the point of data saturation and felt confident in the larger themes, I connected them with concepts identified in the literature review, where applicable. I also drew numerous quotations from the data in order to better elucidate the themes.

I noticed that the data became richer/more nuanced as I went through each audio recording, and I believe this is due to bringing forward participant responses from earlier groups to later groups for discussion. In this way, participants really become even more involved in the research process and the coproduction of knowledge and meaning, rather than having the research rigidly define the parameters and topics of discussion. Participant responses really helped to guide the research and I think this speaks to the interactive and collective nature of focus groups. The point I am making is that, although they were not physically present, earlier participants really were interacting with later participants. The convergence of topics and repetition in responses across recordings came early on. This suggests common themes across groups despite the differences in participant backgrounds. With that said, however, given that I completed the literature review first, my initial coding and thematic analysis of the transcripts

was informed by the literature. And it is possible that my own position and bias influenced both the discussions and data analysis, which I will discuss next.

Limitations

The main limitations of this study included sample size, participant demographic, recruitment strategy, and the researcher's own bias/position. In terms of sample size, the total number of participants was seventeen. Although I do not believe this sample was too small to gather meaningful data, larger samples are always more desirable. Unfortunately, due to the nature of qualitative work (the time commitment, scheduling challenges, etc.), I was not able to recruit more participants within a reasonable timeframe. While I would have likely received a greater volume of responses had I conducted a survey, I do not believe this would have allowed me to gather as many rich, detailed, and nuanced responses. There are often challenges to sampling and recruitment with all types of qualitative research (Munday, 2014). And with focus groups in particular, between recruitment, scheduling, and dropping out, it can be a challenge to move research forward in a timely manner. Recruiting first- and second-year students during the summer semester also proved to be challenging.

The participant demographic, first- and second-year female students between the ages of 18 and 22, is on the younger side of studies on digital health and fitness content, and fitspiration in particular. However, as mentioned in previous literature, this work is especially important to conduct with both men and women and, where possible, with adolescents and younger children given their reported use of social media and Instagram in particular. Given that my participants are young adults and university students, I do not believe that this data is necessarily generalizable to other populations since "focus groups as social contexts in themselves through which partial and multiple versions of social reality are constructed" (Munday, 2014, p. 238). We cannot assume that this group/sample can move beyond this specific context to "act as a mirror for the population as a whole" (Munday, 2014, p. 239). However, given the saturation of

responses and themes that arose across groups, there is some evidence to suggest that some of the analysis would be applicable to some audiences outside of my own research groups.

In terms of my recruitment strategy, it may have been more effective had I recruited via social media. I had second thoughts about recruiting through Instagram via a research account due to privacy concerns (for my participants and my own). I felt that the likelihood of interested participants commenting directly on the advertisement or liking it and revealing their username/data was high, and I was also not particularly comfortable having my own personal email address available on a public account. Whether or not these concerns were warranted I am not sure, but as a result, I relied most heavily on poster advertising on campus, word of mouth, and snowball sampling. If I were to conduct similar research in the future, I would recruit more actively via social media.

Finally, I am always conscious of my own biases and positioning when conducting qualitative research. Given that I was the sole researcher and I transcribed and analyzed the data myself, I have to wonder in what ways my own tone, utterances, and role in the discussion shaped that discussion or promoted certain positions while negating others. I also have to acknowledge that my own biases may have guided the analysis and thematic coding of the transcripts. As the sole moderator of the groups and the data, I am actively involved in producing both the research context and the data (Munday, 2014, p. 252). The social context of this research and the context of the focus groups may promote "the co-construction of meaning, whereby meaning is negotiated and produced by the participants rather than having meanings imposed on them by the researcher" (Munday, 2014, p. 253); however, the researcher does have, or must be perceived to have, an element of power that cannot be completely removed (Munday, 2014, p. 254). Though the generation of data and the research context are participatory in nature, this element of power (and potential biases), can be seen in the *treatment* of the research data. I am the sole researcher and, therefore, I am the only one analyzing, writing up, reporting, and publicizing the data from these participatory groups and it is through my lens that analyses and conclusions have been drawn.

One last limitation, or perhaps it would be better described as a challenge, was my continual reflexivity in relation to the research topic and method of analysis. Gender and gendered displays in health and fitness content was initially a central piece of my research. It was a response to the research from the PEW Research Center that suggests young women are the demographic most accessing visually-based social media sites as well as the research by Carrotte et al. (2015) suggesting young women are the demographic most likely following and liking health and fitness content online. In a way, though, the focus of this research on young women's responses to other women's bodies and to other health and fitness content may have been yet another instance of intensified scrutiny of women's bodies. It was clear to me as I began my data collection, including the previous image data, and analysis that it could be an uncomfortable and sometimes negative experience. Asking young women to analyze health and fitness content from Instagram may have simply added yet another layer of scrutiny to women's bodies in general or their own bodies in particular. This type of research seems to, in some way, have the potential to result in negative outcomes regarding body image and body satisfaction. And given that the literature reveals at least some evidence of correlation between viewing fitspiration imagery and negative outcomes, it is possible that my research contributed to this as well.

Summary

Having now discussed the research design and rationale, the qualitative research paradigm and authenticity, as well as the specifics of my study, including data collection, methods of analysis and limitations, I will move on to describe the themes that emerged across the data and respond to the initial research questions: how do young women and girls access, view, produce, and interpret health and fitness content on social media? Do these images and narratives align with, or influence, their own perceptions of femininity, health, fitness and a healthy body? (How) do they intersect with issues of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality? Numerous illustrative quotations from my participants, pulled from the audio and transcription data, is woven throughout my analysis in order to give the reader an opportunity to interpret

them for themselves, as well as to ensure that participant voices are well represented in the research. This approach was also taken to add more depth to the data and to extend the previous research that is lacking in qualitative/audience analysis. The next chapter also includes a section on discussion and potential emerging themes, and concludes with some final thoughts.

Chapter Four

Analysis and Interpretation

My aim for this analysis was to meet the goals of my initial research question: to document and better understand how young women and girls access, view, produce, and interpret health and fitness content on social media. I also sought to explore if these images and narratives align with, or influence, their own perceptions of femininity, health, fitness, and a healthy body, and finally to see how (or if) their interpretations intersect with issues of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

I have grouped the analysis by breaking down these questions and discussing the themes that emerged under these categories followed by a brief discussion. First, I discuss the access, viewing, and production aspects of my initial research question. Second, I provide a critical reading and thematic analysis of participants' responses to health and fitness image prompts as well as their own experience with health and fitness content on social media. My analysis of the data centers on three main themes: constraint, performance, and authenticity. And within these themes are numerous subthemes, though both themes and subthemes often overlap and interact with each other, similar to how participants' responses often indicated multiple, sometimes contradictory, sometimes intersecting, reading positions simultaneously. Some of the outliers, novel and insightful comments and discussion that did not emerge regularly across the groups, will be discussed in the concluding chapter. This adds depth to the question of how young women are negotiating and decoding this type of health and fitness content/imagery.

It is clear to me that, while focus groups provide rich data, the semi-structured nature of the sessions and flexibility in responses and discussion resulted in complex and nuanced readings and therefore do not necessarily fit neatly within individual themes. I use the following themes as tools with which to conceptualize and contextualize participant responses. I have identified the themes at the outset of each section, but also provided a series of definitions to better elucidate the meaning I have ascribed to them.

I think it is worth reminding the reader that this is a particular analysis of particular media. The image prompts were drawn from popular hashtags #health, #fit, and #fitspo (fitness inspiration) on Instagram and, therefore, do not constitute the entirety of health and fitness content on social media. And given that the content in these spaces is not fixed, the images and discourses that appeared under these particular hashtags during the course of this research will, and already have, changed and evolved and will likely continue to do so. I cannot predict whether we will see relatively stable and similar content in the future or not. It is also worth remembering that these images, part of Instagram's "Top Posts" are subject to a (seemingly) proprietary algorithm that categorizes them as such. I was never able to uncover what that algorithm is, thus what constitutes a "Top Post" or a popular image. This analysis draws on both the image prompts and participants' own experiences with visual health and fitness content more generally.

Access, viewership, and production of social media health and fitness content

Given the popularity of health and fitness content on social media and Instagram in particular, I sought to better understand how (or if) these young women (or peers) are accessing, viewing, and producing health and fitness content on social media. By the fall of 2017, #healthy yielded over 110 million posts/images on Instagram, #fit yielded over 101 million posts/images, #fitness had over 233 million posts/images, and #fitspo (an iteration of fitspiration) yielded over 50 million posts/images on Instagram. While methodologically focus group participants were not necessarily interacting with the posts/images in ways they would on their own devices, the sample of content I used as prompts appeared to be in line with what participants associated with health and fitness content on social media platforms and Instagram in particular. As I discussed in Chapter 3, I want to remind the reader that the image prompts for these focus groups and interviews were taken from Instagram's top posts. And while some of the discussion centered on the images themselves, participants also drew from their own experience with this type of content online. And even though I sampled top (public) posts as sources of discussion prompts,

participants did not appear to be surprised by them save for the occasional suggestive image that was tagged as "healthy" and "fit":

Nadira: [These photos] are unsurprising.

Lottie: We see this all the time.

Nadira: Yeah, we see this all the time.

I asked another group if the sample images seemed to reflect, or were representative of, the category health and fitness on Instagram:

Zoe: Definitely. Ugh.

Xia: Yeah.

Me (Sarah): So you think that this is pretty typical?

Zoe: Yeah

Xia: Yeah if you're – if you just said think up an Instagram health blog, I'd be like – basically this chick, maybe a few more brand name pieces of clothing and yeah, some pictures on the beach doing yoga.

Yvonne: Yeah

Zoe: Oh my god. Yeah.

I asked another group if they ever see other "types" of people represented within the category health and fitness on Instagram that were not reflected in the image prompts:

Kira: No. No. No, it's always – yeah, it's always like this body type-wise. It's always the girls with really tight bodies whatever and guys with really big muscles. It's pretty much what it is.

The majority of participants reported that they are not actively producing and participating in posting health and fitness content, but they are active or passive viewers of the content either on Instagram or other platforms. They reported that most of their peers were the same as far as they knew. The most popular non-Instagram platform for viewing appeared to be Pinterest, which is in line with the PEW Research Center's research on image-based platforms. When I say active or passive viewers, I mean that participants are actively choosing to follow

health and fitness content online or are passively consuming content. By passive, I mean that they are regularly or semi-regularly exposed to it, but not necessarily seeking it out. Most participants, if they were Instagram users, did not search by hashtag specifically and the tags themselves only appeared to be relevant when searching for "like" content. Additionally, very few participants reported reading the written content associated with the images unless something out of the norm captured their attention and stood out. Most participants were either viewing health and fitness content, or exposed to it, via the accounts that they are actively following (and the linkages through those accounts) or via sponsored content. This suggests that this content is inevitably making its way to users' feeds where "these images become part of the contemporary media environment for other users of social networking sites" (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017, p. 78). Nadira, Pat, and Quinn (two different groups) reflected on this:

> **Nadira**: Even if you're not following it, it's there and it's present.

From Pat's group:

> **Pat**: I don't know if I actively follow it, but it definitely just kind of finds me [laughter]
>
> **Quinn**: Yeah, similar.
>
> **Pat**: I've taken – I've gotten rid of Instagram on my phone and computer. I had the app on my computer as well. And I've just had to delete the app. Because I – I just got too many of these [health and fitness] images. And the thing with Facebook and Pinterest and Instagram is like – *even if I was going on to look up my friends, these [health and fitness] images are starting to work their way in to what I'm just seeing every day*.

Most of the participants also indicated that viewing health and fitness content is common among their peers:

> **Me (Sarah)**: Would you say that you know people or do you have peers that would access this [content] or follow [it]?
>
> **Yvonne**: Oh definitely.
>
> **Zoe**: Absolutely.
>
> **Xia**: Heck yeah.

Yvonne: Yeah.

Me (Sarah): Do you know for sure or is it –

[group emphasized agreement]

Yvonne: I know for sure. 100%.

As mentioned, most participants are not producing the content themselves, but three groups indicated that a small number of their peers are. The most common link across the groups with regards to posting content appears to relate to what kind of involvement and relationship their peers have with the content/community already, and that appeared to be a significant investment in this lifestyle:

> **Kira**: We're more observing it. Like, a bunch of girls will sit around and a photo will pop up of a hot girl in a bikini and we'll be like, 'Oh my gosh, like, guys, look at this girl.' Like, 'Oh my gosh I wish I could look like her' [laughter]. You know? Yeah, no. I don't necessarily post workout photos and stuff myself. *I do have one friend who's super into weight lifting and whatever and she does post pictures. And then I have another friend who just did an actual, like, body composition – competition – where they wear the bedazzled bikinis and whatever. And I've been following her and I've been, yeah – Like, 'You go girl!' I know her from high school or whatever. And so, I do have friends who are doing that, but me, myself, no [laughter]*.

This was similar to another group who described a peer who does post content online, but her relationship to this community is such that she participates in body competitions as well. The other instance in which participants mentioned peers who actively post content is in the category of "before and after" photos and what is described as "transformations." This is a topic that I will revisit in the thematic analysis to follow.

Finally, before moving to the thematic analysis, I think it is important to highlight some of the discussion that arose around the influence of social media health and fitness content on participant perceptions of health and fitness. A number of participants seemed to suggest that the

online content being viewed does have some influence and impact on their perceptions of what health and what fitness means:

Lottie: Subconsciously or consciously, both.

Nadira: Both.

Lottie: Even though we say no outside, but inside yeah, we – we know it. We have to achieve those goals if we have to be considered fit now.

Nadira: Mmhmm.

Lottie: But 10 years ago if you had to be considered fit, it would be totally different. Since we have something to match up to now.

Nadira: But now with the advent of social media and how viral it is, it is definitely everywhere and you're constantly seeing comparisons in media everywhere.

When speaking with Yvonne, Zoe, and Xia, I asked if they would consider the image prompts and the content they're familiar with as health and fitness content online to align with their own personal notion of what healthy and fit means:

Yvonne: To an extent, yes. But also that makes me think, how much of that has been conditioned by what I've been exposed to already, right?

Zoe: Right? I can't really gauge what my untainted, like, true ideological perspective of what fit is.

Xia: Yeah, no. I think – I look at these images and I'm like, 'Oh wow, I'm so out of shape,' but then at the same time I'm like, 'I can cycle up a big hill, I'm in decent shape' or whatever. But yeah it's all relative. Because if you're basing – like when I'm thinking of it off of this, without kind of thinking back to the stuff that I actually can do, that I'm capable of, it – it gets kind of out of whack. I don't know.

Yvonne: Totally

Zoe: Totally

> **Xia**: You need to be able to have some – at least some self-concept to be able to be like, 'Ok. This isn't what everyone looks like. This is just a really filtered down group of people.'

Nadira also highlighted the importance of self-awareness and having to make a concerted effort to separate yourself from what is being presented:

> **Nadira**: Oh yeah, especially with celebrities and just – yeah there's a lot of influence there. If you- even if you've worked through things and you're like, 'Well I don't have to look like this.' If it's all you see…. I think your – your instinct is to definitely go and get lost, but then it takes some forethought to go, 'Wait! This isn't actually healthy' and to be able to separate yourself rather than getting drawn into it.

During another discussion, I asked Kira if she felt that her peers would agree and would think of this type of content when we say health or when we say fitness:

> **Kira**: Yeah. Just because that's what's been presented to us as health and fitness. Cause – like, that's pretty much all we know, um, is whatever we're being shown.

An important initial observation of participant comments links back to biopedagogies as discussed in Chapter 2. The notion of influence and "because that's what's been presented to us as health and fitness" and "pretty much all we know . . . is whatever we're being shown" suggested to me the possibility that the categorization of this content under hashtags associated with the body, health, and fitness, acts as a regulatory strategy that enables bodies to be governed in certain ways in the name of health and life (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 760). More specifically, if what we know is what we're being shown and what we're being shown is organized by hashtags, through hashtags such as fitspiration, healthy, and fit, "a biopedagogy is created as the health messages circulated act as 'instruction' which direct users to regulate their body by eating healthily and staying active" (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 764).

I think this is also an important place to consider how my own framing of health and fitness content for this project may have skewed the perception or conflated the terms health and fitness. There is a particular problem with how I framed health and fitness as two distinct terms

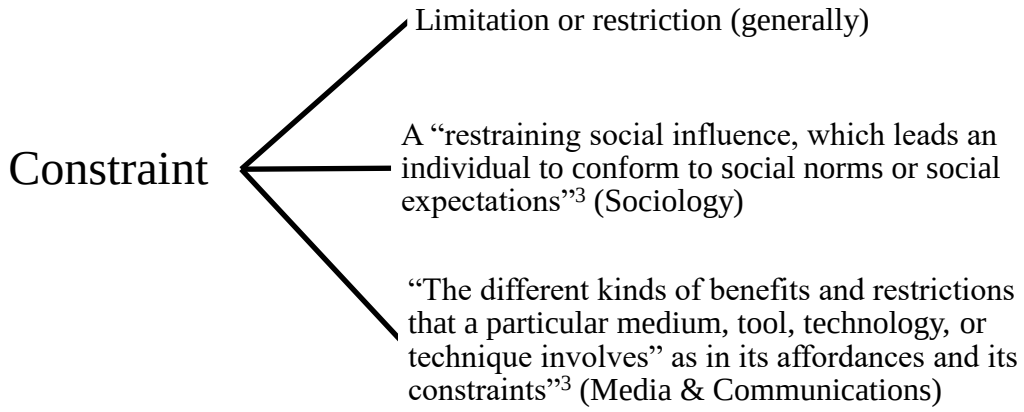
that were constantly grouped together discursively. If fitness, as has been suggested in the literature, suggests particular appearance markers versus performance markers, then grouping health and fitness together assumes a correlation between, as Nadira and as Quinn suggest in the next section, body shape/size as an indicator of health. O'Brien & Szeman (2014) write that when it comes to enhancing and/or producing the healthy body, both medical and aesthetic discourses rely on concepts of normalization (p. 198). And we can situate diet and exercise within body modification and within that space. So by constantly linking the two terms, I have to ask in what ways this contributes to the assumption that the two are necessarily related or even synonymous, and it what ways it normalizes the notion that body shape/size are indicative of health. Nadira and Lottie touched on this:

> **Lottie**: […] The more we see it, maybe – in social media only, the more we see it the more we think it is right. Even though it – it might be wrong. Since social media, so many people are giving it to us we might think it's right.
>
> **Nadira**: Yeah. It's like the more common something becomes, the more normal you think it is.
>
> **Lottie**: Yeah. Correct.

This concept of normalization leads me to the first main theme, constraint, and in what ways constraint may be normalizing a particular body in health and fitness content on social media, and particularly in #healthy and #fit spaces.

Constraint

For the purposes of this analysis, I understood constraint to refer to limitation or restriction and conceptualized it via the following:



Participant responses indicated a number of constraints on what does, and what is allowed to, constitute a healthy and a fit female body in social media as well as health and fitness more generally. These included limits on body type (size and shape), both in terms of weight and muscularity, the constraints attributed to women specifically related to "muscle-enhancing" behaviours, the constraints of social media platforms themselves, as well as certain discursive aspects that may also contribute to the constraints that appear to normalize a particular healthy and fit body.

Groups that described their own personal definitions and their perceptions of a social media definition of health and fitness seemed to converge quite closely. It was clear that there was a norm developing across groups, particularly among how they perceived what a social media definition would look like. Personal definitions included a much broader and less appearance-focused perception of what healthy means and what fit or fitness means:

Tay: Like a balance. You've got your school, you've got family, you have extra-curriculars, it's not just work, work, work, work, work. . . . And then, like, healthy habits I guess, healthy diet [laughter] uh – get some exercise, and then-

Sabrina: also being flexible. So when you have school you might not have enough time for exercise. But you can always work 5 minutes into your day to do, you know, some relaxing or some, you know, just stretching or something, right? And also with your diet, not being too strict, right? And just being flexible and – yeah.

Uma: Yeah, I think they nailed it. I think the balance is really key and then making sure you don't go to the whole other extreme of the over-exercising and, 'Oh, I can't eat that' or whatever and just- everything in moderation.

Vera: I just think eating what makes you happy. Like, not necessarily junk food all the time, but just being healthy and having a balance I guess with the food you eat. And . . . even walking to school is good exercise. Walking on campus is good. […] just feeling healthy inside, but also being happy with what you're eating. So I guess not restricting yourself to just healthy healthy healthy then giving yourself, also, a bit of pleasure I guess?

Dawn illustrated having two competing, yet simultaneously held, definitions of health and fitness. This seemed to be common to many of the participants:

Dawn: I have two definitions of healthy. I have my social media definition of healthy, which she totally fits, which is the girl taking the photo in the mirror or the guy taking the photo in the mirror or the human taking a photo in the mirror, but then there's my personal definition which would be like someone outside smiling at whatever. So [the photo] wouldn't go with my personal definition, but they're both, like, my definitions in my head if that makes any sense.

When it comes to social media content and perceptions or associations with health and fitness specific to social media imagery, participants often referred to either appearance markers (perhaps unsurprisingly) or consumer goods. Selfies, "transformations" and "progress" pictures

(before and after pictures), highly toned (but thin and slim) individuals, specific body parts, super-models, stylized photos of nature, sports bras, fitness advertisements for consumer products, and brand names were prominent features. Occasionally, very muscular women and bodybuilding was mentioned, but this did not seem to be common across the groups I interviewed. The distinctions between personal definitions and what might be described as a social media definition of health and fitness or being healthy and being fit seemed to suggest that the way(s) health and fitness are most commonly displayed on social media are extremely narrow and limited compared to how viewers might otherwise conceptualize these terms. This leads me to the first sub-theme of constraint: representation.

Representation. In *Losing Bodies*, Orbach (2011) writes that "today only a few aspirational and idealised body types which everyone feels enjoined to work towards are taking the place of differing forms of embodiment. . . . we are almost doing away with body variety" (p. 12). The literature review noted that, according to researchers, images, videos, and hashtags for fitspiration "often reference or imply the need for self-control, [dietary restraint], and discomfort to achieve goals, and can therefore contain guilt-inducing messages" (Slater et al., 2017, p. 94) similar to "thin ideal" or "thinspiration" messages. This type of overlap with "thin ideal" messaging appears to be in line with the limited representation of body type/size in health and fitness content online and seems worth evaluating. For instance, given the negative media centring on "thin ideal" messages and media, is it possible that "fit ideal" messages and media are simply an extension of this, but framed as healthy? Are we just calling thin by a different name? Conversations like the ones below were threaded throughout the groups:

> **Dawn**: It's less like fit, it's more like people being fit than […] fit-*ness*, like there's no one doing any crunches or pushups, like - that you would normally see. I also […] I totally see that they're missing a demographic of like, at least in this one, of bigger people that can still be *fit*, but that's common in social media. […] People who are super – bigger, they can still be fit. There's just a different way of looking at it. But there's this ideal that a specific type of fit that's […] constantly seen on Instagram. I have friends

who post pictures of their progress and stuff and that's really cool, but then, it's also like I personally haven't seen anyone who's super big posting without having comments like, 'Oh you should really work harder' below it, which is interesting.

Anne: Also, you don't really see people of colour all that much. It's often, like, young, 20-something white – I don't know – there's a lot of females, but there are males too so I don't wanna say that, but – it seems to be a little bit more female dominant.

Nadira and Lottie also elaborated:

Nadira: You don't usually see a whole lot of - you don't see curvier women or real women or really, really muscular women. It is the super-model type: thin and pretty.

Lottie: I think in social media only the thing about health and fitness is the waistline. But there's much more to it than just a waistline.

The association of thinness or slimness (or even "fitness") with healthiness seemed to persist among a number of the participants:

Nadira: Because one of the first things people think of when they see someone that's overweight or whatever – that they are unhealthy. They must not work out. They must be lazy. Which kind of conflates it too, so I think it would almost be like a triangle between health, fitness, and body shape. And how the typical appearance of, like, thin, health and fit, and then not thin, unhealthy, unfit kind of fit together.

Quinn, from another group, added to this:

Quinn: Well I think that that probably reinforces the idea that you have to have a certain body type to be healthy.

Nadira and Quinn's comments reflect Jong & Drummond's (2016) study. They write that online fitness accounts reinforce "the use of exercise in the quest for thinness, and further the association with thinness and healthiness" (p. 762). And not surprisingly, achieving a healthy body is often visually determined by online fitness communities and the discourse that ensues is one that associates weight with health and body shape with health, which ultimately emphasizes

the appearance of the body (p. 763). Lottie and Nadira, and Xia and Zoe made this same distinction of a narrow representation of bodies categorized as "healthy" and as "fit":

> **Lottie**: I feel, in olden time, I mean 10 years before. . .
>
> **Nadira**: [laughter]
>
> **Lottie**: . . . health was considered as you have good eyesight. You can walk. But now it's no. You should look thin. Then you're healthy. I mean […] but healthy is completely different. Healthy is what I just said, no? Your eyes, your hair […] you can walk properly, you don't have any joint pain, teeth pain, that's healthy! […]. So now it's not that. No one cares about those aspects.

And from Xia and Zoe:

> **Xia**: All these- all these images are just of one body type. Cause it's like- it's not like fitness. It's like you have a certain body type *and* you have abs.
>
> **Zoe**: It's very– it's very much, um, what's the word, like generated – like industrialized almost in a sense. Like everyone's sort of fitting this same mold. Like, 'I wear crazy colors, I wear lots of Nike clothing, I have a full-sized mirror in my home, I have abs, I'm a young 20-something that lives in LA.'

Nadira from one group and Olive from another touched on a very interesting theme that emerged throughout the groups and may, in part, respond to why there might be a very limited representation of health and fitness on social media:

> **Nadira**: […] societal pressures have just transcended and just gone into social media. So, people – the people that are confident posting their bodies will post their bodies as they feel their body is socially acceptable […] And therefore just reinforces it.
>
> **Olive**: I think people are afraid to post pictures of their own workouts. Or just feel social pressure only to post pictures when they have the 6-pack abs or when they have the strong legs. Like yoga, for instance, you know, you never see a larger woman or guy doing yoga on these crazy pictures […]. It's just like, 'Oh. I don't have a body like that therefore I shouldn't be posting pictures.'

There seemed to be a relative consensus among my research participants that a body within these online spaces has to have particular markers of health and/or fitness that is already socially acceptable to be shown, or made visible, in these spaces. And without those markers, without meeting that norm, presenting alternative visuals tagged as healthy and as fit are subject to increased surveillance and scrutiny by others or even by one's self. If other bodies are only typically represented as "before" pictures under the category health and fitness or "in progress," this suggests that those bodies are not acceptable as they are and must be worked on and disciplined into aligning with those socially acceptable markers. This does not mean that there are not spaces in which bodies that do not meet these markers are not visible, but within the general category of "healthy" and "fit" and the perception of what is represented, there seems to be a very specific definition, particularly on Instagram:

> **Kira**: Not on Instagram. Just because I think maybe those people feel like posting that would be, yeah. Like – they would feel weird about it just because this is what is categorized as healthy and fit. And so them posting and being like, 'Look at me, I'm healthy and fit.' People would be like, 'What?' 'You are?' [laughter] you know? Yeah […]. I don't see that as often unless it's a transformation photo. But that's different because then they're showing 'This is what I was before and this is what I am now.' Yeah. […] I think you can still be healthy and fit though without having a super, you know, tight, nice body whatever. Just because everybody's bodies are different. They work differently. You know, different metabolisms and everything. And not everyone can, you know, look one specific way. But this – this is like the norm of what you usually see of – is – this kind of, you know, they'll have nice bums and you know?

In a similar conversation Kira spoke about her frustration with repeatedly seeing the same sort of images:

> **Kira**: And it's just this dumb, you know, cycle of just, you know, just trying to keep up with what everyone else is doing rather than having this individual uniqueness. You know, just being yourself kind of thing. That's the one thing that bothers me with

> Instagram. It's just everyone's trying to keep up. Yeah, so anything fitness. People just try to keep up with whatever's already being posted. Because they don't want to be different. Because they're scared of what people might think of it.

The notion of being ever watchful and ever critical is certainly a tenet of identities created online. Not only are we watchful of ourselves, but we are aware of an "audience," also ever watchful. In *Bodies,* Orbach (2009) also suggests that it is now "the currency for girls and boys to display, their bodies also have to be judged and rated" (p. 113). This kind of constraint, or social control, over what bodies appear in this particular space is in part due to "having people police themselves because they believe they are being surveyed" (Winokur, 2008, p.178). This will be discussed in more detail in the following section: gender, musculature, and space.

Gender, musculature, and space. While there still seems to be a focus on thinness and on remaining slim and small, some of the participants described feeling that female muscularity was less taboo today than it might have been previously. This is in spite of the significant size constraints and also constraints on which parts of the female body could be muscular or "larger" such as the glutes and thighs, but not the midsection or upper body. In a 1980 essay, *Throwing Like a Girl*, Iris Marion Young writes that "what is often regarded as women's 'natural' lack of physical strength and coordination is at least partly attributable to the way in which their bodies are socialized to move (or not) in particular ways" (as cited in O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 194). Nearly forty years later, I think this is still relevant, but in the context of this project we should consider in what ways this particular socialization of girls with regards to the manner in which they move may be extended to the way they are socialized to look and what their bodies are socialized to suggest by the way they look.

Tay illustrated this type of constraint in the context of her own experience as a woman with visible muscle definition as a result of rock-climbing:

> **Tay**: Personally, for me, I've been rock-climbing for 4 years. So I have, I would say, more muscle definition, I guess, than most girls. I haven't heard this on social media, but my [relative] he's like, 'No, Tay. You're too muscular. You're going to scare away all

> the boys.' So when I see all the protein powders and muscle-enhancing stuff, I don't really know. It's like, 'Strong is the New Skinny,' but you can't be too strong.

This interaction seemed to suggest that her relative associates the way her body looks with a challenge to femininity. She continued to illustrate that this constraint does not appear to extend to men's muscularity:

> **Tay**: For men it's like, just get as big as you can. And that's – that's it.
>
> **Me (Sarah)**: But the same sort of space isn't available for women? Would you say?
>
> **Tay**: Literally.

In another group, Christy and Anne elaborated:

> **Christy**: It's social constructs that keeps changing because it went from thin, but sometimes - guys now they'll often be intimidated if a girl is more muscular than them. There's a lot of that aspect to it.
>
> **Anne**: - it's true that some guys think that. Cause there's that classic gender role that the guy has to be the strong one and take care of his, like, frail woman.

This type of interaction, and this type of regulation on women's muscularity was extended to the social media environment by Kira (and other participants). Kira described female peers who actively engage in developing muscle and her positive feelings about it, but also acknowledged the negative commentary that oftentimes is associated with women who have developed muscles:

> **Kira**: I personally think it's sweet [laughter]. I personally think it's really cool. I don't know if I would go that far in getting, yeah, a lot of muscles, but I just think it's really cool that women are, you know, feeling free to be able to do that. Cause usually it's been this whole thing of like, 'Oh, only guys can […] work out and get really big muscles' or whatever. And going back to my friend that just did a body building competition whatever. She still looks really good. She just has really big muscles and I don't see a problem with it.

Kira reported feeling that the constraints on women and musculature are lessening and that there's more acceptance of a body type that might have been considered more "masculine" in the past:

> **Kira**: There's still people who are like, 'Ew. Why does she have – why does she look like that?' Even if she's super fit and she's obviously taking really good care of herself. People will be like, 'Ew. Women aren't supposed to look like that,' like, 'Why does she have so many, you know, veins' and stuff like that. And I just think it's a personal thing. Like if that's what you want to look like, then that's what you want to look like. You do what you want to get there […] But there's – yeah there's always bad comments and negative things on – on especially fitness and whatever. Like when women are showing off their bodies there's always negative comments on there.
>
> **Me (Sarah)**: Do you find that that's similar for men's bodies?
>
> **Kira**: No [laughter].
>
> **Me (Sarah)**: Interesting.
>
> **Kira**: Yeah, no. Because all – of course it's always like, 'Oh my God – that guy's like' you know, 'look at his abs.' This whole thing, whatever, and of course it's fine for men, but it's not for women. Yeah. It brings it back to that whole thing of like, can women be fit too? And in my opinion I'm like, 'Yeah. Go for it. You go girl!' [laughter]. You know? But yeah no, guys are – it's a whole other ballgame. Everybody's chill with guys, you know, being shirtless, taking, mirror pictures in the gym. And videos of them lifting weights and all this stuff. Um, yeah. I guess it's just more acceptable for whatever reason.

Nadira and Lottie had similar feelings about the difference in commentary on women and men with visible musculature:

> **Nadira**: And even just looking at people commenting on social media. Like if you do see a muscular woman and she is weightlifting or something, people will be like, 'Ew. She's becoming manly. She looks like a man.'
>
> **Lottie**: And she's on […] steroids.

Nadira: 'She's on steroids,' 'This isn't healthy.' They'll make comments like that. But if it's the same photo and the same context for a guy it's just all like, 'Look at him! He's getting ripped!'

Another group, Yvonne, Xia, and Zoe, felt similarly to Kira in that there is more acceptance of women who have visible muscle now, but at the same time, there appears to be a point at which that muscularity must be reigned it, else it risks being policed online:

Me (Sarah): Do you think it's more acceptable for women to have muscle now?

Yvonne: Definitely.

Xia: Yeah.

Zoe: Total. Totally.

But Xia noted this contradiction and the frustrations:

Xia: There still are some accounts where girls are too muscular […] some people commented on this one girl's photo, but like – she has a lot of muscle and they're calling her gross and stuff cause her account has thousands of followers now and people– there is a very, still small kind of little target for women to reach and it's not very attainable. Because you can be too far on the - I don't know – just not having muscle side, but then if you get too much muscle then you're disgusting and just, like, too macho or whatever. And it's like, 'Are you trying to be a man?' When it's like, no – what the fuck are saying?

Constraint along gendered lines also seemed to be common when discussing "muscle-enhancing behaviors" (MEBs) such as protein shakes, supplements, increased exercise, and steroid use. MEBs appear to be perceived as common and even on the rise within the participant demographic and peer group, but behaviours that appeared to be gender-specific generally follow the line of muscularity. Behaviours that might promote larger bodies, such as protein shakes, supplements, and steroid-use seemed to be perceived as more prominent among men. Often the perception seemed to be that men were engaging more in these behaviours because of the desire

to gain weight and build muscle versus women who were often perceived to be pursuing weight loss and toning.

> **Olive**: You never see […] if you go down the shakes aisle or something at a store – it's always guys with big muscle in the pictures. But you never see a girl getting toned on one of the – one of the containers.

There were some exceptions to this, particularly in discussion of women who are actively pursuing bodybuilding and for athletes, men and women, who take supplements for performance. But conversations like the one highlighted from Olive (above) seemed to align with the research regarding fitspiration in the literature review: "fitspiration on social media often encourages exercises in order to reach an appearance aligned with gendered body image ideals" (Carrotte et al., 2017, p. 7). Not only might the content suggest that only thin and toned bodies equate to healthy and fit bodies (Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), it also suggests that healthy and fit is "equivalent to fitting in with current masculine and feminine body ideals; in many posts fitness and beauty were depicted as being essentially the same concept" (Carrotte et al., 2017, p. 7). I think to the extent that "doing beauty" is tied to "doing femininity" (Lazar, 2011, p. 37), we can also consider in what ways doing beauty, if in fact is doing femininity, is also "doing health" and "doing fitness":

> in many societies, 'doing' beauty is a vital component of 'doing' femininity: being beautiful, as defined by the norms of a society – for example, in terms of skin type and complexion, and body shape, size and appearance – and working towards achieving those conventional standards are an accepted (and expected) part of what women do by virtue of being 'women' (Lazar, 2011, p. 37).

Orbach (1978) wrote that one potential consequence of being powerful, real or imagined, is social isolation because, traditionally, "concepts of femininity exclude thinking of oneself as powerful" (p. 76). And while there still appears to be significant size constraints on what might be considered acceptable female muscularity and the perception of women's strength, there was also some discussion regarding the possibility that displays of physical strength could be

perceived as a visual representation or form of feminism as outward physical strength may be interpreted as an extension of strength of identity. While this topic was not explored in detail, it did appear across two groups and I think it is important to include:

> **Anne**: And being a strong, like a physically strong female might be linked to being [a] mentally, emotionally strong female? And there's this idea that, you know, I am woman hear me roar. Like, there's this - a little bit of a feminist aspect, whereas girls are being like, 'We're not tiny and we can be strong too' kind of thing. Because historically it's always been the men who are strong, but now I feel like it might be part of the feminist aspect of women being more equal as we can be strong and athletic too.
>
> **Bennett**: I definitely remember, like, when I was younger it was definitely - the skinny was more favoured than the fit for the girls' body types. So you wouldn't really see that many women in a gym actually working really hard unless they played a sport. But nowadays it's like – I think it's better than the skinny – cause it's, I think it's more healthy to actually try and be fit. But yeah, I definitely think it has to do with feminine – being a feminist – femininity.

From another group Zoe commented similarly about representations of women with defined musculature:

> **Zoe**: Maybe it's a part of this whole feminist wave of, like, showing that, you know, we can be strong too. You're not the only people with muscles….

In this section, we see the negotiation between constraint and (possible) resistance. By discussing the limits to women's size and muscularity while, at the same time, offering a possible feminist interpretation of what pushing against those constraints might signify, we could interpret this as what O'Brien & Szeman (2014) describe as an example of a body modification practice (increasing in visible musculature) that can be read as challenging social norms, but that "cannot avoid negotiating them" given that "bodybuilding still draws attention to the female body as the repository of female worth" (p. 198). And Budgeon reminds us that "gender inequality can exist in concert with female success" (Budgeon, 2011, p. 286). We might see

muscularity and perhaps slightly less constraints on female size as a small success, but it appears as though along gendered lines, there are still significant restrictions for women in the physical space that their bodies may occupy. These discussions and perceptions also appear to be in line with Littler's (2013) description of the figure of the "yummy mummy" as *quasi-emancipatory* in that "it undermines the idea of motherhood as an asexual state – but deeply constricting in its promotion of its hyperfeminine heterosexual form of maternalism" (2013, p. 238). Similarly, the depiction of athletic femininities may be quasi-emancipatory in that it may normalize a wider range of beauty ideals and thus undermines the association of femininity with docility and weakness, but these parameters of femininity still appear to be deeply constricted in terms of the size requirements associated with it.

Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) suggested that Instagram might be an even more potent form of transmission and convey stronger associations with body image given its unique focus on photo activity (p. 65). And while I think the visual nature of the platform is an important feature to interrogate, I think this notion of constraint, particularly with women's muscularity, is also enabled by the ability to comment on individuals' photos. Given the responses by Xia, Nadira, Kira, and Tay, it appears as though the ease with which size/muscularity can be policed might be a factor in the perception of what kind of body, and how much muscularity, is acceptable for women's bodies in some health and fitness content. I will elaborate on this and other themes of constraint in the next section.

Platform affordances and constraints. Instagram in particular necessarily draws attention to the visual and thus any concept organized as part of this platform, categorized via hashtags, necessarily associates the body/visual with that concept. And though Instagram was the focus of my research and the image prompts were drawn from Instagram, participants also drew from their experiences with other platforms, with the greatest mention of Pinterest, followed by Facebook and Snapchat. As mentioned in the access, viewership, and production discussion, a number of participants indicated that they were not likely to post images of themselves on Instagram due to fear of negative comments, increased scrutiny, etcetera. On the one hand,

Instagram and other social media platforms allow the user to follow the content that they most want to see. On the other hand, as mentioned by Pat and Quinn and others, whether you are actively following this type of visual health and fitness content or not, the content appears to inevitably make its way into users' feeds. This is because users' feeds form a type of web and are shared, but also because of promoted posts and advertisements.

The constraints and restrictions on representation, and gender and muscularity, may be attributable to the constraints of the platforms themselves. Homogeneity in digital communities might be a product of the constraints of the digital platform in/on which it is located. A platform like Instagram or Pinterest has particular features of constraint, especially considering its visual context. Belonging to a visual digital community could carry with it requirements different than text-based ones because corporeal markers and identity categories are more apparent. It seems worth evaluating a platform's constraints/features in theorizing its capacity to build community, and to interrogate on what that community is built. Avance (2016) describes this further:

> The affordances of various platforms, both in *intended* and *possible* uses, all inform what might be seen as a digital community's blueprint. Online community formation relies on this user-centered software architecture that predates the community itself, so that communities evolve and adapt not in spite of but because of the affordances of their technological platform. These include format, space constraints, visual, fixity vs. mutability, privacy vs. surveillance, peer feedback, report features/terms of service, modality . . . all features that inform what is possible in a given community (p. 66)

The literature review suggested that Instagram may have stronger associations with body image than other platforms given its unique focus on photo activity and the way this media is transmitted and accessed as compared to other platforms and media (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015, p. 65). I think this can be seen through a number of the participants' discussions. In particular, the emphasis on image sharing as well as the presentation of only the best of one's self can skew perceptions of a person's life. The way that a number of participants interact with

both Instagram and other platforms, I think, encourages comparison because most participants reported not reading the written content associated with posts and images.

> **Christy**: We don't have a limit on social media, which is really - it's changed a lot of things especially for young people. It can be really detrimental to them. And so I think that can play a role into how we view all these, like, different issues and how we view each other because we're presenting our best self, but then we feel really isolated.
>
> **Anne**: I guess all social media's like this, but I think it's maybe a little bit more on Instagram is – you show the side of yourself that you want people to see. […] with a lot of these health and fitness pages, I guess – [people] don't see the balance, and it would appear that they're just working out all the time. But you're not seeing what else they do. So it would kind of create this idea of this obsession with the gym and I feel like people might judge that. And they also might be like, 'Oh I should work out and like, if I wanna look like that I need to do this.' And I feel like that obsession with the perfect image and the obsession with trying to obtain that is kind of dangerous.

Surveillance. A number of participants commented on their own relationship with this content and with their relationship with more generalized social media content. They suggested that scrutiny, surveillance, and social comparison are factors in their own use/behaviour and interaction with health and fitness content and limits their own participation in posting content tagged as "healthy/healthy" and "fit/fitness":

> **Dawn**: I think, especially with social media we kind of feel like we're always being watched to meet these standards where, in some cases I think we are – people are watching you, but then in some they're not so it's really dependent on, like, the other person. So it's like you kind of have to change your perception because you can't change their perception and stuff if that makes sense.
>
> **Christy**: I think people have gone from - society's gone from monitoring, just what's acceptable, to what you should be and I think that's something that's really shifted in – because, like, there is social media now and that – like you said, that allows people to

post, like, the best of themselves. So that just creates, like, what we should be instead of what's acceptable now. I think that's been a huge shift in the past 10, 15 years.

Anne: Yeah. I feel like people look at Instagram photos with a really critical eye. And not everyone, but oftentimes you see really harsh comments and people will notice, like, if there's some little detail in the background or if there's one little thing off then – people will just scrutinize the person for it, and it's – it's really discouraging. And I know for me – I'm often intimidated to post photos on Instagram and I don't do it very often because I always feel like my photos are going to be judged, and there's always that - there's that idea of how many likes is your photo going to get and that determines your social worth kind of thing.

I think Dawn, Christy, and Anne touched on a really important issue with regards to surveillance. Christy's comments in particular remind me of Foucault's concept of docile bodies and the move away "from the external discipline of the body . . . toward various forms of internal discipline that involve the compliance and active participation of the subject" (Corbett, 2010, para. 2). If we think also about "practices aimed at observing, documenting, and cultivating reflective, penitent, and, most important, self-regulating subjects" (Corbett, 2010, para. 1) versus what Corbett describes as previous practices associated with the violent taming of the body, it is also possible to link it to a number of digital practices and structures of social media, and Instagram in particular. Specifically, practices of observation by the self and others as well as the documenting of the "progression" towards health and fitness. It is not uncommon to see comments in the online health and fitness content on Instagram that refer to these practices for the purposes of keeping oneself "accountable," but we have to ask - to whom and for what? We can perhaps see the use of the term *accountability* as internalizing the disciplinary strategies involved in pursuing this bodily idea and creating, as Christy says, "what we should be" versus perhaps the more general principles of what is "acceptable" behaviour. When we read Dawn, Christy, and Anee's comments we can also draw on Foucault and the concepts of the panopticon and the omniopticon, in which the many watch the many, as discussed in the literature review.

Mark Winokur (2008) described David Lyon's "discussion of the way in which panopticism is defined by 'uncertainty as a means of subordination' (in other words, by how the authoritarian gaze is unverifiable)" (p. 176) and I think this group spoke to this uncertainty and unverifiable other as enacting subordination. The uncertainty and unverifiability of being watched alters behaviour. Not knowing "whether or when they are on view" is the impetus to "ultimately internalize the notion of a surveyor" (Winokur, 2008, p. 177). Here I am also reminded of Marwick and social surveillance where "the potential of being watched by others contextualizes [one's] own surveillance" (Marwick, 2012, p. 379). But rather than conceptualizing a more traditional model of surveillance as a mechanism to "manage, control, or influence a particular population, social surveillance leads to self-management and direction on the part of social media users" (Marwick, 2012, p. 381).

The other issue with regards to the platforms' affordances and constraints that might be worth evaluating in terms of the panopticon is the idea that the "panopticon does not use information just to know us; it also deploys information to create us, to constitute us as compliant workers and consumers" (Winokur, 2008, p. 177). I wonder in what ways we can conceptualize this in thinking about algorithms on social media, and on Instagram in particular. There were a few brief mentions of algorithms in a few of the focus groups (some named as such, others that commented on the particular structure of what is shown and how). If we reflect on the algorithms that display certain images and not others, top posts for instance, it is worth interrogating how that information is deployed to "create" and to "constitute us as compliant workers and consumers." For example, in what ways does it "create" a very particular, distinct, version and visual vocabulary of health and of fitness? And how does that influence compliance and exclusion from certain categories? Lottie and Nadira discussed their reasons for not posting their own content here:

> **Lottie**: I feel I'm too inferior to what's going on in the Instagram. I can nowhere reach close to what they're doing and even if I do – even if I do I'll be under too much scrutiny.

> **Nadira**: Someone's going to be looking at it and you don't want to … no matter how confident you are you don't want to be stripped apart on social media.

These are also important points in thinking about how gender and muscularity is surveyed and policed as outlined in the last section. This speaks again to social surveillance and platforms whereby "users monitor each other by consuming user-generated content, and in doing so formulate a view of what is normal, accepted, or unaccepted in the community, creating an internalized gaze that *contextualizes* appropriate behavior" (Marwick, 2016, pp. 382-384). Social media users can alter the content they create and "share" according to how they imagine that content will be received. And, if the desired effect or response is not achieved, users can simply delete content and try again, possibly reinserting content more in line with the community's norms and reinforcing a kind of homogeneity. Consider the latter part of Anne's comments below:

> **Anne**: I'm often intimidated to post photos on Instagram and I don't do it very often because I always feel like my photos are going to be judged, and there's always that - *there's that idea of how many likes is your photo going to get and that determines your social worth kind of thing*.

It seems entirely possible that content may be curated specifically to fit within the community's norms in order to ensure acceptance within a specific space. Nadira touched on this in a way that I had not considered, but that may seem somewhat obvious, which is that being an active (or perhaps even passive) participant in this particular community of health and fitness online can feel like a sort of peer pressure. Depper & Howe (2017) write that "the way in which individuals might potentially be exploited or subject to peer pressure through use of social media alongside fitness apps was absent" from their participants' narratives (p. 103), but this was not the case in the groups that I spoke with where the question of peer pressure and community and conformity arose in conversations about health and fitness content on social media. I asked Nadira to elaborate:

> **Nadira**: […] whereas if you saw a person on the street you may not consider them a peer. But when you are consuming this media and it's ever-present then it almost does feel like you're a part of that group. And that you do have to fit in even if you wouldn't normally consider it to be your group that you'd fit in with. So it is - I feel it definitely is peer pressure.
>
> **Lottie**: We inevitably form a group and tend to follow.

In another group, Quinn seemed to suggest the same type of idea with regards to community:

> **Quinn**: I don't know. I think people like to […] be able to post in the group hashtag of things that are health or fit or whatever because that makes them feel like they're part of this thing […]

If the body is a material phenomenon, "but the way we experience it is determined by culture" (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 191), I wonder in what ways this particular aspect of popular culture (perhaps visually-based digital community) contribute to or determine how we experience the body in a material sense. From here, I turn to a final sub-theme of constraint, discursive limitations.

Discursive limitations. While we might consider the entirety of the images associated with #healthy and #fit/#fitspo its own discourse, we can also consider some of the textual cues within this content as discourse: as in, "a distinct area of social knowledge and the linguistic [and textual] practices associated with it" (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 71). During the course of the focus groups, there were a number of discussions regarding posts with images and "motivational" text laid over top of those images as well as the mantras/mottos that have been circulating within recent memory such as "Strong is the New Sexy," "Strong is the New Skinny," and "Fit not Thin." While some participants felt there were fewer constraints on the "athletic" or "fit" ideal as suggested by these mantras, others considered them to be just as (or more) restrictive than previous standards or "ideals" such as the thin ideal. As discussed above, there appear to be a number of challenges when it comes to discourse and the representation of the healthy and/or fit body in social media. And while textual discourse did not figure

prominently in the image prompts, I did have two samples that participants could view. Participants also noted that images with text overlaid that are intended to be motivational are common in their experience of health and fitness content on social media. When speaking to images with "motivational" quotes or the idea that this type of media might be motivational, Anne's group discussed the challenges with associating the text with particular bodies or body parts (appearance comparison):

> **Anne**: I've definitely seen a lot of photos like this. […] they're supposed to be motivators to work out and stuff, but I don't know, to me it kind of causes a little bit of concern because […] it's kind of saying, 'It's not ok to have a body that's not like that.' Like, you need to be trying to achieve that. It kind of makes it seem like everyone needs to have this ultimate goal and, like, we're all working towards that. But that's not - body types are all different, right? That's not realistic for a lot of different bodies.
>
> **Bennett**: I think it's motivating. Like, if I were to see that I'd be like, 'Oh, that's - that'd be cool to have that stomach,' but at the same time that's kind of impossible for certain body types so yeah, it's a process to keep going, but at the same time you're setting unrealistic goals. It doesn't mean you shouldn't try to work towards it, but your end might not be exactly like that photo.
>
> **Anne**: Yeah. I feel like maybe encouraging satisfaction and happiness with our own bodies is probably better than the idea of trying to achieve a body type that potentially your genes won't allow.

Xia also brought up the possibility of social comparison and body dissatisfaction, particularly if the images associated with the text are encouraging appearance markers of health and/or fitness:

> **Xia**: I feel like with [the image of a woman's stomach and text that reads 'It's a slow process, keep going'], it's kind of problematic because it's kind of saying that she's not good enough. By saying 'It's a slow process – keep going' and it's like – if you looked at this and you're comparing it to yourself then you're like, 'Oh if she's not good enough

then I'm far from whatever end goal this is suggesting.' I think so far, like, this is my *least favourite* of the images. This pisses me off the most.

Orbach (2009) writes that "disguised as preoccupation, health concern or moral endeavour, almost everyone has a rhetoric about trying to do right by their body which reveals a concern that the body is not at all right as it is and that the body is a suitable, indeed appropriate, focus for our malaise, aspiration and energy. We have swapped the body politic for the politics of the body" (2009, pp. 72-73). I think Anne, Bennett, and Xia spoke to this in their own ways and touched on this idea that even if these images are intended to motivate or inspire, they may imply what Orbach describes as "a concern that the body is not all right as it is" (p. 73). The discussion of this image and similar images also brought up the question of active/authentic versus static/inauthentic perceptions of health and of fitness, which will be discussed in the final section of this analysis. If the image in the frame was encouraging a performance goal, such as cycling up a big hill or hiking Mount Finlayson (these were examples used by participants) that might be inspiring, but encouraging a specific appearance target or percentage of body fat, such as one particular image seemed to suggest, was viewed very negatively. The perception of the message or the perceived "end-goal" was a strong factor in whether or not viewers saw inspiration or were more inclined to make appearance comparisons to images containing "motivational" text and appearance markers. I think this is important, because having no clear outcome except to continue to work on the body, suggests the body is infinitely modifiable. If the body is infinitely modifiable, as Orbach (2009) asserted, we have no capacity to reject the industries and practices that prey on our insecurities (p. 144).

Similar to images with "motivational" text associated with them, I asked participants about the popular mantras or mottos such as "Strong is the New Skinny," "Strong is the New Sexy," and "Fit not Thin":

Zoe: Initially I thought [mottos like Strong is the New Skinny and Fit not Thin] was a really good thing, but then the more I looked into it, the more I was like, 'Woah, that's body shaming.' Cause, you know, some people just can't hold muscle tone or, you know,

whatever your physical predisposition is. I don't know. I think it's not cool to just say you have to be this or otherwise you're not woman or whatever.

Yvonne: I, I think it – I don't know, it's not good or anything, *but it is better compared to thin because when you think of thin you have a very, distinct image of a person. But if you think of fit, you could be fit as in you're a fit boxer or you're a fit runner, or you're a fit weight-lifter. Like, there's a lot of different types of fit in comparison to just being thin. So I like that side of it*.

Xia: But it, yeah – I feel like I agree with what you're both saying cause it's like, I like the side of it that's like being fit is good, but at the same time, saying fit *not* thin, is like – putting down people who are naturally thin. And – who, as you said, can't hold muscle tone. They may be fit, but if you see it in the context of that hashtag then it's like they're weak even if they're not.

In another group:

Anne: I think [Fit not Thin]'s important because it puts more of an emphasis on the healthy aspect, not just, 'don't eat because you need to be this ideal size' whereas fit is more, you know – it's important to feed yourself right and to exercise and it puts more an emphasis on healthy living.

Dawn: I also think the fit leaves out a lot of people too because I know that everyone has different bodies, but I'm pretty sure there's probably someone who has a body type that's super thin and, like, and if they worked out *a lot* they could become more of the typical fit and stuff, but if they just live their lives normally they're just going to look more thin. And then there's people who […] anyone can […] be that fit if they put that much time into it. But then there's so many different aspects of your lives that you have to pay attention to that you can't really follow that, so – so it's like, I personally exercise, I'm fit, but I for sure do not look like that. Like, I got tummy and you still hear me roar.

Anne: […] sometimes people will associate skinny with healthy, but I mean – depending on your genes, some people are just - they're built really small and they're just a skinny

person, but they're not necessarily eating healthy or they're not treating their bodies properly. And there's this association – it might be influenced by, strongly by, this kind of media – is that you're thin if you exercise, but that's not always true for everyone, right?

While these two groups seemed to suggest that there is an element of body shaming, and associations of thinness with healthiness, as was discussed above, there were also positive readings as noted by Anne and Yvonne. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the body and our relationships to them is complicated, which is mirrored in the discussion of the body and in the multiple (simultaneous) reading positions participants shared. Part of the challenge with promoting the "fit" body while simultaneously implying that thinness is no longer desirable is that it inevitably draws on appearance markers. Even though the term strong or use of the word strength might not necessarily imply a particular aesthetic or shape, as noted by Yvonne, when paired with thin or skinny, which does imply a particular aesthetic shape, strong is likely interpreted to evoke particular appearance markers.

Another consideration with text associated with health and fitness content draws on similar finding to Dworkin & Wachs' (2009) work in print media. Discursive considerations (as they relate to constraint) might be found in the perception of the ways in which fitness activities are linked to appearance markers versus health, pleasure, or performance. Olive and Pat illustrated this:

Olive: I'm trying to get, like, more into going to the gym and stuff. And, I mean – to be honest it's always, it's more demoralizing to look up workout routines […] they're all like, '10 ways to lose leg fat' or I don't know – they're all, like, double negatives.

Pat: They're just like, 'Get a nice butt now!'

Olive: Yea, or like, '30 days to a thinner body or a better you.' And it's – it's not a positive, like […] increase your cardio. Stuff like that. It's – it's all specifically related to different parts of your body and I think that like, man, it's to a point where I don't even really like to - now that I've got one routine I don't really even like to go back and look at

different ones. Cause they're just like, how do I categorize what I want my workout to be? I don't think of it in the way of, 'Oh man I really want to get a nice butt.'

Me (Sarah): It's interesting because you say it's not really framed positively, like get more stamina or increase your […] lung capacity.

Olive: Like increase your mental health because that's what I feel– that's what it should be!

Olive and Pat also seemed to refer to the gendered upper body - lower body divide and "the cautions aimed at women's lower bodies and the restrictions on their size [which] indicate the potential for cultural devaluations of women's strength" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 80). It has been nearly ten years since Dworkin & Wachs wrote *Body Panic* so I think the restrictions (at least on women's lower bodies) is shifting, so it is perhaps not solely a question of devaluing women's strength today, but rather the continuation of enforcing a particular picture of femininity.

The last aspect of discourse that I will touch on since it was mentioned across a number of the focus groups is the idea of the "before and after" images and posts, of which there are many, which are often described as transformational (as in "Transformation Tuesday" or #transformationtuesday - over 11 million posts as of fall 2017 – and "progress pics"). A few of the participants perceived these positively, drawing on personal connections to friends and/or family who had undergone such transformations. Other participants were less enthusiastic, but commented on how it might be motivational for some viewers, though perhaps not always a positive form of motivation. I see this, and numerous other examples, as one of the tensions within the theme of constraint. While I certainly will not, and cannot, discount the possibility that such imagery associated with this type of discourse may indeed be encouraging or motivating for some viewers, this particular language around transformation and progress may be situated within "healthism" as described by Robert Crawford in Dworkin & Wachs (2009) and O'Brien & Szeman (2014) here:

> [b]eyond public health campaigns aiming to inspire, encourage, worry, and/or shame people into exercising . . . a more general social climate is focused on self-improvement as a life project. According to Robert Crawford, the prevailing mythology, which he terms 'healthism,' situates the problem of health and disease at the level of the individual and 'elevates health to a super value, a metaphor for all that is good in life' (p. 196)

Positive reactions may very well relate to this particular type of content if perceived as a "health campaign aiming to inspire" and encourage. The fact that the "after" is associated positively with transformation and progress seems to be in line with the idea of self-improvement as a life project, as well as the infinitely modifiable body described by Orbach (2009), particularly when, as noted by a few participants, there is no clear "end-goal" associated with the body. It is, or can be, a constant, eternal project. The notion of progress and the constant quest to improve and make the body better is the same type of discourse we see in history and the two are, in my opinion, interrelated even though we may not immediately equate the two.

In the literature review Jong and Drummond (2016) explain how biopedagogies can be created via hashtags "as the health messages circulated act as 'instruction' which direct users to regulate their body by eating healthily and staying active" (p. 764). I also discussed how hashtags can be conceptualized as cognitive organizers in much the same way headlines can be in traditional print media, organizing "information, making it possible for audiences to apprehend immediately how such information should be read and remembered" (Jiwani, 2012, p. 118). Beyond the fitspiration hashtag, we can apply these concepts to discursively related tags, including #transformationtuesday and #progress, as they tend to relate to the regulation of the body and the insinuation that the body in the "before" is pathological and therefore in need of disciplining. It's important to remember that "the way in which messages are encoded places limitations on the way in which they are decoded" (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 94). Both #transformationtuesday and #progress (or "progress pics") in particular suggest that the pre-fit and pre-sporty body is one that must be worked on, that before is bad and after is good. This is associated with particular corporeal markers due to the visual nature of the posts associated with

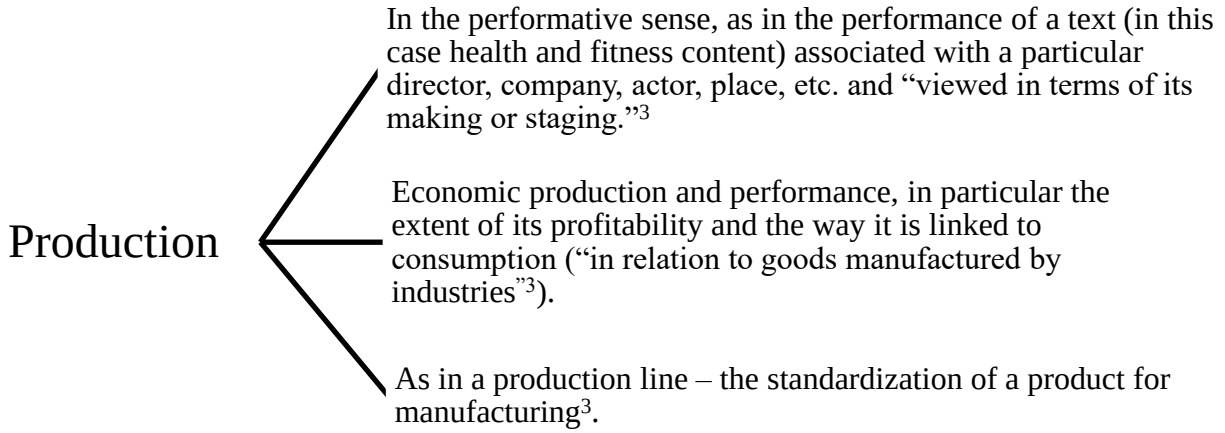
this type of text. This reminds me, again, of how I framed this project and the possible conflation or association of fitness with health. Zoe, Xia, and Yvonne touched on this in social media as well:

> **Zoe**: […] There is obviously a very – I feel like a lot of people have touched on the topic of Instagram is not reality. Therefore it's obviously very skewed and henceforth everybody's associating health with fitness. Yeah. […] Cause it's - it's like its own category. You go in – on a website or something. Yeah. Health and fitness.
>
> **Xia**: Like peanut butter and jam.
>
> **Yvonne**: Yeah even on Pinterest there's a health and fitness board on Pinterest.

Summary. The tension around constraint figured prominently in the limited representation of the healthy and fit female body in social media, the restrictions on size and muscularity for women, on Instagram's affordances and constraints as a platform, as well as some of the discursive themes within health and fitness content on social media. As a way to frame this particular theme I included a definition of constraint particular to sociology (according to Oxford Reference) as "a restraining social influence, which leads an individual to conform to social norms or social expectations."[3] These subthemes of representation, gender and musculature, social media platform, and discourse seem to represent some of the areas in which health and fitness content on social media acts as a social influence that may lead to a climate of conformity to (gendered) social norms and expectations within this particular space.

Production

The second major theme of this analysis is that of production. And I conceptualized production in three ways:



Casting. Consider production in the performative sense, as in the performance of health and fitness (as text). Like many forms of entertainment a particular actor must be cast in the role of "lead" actor. As an extension of the image prompts and discussions around participants' own experiences of health and fitness content on social media, there appeared to be a particular actor cast in the role of the "healthy" and the "fit" woman in social media, or at least in #healthy and #fit spaces. She was (and probably still is) young, thin, usually white, and seemingly economically privileged, not unlike many of the leading actresses in Hollywood. We can see this as a continuation of the theme of constraint, but also conceptualize it in terms of performance/production. It might also be an appropriate extension of Dubrofsky & Wood's (2015) study, where agency seems to be attributed disproportionately to celebrity white women self-representing and displaying their bodies online through the labour associated with being fit and healthy: "while white women are presented as actively fashioning their bodies for public display (through exercise and diet), the few bodies of celebrities presented as women of color . . . are positioned as always already gaze-worthy, reducing their agency" (p. 94). So, where white

women are described as labouring for the gaze with diet and exercise, women of color are framed as being already, innately, gaze-worthy. The representation of an empowered, sporting femininity, which I think can be extended specifically to include fit femininity (or athletic femininities) "creates the illusion that the new feminine body ideals are available to all girls, and paradoxically neo-liberal images of an achieved gender equity obscure the ways that some girls' physicalities are constrained by poverty, or lack of access" to (Western) standards of health and physical activity (Azzarito, 2010, p. 270). It is the "fantasy of total choice, freedom and opportunity," where one simply must decide that she, too, can achieve the same body ideals and therefore success (pp. 267-268). The question of race is less explicit, but Azzarito (2010) argues that these [sports] "images subsume race, class, religion and disability" (p. 261), which defaults to able-bodied, Western, and primarily white individuals.

Above, I quoted O'Brien & Szeman (2014) who discussed the body as a natural phenomenon, but "the way we experience is determined by culture" (p. 191). In the context of the discussion above, we have to ask "which social subjects have had the privilege of being whole, or 'healthy,' and thus fully inscribed in history and in culture?" (McRobbie as cited in O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 192). Within this particular cultural moment and digital space, I reported how the lead actor in these images appears to be young, thin, white, and likely economically privileged, which has been reflected in some of the participant comments incorporated in other sections of this analysis. Race and ethnicity figured into some of the discussions I had with participants in other ways as well: from discussion that centered on the lack of women of color being represented, to the display of food in these spaces, to some cultural practices that seek to emulate a Western beauty ideal. Zoe, Yvonne, and Xia discussed these issues as follows:

> **Zoe**: I think going back to your demographic, about the young, attractive white women.
>
> **Yvonne**: Yeah.
>
> **Zoe**: I did notice my favourite personal trainer - he has this one video of a black girl doing her workouts and stuff and obviously everybody on his account is killing it, but

hers had significantly less views and I was angered about that. Like, she was fine as all hell, but she was black, so – I don't know.

Yvonne also elaborated on this:

Yvonne: But yeah […] you wouldn't see any sumo wrestlers even though over in Japan whatever, they would be considered healthy and fit because they're like, 'Yeah! Look at those sumo wrestlers go!' But we don't see any of those, so –

Zoe: It's very culture oriented.

Yvonne: Yeah, very much so.

Me (Sarah): What do you think about this idea that social media is global, it's participatory, anyone can be represented . . . how do you respond to that in this context?

Zoe: It's bullshit.

Yvonne: Yeah.

Xia: Well it's – social media has globalized ideals. […]. I did a project earlier in the semester on makeup and stuff and just the kind of facial beauty standards and stuff. And in that I found it was very much like there's the globalized, like what is popular in America and Europe right now. Like whatever fads are generated there and then are expanded through social media cause as you say, there's the kind of, like - the most liked, the algorithms that Instagram makes for what shows up on your popular feed. And then wherever you are, that's going to be influenced by what the most people on the social media websites are viewing and then you're going to be exposed to that. People aren't going to be exposed to fads that are coming out of smaller places with a smaller viewership because it just doesn't have that kind of power that Instagram's gonna pick up and be like, 'Oh! This is a trend!' I don't know, it's – yeah it's globalized ideals rather than the other way around.

Zoe: It's definitely fast-tracking globalization

The export or globalization of Western ideals also figured into conversations around the representation of food in health and fitness content as well as the constraints on women's

"allowable" muscularity. Lottie explained that what she sees displayed in social media with regards to food is not something she can normally access. Lottie discussed her Indian background and explained that it doesn't matter where you are, whether you're in India or in Canada, health and fitness in social media appears to be a representation of Western ideals. This is an excerpt of a conversation about the food displayed in some of the images:

> **Lottie**: the thing is we don't get that [food] very often. They're making being healthy very difficult. So my mother's like, 'If you – you can't follow that diet. You better stop – not follow – because it's so difficult to maintain that.' Unless you're upper-middle class…
>
> **Nadira**: Oh yeah! It's expensive to try and import and –
>
> **Lottie**: yeah!
>
> […]
>
> **Lottie**: We being in India, this is – none of this grows in India. But we still feel – we think the Western people are thin […] because they have these foods.
>
> **Nadira**: Yeah, so it's very North Americanized.
>
> **Lottie**: Yeah! This is only for that part of the [world?] – for us it's not there.

The earlier discussion around gender, muscularity, and constraint was also extended by Tay and Sabrina when discussing their experiences as women from Asian backgrounds. When Tay discussed her involvement in rock climbing and her body as being more muscular than most girls she knows, she and Sabrina discussed this as being perceived as somewhat anomalous in Asian demographics (with which they identify). They discussed the emphasis on thinness and the pursuit of certain "Western" aesthetic markers:

> **Sabrina**: …the Asian demographic, they like skinny and […] like a Barbie doll, right? Because in Asia it's actually really normal to get your nose fixed and to get plastic surgery.
>
> **Tay**: Especially in Korea, South Korea. Everyone gets some sort of –

Sabrina: It's like the equivalent of getting your ears pierced to get your nose and your chin.

Tay: Or your eyelids.

Sabrina: Yeah.

[…]

Tay: It's basically to look more like white people.

Sabrina: Cause Asians, we have monolids or our eyelids are folded over. We have the epicanthus fold. That's the scientific term – epicanthus fold. […] But I feel like Asians, they really look up to North America and Europe so –

Tay: I think everyone does, everyone in the world, to Western stuff.

There are a number of examples whereby "body modification" in its less overt sense (compared to piercing, branding, implants) can be seen as a Western export. For instance, Orbach (2011) describes Western television and the export of body type and influence on young Fijian women's modification of the body thereafter:

> In 1995, a television channel started broadcasting in Fiji. It showed imported U.S. shows, such as Friends. By 1998, a mere three years later, 11.9 percent of Fijian adolescent girls were [bulimic] . . . where previously none existed. These young women had identified modernity with the Westernized body shape of the last few decades and they had embraced it. In their attempt to find a place in global culture, they understood that the reshaping of their body was crucial. . . . They perceived the way they were to be radically out of date and in need of upgrade. The site of modernity for them became the reconstruction of their bodies (pp. 388-389).

Orbach also describes additional procedures, such as those described by Tay and Sabrina, in *Losing Bodies*.

Drawing on Mauss and Bourdieu, O'Brien & Szeman (2014) discuss the concept of habitus, which can also help to conceptualize why the production of a particular body might (literally) be valuable within health and fitness content:

> . . . habitus describes the way in which particular social environments are internalized by individuals in the form of dispositions toward particular bodily orientations and behaviours. The concept of habitus thus allows us to talk about the way in which social differences are reproduced at the level of the individual body. Class . . . plays a determining role in the development of bodies by influencing such factors as social location and taste . . . as well as more physical aspects of habitus. These differences in turn contribute to the production of different kinds and degrees of social value attached to different kinds of bodies. Value corresponds more or less closely to class . . . value here is determined principally by the ability to translate what Bourdieu terms *physical capital* into other forms of capital (p. 194).

This is an important question in the analysis of the healthy and fit body in social media. If value is determined by the ability to translate physical capital into other forms, such as economic, cultural, and social, we need to consider in what ways this particular type of physical/bodily orientation does appear to translate into those areas. We can think about the capacity to monetize one's social media content here. Those that align most closely with what appears to be the popularized image of health and fitness content appear to have the greatest opportunity to capitalize. In *Bodies*, Orbach (2009) expresses a similar thesis: "[b]odies are and always have been shaped according to the specific cultural moment. We are judged physically and our social and economic position has depended on how our bodies are seen and we are then placed socially and economically" (p. 134). As will be discussed in the next section, this particular bodily orientation and physical capital translates to, and is linked with, economic capital.

Economic production and profitability. The second sub-theme of production is the economic production and profitability of this particular media content and the body that appears to be most closely associated with it. I was reminded of the Future Girl rhetoric when thinking about how the physical capital of the healthy and fit female body translates to economic capital

(for herself and also corporations) or the inverse: how economic capital translates to physical capital.

Class is tied to economic capital, and this figured into a number of the conversations across the groups in the display of appearance markers, consumer goods, advertising, etcetera. While discussing the exclusion of sport from representations of fitness, Lottie and Nadira discussed the need to have access to more money to belong to a gym and to purchase the food that is displayed as "healthy" and associated it with an upper middle-class lifestyle. Access to a gym and the equipment, access to organic foods, energy drinks, and supplements were all linked to a particular class and the luxury to access it. As noted by Azzarito (2010), sport and fitness participation has become a sign of the successful woman complete with symbols of this sporty, fit femininity, including the apparel, the equipment, and the supplements. However, participation may be limited to those who can afford them. Discussions about those who are *invisible* in this process, who make the process possible with the labour required to produce the economic markers of a healthy and fit lifestyle, did not surface. The question of access, money, and upper middle or upper class lifestyle, however, was highlighted by Zoe, Yvonne, and Xia. A certain status is associated with this content because it is idealized:

> **Zoe**: And it's very much like, oh, we're the 1%. We just spent all day tanning and running and wearing our designer clothes, and I don't know where the hell my money comes from, but I'm just rich somehow.

An extension of this might be to think about health and fitness as produced specifically for media, particularly when considering static or posed images, because they tended to elicit the greatest appearance comparisons. If we think of health and fitness as a form of economic and material production, we can point to the shift towards post-industrialization. Zoe, Xia, and Yvonne touched on the shift in how labour is inscribed on the body, which in ways also mirrors the shift in labour (also described by Orbach, 2009):

Zoe: I've heard people refer to certain muscles as they're just for show. And then there's actual functioning muscles. Some people are just like, 'Oh, I look this way just for the camera' and others are like, 'I look this way because I lift boxes.'

Xia: Yeah, no. Cause there's the very specified workouts, I guess, for models and stuff who have to, I don't know – have like, whatever kind of stomach and it's like, yeah, it's not functioning muscles. It's not like muscles that you use to push a grocery cart or even simple tasks. It's just like, these make me look good. So yeah – I guess it's like, just the luxury to be able to be like, 'Yeah! Tone my body.'

Zoe: Totally

[…]

Yvonne: I think it makes a lot of sense. I don't have the luxury to do that cause I'm – if I'm not in the library studying, I'm sleeping because that's all I have time to do.

[…]

Zoe: I feel like that's something that's occurred really, like, historically –way back in the day it was a luxury to be able to sit inside all day, so having pale skin back in the day was like -

Yvonne: Mmhmm.

Zoe: - and you know, and in lots of parts of the world it's still a very tell-tale sign of beauty or whatever. So it's - it's very similar nowadays with the tanned skin and the blonde hair and the booty and the fancy clothing.

We might also think about the ways in which consumer goods seem to signify belonging to a particular class and inclusion in a particular community:

Anne: Even just having these bottles here that she has in this photo [health/supplement brand]. Like Vega bottles, they're not all Vega, but that's like a really common one - is like the blender bottles for the protein shakes. Even just having one of those bottles, half the people just use them for water, but having that bottle - it associates you with that kind of athletic type and the protein, and the nutrition, kind of health and fitness. . .

Christy: … like image portrayal.

Bennett: They are really expensive too, so – it's definitely, I think, higher class.

These particular markers, beyond the appearance (body) markers of "healthy" and/or of "fitness," signify a particular kind of access, status, and economic capital. Physical capital as it translates to economic capital is taken one step further if we think about the promotion of products on personal health and/or fitness content and the sponsored content on Instagram. The ability to monetize this particular bodily presentation for personal and corporate profit is new and specific to this type of contemporary media landscape. Consider the opportunities for "cultural producers" to "circumvent the typical channels of cultural production and distribution" via the internet (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 127) versus more traditional (and expensive) forms of production and distribution. This particular media then becomes a hybrid of personal and commercial/corporate content:

Anne: Yeah exactly. It's kind of like, 'Hey, here's this protein shake, just drink that and you'll be fit.'

Sabrina: I know a lot of people try to get sponsored and because it's such a big movement nowadays, a lot of companies if they see, like, an Instagram account that's really popular they try to, like, sponsor them so they promote their products or something […]. I feel like the most popular ones might be sponsored just because they already have a big, big base of followers and stuff. So then they're more likely to be sponsored. . . . And then they're more likely to post more [inaudible].

Vera: Especially the Kardashians? They post a lot of products that they're trying to advertise, like, Fit tea. And like waist bands and stuff. And they take pictures and they write a description, like 'Get 10% off when you use my code' and stuff like that […]. I think it's becoming more and more and more advertis[ing]-based. I've seen more famous and celebrity peoples have a lot more advertising going on their accounts. . . . Especially the fit teas. I've seen that a lot.

In *Strong is the New Sexy*, discussed in the literature review, Washington & Economides (2016), refer to a conversation between Elizabeth Akinwale and an interviewer:

> Akinwale and the interviewer also discuss the class dynamics of CF [CrossFit], noting that most of what is done in CF can be done at a local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for '20% of the cost.' After examining the costs associated with participation—a quick sampling: the $100+/month box membership, branded athletic wear, and the maintenance of a lifestyle that usually involves eating "clean" (e.g., organic, grass fed, unprocessed, and non-starchy foods)—critics of CF note how fairly expensive it is to participate. Akinwale attempts to highlight some of those issues by her using her own website (www.elisabethakinwale.com) to discuss issues of race, gender, and class by tying them to larger institutional issues and societal biases and pressures (p. 154).

A conversation between Yvonne and Zoe reflected this assertion and highlights some of the issues with regards to class and economic barriers related to participating in certain popular health and fitness regimes.

> **Yvonne**: The other thing is the whole fitness industry is totally on, like, making money. Cause remember CrossFit came out and it was like the cool thing you could do in your garage. Hang out and do stuff. But now they have specific CrossFit gyms that are literally just garages that you have to pay huge amounts of money to use. Which doesn't really make sense cause –
>
> **Zoe**: And now they have, like, championships and stuff.
>
> **Yvonne**: Yeah, but it was based – the beginning of it was to do it cheap, like go for a run and then flip some tires in your backyard. But now they're - now they're not like that [laughter].

I think it is also worthwhile to reflect on the ways in which these types of economic markers may act as a barrier to participation. Bennett and Dawn touched on this in another conversation:

Bennett: Yeah […] look at all these shoes [gestures to photo]. Like, if you want to have a good gym look then you have to have 10 pairs of $150 dollar Nike shoes when a normal pair of running shoes would be just fine. But then you wouldn't be the ideal. I think a lot of it is branding. Cause if you saw someone at the gym, like two people with the exact same body type, and some person was decked out in Nike and someone was just in, like, old [regular] clothes . . . then you would definitely think the person in Nike is fitter and cooler and whatever.

Dawn: so I feel like there's this […] idea that you kind of have to look good – depending on even what size you are – but you have to look good when you go to the gym. Where it's like the gym is there. You should just use it when – if you can. […] Like, it's totally a class thing because it's like the more outfits you have or the cuter outfits you wear – […] it's like, you know, the crop top it's making your boobs look bigger and your butt look bigger and then just having a tiny waist, like, at any size […] you can form that with clothes. So in that – but you have to consume the clothes and buy the clothes and that's an economic thing.

Emphasizing appearance markers in health and in fitness media over achievement or functionality markers makes sense if we point to the economic implications: doing so ties "more centrally to individualized consumption narratives," and allows the body to be nothing more than an object of consumption and site from which to consume (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, pp. 23, 152-153). This is tied to the discussion of the body as alien object that must be managed; every body part "is part of an endless process of marketplace definition" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 10). Framing fitness and/or health in terms of appearance markers makes the link between self-discipline (fitness) and self-gratification (consumption) perhaps more obvious.

O'Brien & Szeman (2014) write that the enhancement and production of the "healthy body," and the perception that health is "a matter of individual control and responsibility" is reflected in developments (such as food labelling) that assume "health and fitness are largely dependent on consumer choices" (p. 196). And if we extend the production of the healthy body

in digital media spaces, we might consider in what ways the notion of community is "a consumer identity, created by marketers and sutured to users' understandings of their own behaviours" (Avance, 2016, p. 67). Having a relatively well-established and stable set of appearance (both physical and consumer-related) markers and a visible health and fitness community can perhaps be understood as a consumer identity and therefore more easily marketed to. And bodies, if they are no longer "a simple outcome of biology," but are "made not born," may have serious implications for both the living we do online and off (Orbach, 2009, p. 139).

Standardization (the utility of the production line). Orbach (2009) argues that our bodies are now judged by our capacity for individual production, they are our "calling card vested with showing the result of our hard work and watchfulness or, alternatively, our failure and sloth" (p. 5). Where the body of the manual worker used to be "easily identified through brawn and muscle, now it is the middle-class body that must show evidence of being worked on at the gym…or any number of body practices which aim to display what the individual has achieved through diligent exercise" (pp. 5-6). If the above is true, then the body has shifted from the means of production to the production itself (p. 6). Orbach goes on to ask how it could be any other way in the post-industrial West where bodies are no longer used, but rather have been replicated. The overt, explicit images of "health" have been produced artificially:

> . . . where the body has become a series of visual images and a labour process in itself? How can the individual body possibly measure up? We manufacture our bodies…the quotidian throwaway commentary on our body and its discontents expresses a culture that has been on its way to bodily disenfranchisement from industrialisation on (2009, p. 75).

Consider this argument in conjunction with the concept of standardization and the factory production of (standardized) cultural consumer goods. Drawing on Horkheimer & Adorno (1971) and the term "culture industry," O'Brien & Szeman (2014) explain that standardization leads to a limited number of predictable cultural forms produced to be consumed by a global audience, ones that are easily reproduced with the aim "only to reinforce and maintain the power of the status quo" (pp. 110-113). And we may see how this could align with a very specific, and

standardized, as well as easily reproducible bodily presentation of health and fitness. Such a standard would align very well with economic production and market segmentation. “Achieving” health and “achieving” fitness becomes a matter of fitting into the particular cultural representations of the time. Given my participant’s fairly consistent “definitions” of health and fitness on social media, I would argue that indeed, we are manufacturing a particular kind of health and/or fitness.

O’Brien & Szeman (2014) also discuss some of the critiques of the culture industry thesis, but the power of this particular idea is that it implies that “[f]ar from being ‘mere’ amusement, popular culture is at the heart of the production and management of social order” (O’Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 115). This reminds me of the rhetoric around healthism and public health campaigns. This thesis also does not deny the possibility for opposition or resistance, but the question is whether or not opposition or resistance leads to a change in “the basic structures of capitalism and popular culture production” (p. 114). There are absolutely, and increasingly, spaces in social media to resist, but when the contemporary literature is brought into play and the voices of my study’s participants are taken into account, I am not convinced, in terms of bodily presentation, that these spaces have led to a fundamental change in the way certain bodies are valued and others are not. They appear to be constrained by the same features of the platforms that more “normative” bodily presentations are.

This assertion is also supported by theories of cultural production. Having very specific standards regarding what is considered “fit” and “fitness” in popular culture, or perhaps specific to certain social media platforms, allows for a particular type of standardized production. Since the 1950s, rather than cultural production that was geared towards the mass market, “there have been greater and greater degrees of market segmentation, with the result that cultural producers have to gear their products to increasingly small and specialized segments of the overall group of consumers” (O’Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 129). If we can conceptualize this particular bodily presentation in health and fitness spaces, or specifically #healthy and #fit, as having a standard “type” and market segment, cultural producers can tailor the production of consumer goods to

that "type." And again, it is here that appearance markers are crucial in that they tie more centrally to individualized consumption narratives. The idea of a "standard" fit and healthy bodily presentation was discussed in a number of conversations, including the following:

> **Olive**: I think it's more so [*the idea that fitness is a part of looking good*] now than - like before it was really thin, thin girls. But now it's like, you want to be like...
>
> **Quinn**: You still want to be fairly thin, but –
>
> **Pat**: Yeah, thin but not thin [laughter], which is kind of funny?
>
> **Olive**: With muscles and stuff.
>
> **Quinn**: Yeah, like muscle definition….
>
> **Pat**: Well – here's the thing. For sure back in, like, beginning of high school – it was thin, very thin. And now there's like this thing. People are saying, like, thick or whatever. And you're actually still thin, but your legs are just not toothpicks. You just have curves, right? So, like –
>
> **Quinn**: Yeah, but you're still expected to have, like, a tiny waist –
>
> **Pat**: Right. Tiny waist, but huge butt. And you just need to be, like, very curvy, but just skinny in the right areas. And it's like, I don't know. Maybe people could be like, 'Oh! You're not, like, totally skinny anymore.' It's like, 'Well no.' *It's just a different standard* and then the people who actually were just naturally skinny, now they're just left out of it. So it's just a new standard, but I do think fitness is coming – fitness is more popular now. But it – it's for – I don't know. I rarely see images that are geared toward feeling strong […] *it's just different standards*. And so maybe people can have healthier habits because they're focusing on fitness, but I don't think it is doing it for the right reasons necessarily […]
>
> **Me (Sarah)**: Would you think there's, then, we haven't really loosened up the kind of pressure that women are under to be a certain body type?
>
> **Olive**: I would say this [health and fitness trend/imagery] adds more pressure. […] I feel like this is now pressure to, ok, now you need to be fit. *But not only do you need to be fit,*

> *you need to look like that* [gestures]. And, like, as someone who exercises at least an hour and a half everyday… I don't know if I'd ever have a body like that. And I'm ok with how I look, but like, I don't know what these ladies are doing.

Lottie, too, suggested that "ideals," or standards, are shifting away from thin and towards a more athletic image, which was noted in the literature. Nadira, however, commented that this may be a horizontal shift:

> **Lottie**: Right now we're at the junction where the – *thin size zero is going. And the muscular and the toned body is coming*. We're at the junction right now.
>
> **Nadira**: Because you see, definitely, comparisons when people are looking at people that 10 years ago would have been you know, super model, very attractive, very popular. Now people are going, 'Woah that's unhealthy.' But then they are putting something that is quite difficult to attain as being *the standard*. Which is, you know, just kind of a, like, a horizontal shift. And isn't necessarily more improvement.

Robinson et al. (2017) write that the popularity of [fitspiration] images, and subsequent saturation, makes this particular bodily presentation potentially "both attainable and normative, desensitizing women from their generally unobtainable nature" (p. 69). This idea of desensitizing women from their unobtainable nature appears to be somewhat patronizing and might imply that audiences cannot be critical of this particular idealized standard. However, Olive, Quinn, and Pat touched on the additional pressures of this particular idealized representation of a fit/healthy body. They seemed keenly aware of the potentially unobtainable nature of this bodily presentation, and this was reflected in other groups as well:

> **Olive**: But it's not exercise that I would deem healthy or – like, natural for most girls to do so you're adding pressure and now, like, when guys talk to you or when guys look at you it's like – do you have that body? Or, 'Oh you're athletic, you must look like this or you must look like this person.' It's an unreal expectation to live up to.
>
> **Me (Sarah)**: So do you think it's just as, or more, unrealistic than previous standards?
>
> **Olive**: Absolutely.

Pat: That is pretty unrealistic, I think. Unless that is your life. Like people for sure dedicate their lives to that. But […] I see a lot of these images and I'm like, 'Well, that's not gonna happen' [laughter] because that's not something I'm going to dedicate my life to.

Quinn: Mmhmm.

Olive: And yeah. I don't know. I feel like it's what people see now and it's what people expect and it's – that's not what you get even if you are athletic or healthy.

One of the other reasons I suspect that health and/or fitness content may be linked to negative outcomes is the seeming exclusion of sport from the content. And it is here again that the question of production, standardization, and market segmentation is relevant. The particular brand of fitness and health displayed in certain social media spaces is largely one that focuses on the individual and the production of the individual body. A number of participants were critical of the focus on the individual and noted that fitness and health imagery excluded sport, perhaps further branding this particular bodily ideal. The content seemed (and seems) to portray fitness as being particular to your traditional gym environment or occasionally as documented in a picturesque/aesthetic scene (mountain, beach, etc.):

Christy: They don't cover the demographic of other people who do other exercise that doesn't necessarily mean going to the gym [...] So, outdoor sports or just, biking, different things like that. They don't always show those things, so for me personally I hate going to the gym. I'd rather go play basketball, volleyball, hockey, anything else that's like an entertaining sport to me. So they don't necessarily – like, this doesn't really motivate me. This makes me kind of go, 'Ugh.' So it's just making me think about how a lot of the portrayal on Instagram is like, ok, do um – here's like the 30 day abs challenge and different things like that that are all based in gym exercises. So that's what that makes me think about.

Quinn discussed this as well in the context of martial arts:

Quinn: I really like martial arts and there's not a lot of martial art content in any of the – anything that's not like MMA [Mixed Martial Arts] hard-core fighting. Well, yeah – that's cool. But there's so much more variety that you're missing out on here.

Me (Sarah): Right, yeah. That actually came up on Tuesday from someone else who said the same thing. She said, 'I like to do kickboxing, but I never see that.'

Olive: Or you see the kickboxing shots like that [gestures].Yeah. With the toned, like, 'I'm in a fighting stance.'

Nadira is another participant who preferred martial arts and sport to what is typically represented as fitness. Some of the participants expressed not seeing themselves represented because their preferred form of exercise was sport- or team-related *and* their body type was also not represented. For example, Nadira explained:

Nadira: – when I'm being active I'd rather be playing a sport and having fun. Whereas I find going to the gym – I find it very repetitive and so it's like you don't really see yourself – and *as* someone who's curvier, when this is all you see you're like, 'Hmm' [makes a face, laughter].

I asked her if she felt that she was in a way doubly not represented since she described herself as curvier and more interested in sport than the type of fitness represented in the content. She exclaimed:

Nadira: Doubly not represented!

Whereas when talking about images that inspired them, participants discussed sports, hiking, seeing people *doing* rather than displaying appearance markers of fitness:

Nadira: I find people going on hiking adventures and I think that's pretty cool because, like, you're able to explore and be healthy. And then I also - because I've done martial arts my entire life, so seeing people doing really, really cool out there, like jiu jitsu and stuff – I find that stuff empowering because you're like, 'Wow. The human body is capable of doing some crazy things.'

Lottie: Actually, what I was – I don't know if this, it's only my Instagram people – I don't see, you know, hockey girls or sport – do you see sports people?

Nadira: No.

Lottie: No, right? Actually that is supposed to be the one which has to be there!

Nadira: Yeah! That's something that should be associated with fitness that isn't there.

Lottie: That is never there!

Nadira: Yeah. It's always gym, going on runs –

Lottie: Yeah!

Nadira: - it's never actually…

Lottie: Hockey girls, basketball [inaudible]

Nadira: And when you do see it it's really inspiring.

This distinction between active and static images and the perception of authenticity and inauthenticity appears to be in line with very narrow possibilities for a visual definition/discourse of health and of fitness (or #health and #fitness) on Instagram. The exclusion of sport from popular health and from fitness media lends itself to a particular brand of fitness and thus the manufacturing of this particular brand. Finally, Kira raised an interesting question which prompted me to consider how/in what ways participation in sport may influence the way young women (and men) perceive health and fitness imagery and/or whether it acts as a buffer to social comparison and bodily comparison. If it does, the question of active versus static imagery, and the exclusion of sport from "fitness" imagery in particular on Instagram, is of particular concern. The exclusion of sport and the seeming increase in the focus on the body and the appearance markers of fitness leads us to the theme (and perception) of authenticity in health and fitness media.

Kira: […] *I've always played sports and whatever. But it never really made me think about, like, 'Oh, bikini body' or all this stuff, whatever. I just didn't care. Yeah. But now – I feel like everyone's caring.* Like, even kids who are younger than me, that – at that time – now are like 13 and like, 'Oh, I wonder if this bikini looks good on me' […]. You

> just want to go up to them and be like, 'No, it's ok, you don't have to worry about that right now.' Like, everybody – you know, you guys are still growing, your bodies are still developing, all this stuff.

Jhally (2015) writes that advertisers responded to the decline of commercial timeslots, from 60 seconds to 15 or less, "by creating a new type of advertising – what is called the 'vignette approach' – in which narrative and 'reason-why' advertising are subsumed under a rapid succession of lifestyle images" (p. 250). A commercial editor in the article describes them as "a dream to work with because the parts are sort of interchangeable" (p. 250). Health and fitness is often referred to as a lifestyle and so goes hand in hand with lifestyle marketing and market segmentation. We can again consider the utility of standardization here with the notion of "interchangeable" imagery.

Summary. The notion of production is tied to performance, which was discussed in terms of who is and is not within the frame of health and fitness media. It illuminated some of the issues "casting" a particular actor brings up with regards to race and ethnicity. Production was also useful as a term in considering its economic, and necessarily classed, implications. Finally, I explored production through the subtheme of standardization and the economic benefits of a standardized, easily reproducible, cultural product/concept of health and fitness, which appears to necessarily exclude sport from this brand of health and fitness media. Next, I discuss the theme of authenticity before concluding with a short discussion.

Authenticity

Authenticity figures in this last theme as the quality of being authentic. Or, "[a] quality of genuineness claimed for some phenomenon (seen as being natural, pure, or true—especially in contrast to commercialized forms)," even if such a quality, that is natural, pure, or true, may be critiqued as being both illusory and essentialist.[3] And as an extension of the concept of authenticity (versus superficiality), I think it is also useful to consider the notion of *spectacle*:

> [f]or the French philosopher Guy Debord (1931–94), writing in the 1960s, the 'society of the spectacle' is a cultural obsession with appearances and the image: mass consumption and electronic media have created a society of spectators and inauthentic experience.[3]

Spectatorship and inauthentic experience figures throughout this final theme of authenticity. The cultural obsession with appearance and image is intensified by the ubiquity of media platforms and the degree of access that many people have to that media. It is the appearance and the image of the body as object versus subject that seems to have a significant impact on the way health and fitness media is perceived, as well as the degree to which electronic media (social media platforms in particular) increases both deliberate and inadvertent consumption of these media images.

The inspiration in Fitspiration? One of the major outcomes of the discussions I had with these seventeen young women appears to suggest that, for the majority of the participants, a particular aspect of health and fitness content may, in some instances, buffer against the negative outcomes outlined in the literature review. For the majority of participants, images that depict what they perceive to be genuine/authentic activity (active images) were positive, as in motivating or inspiring, versus images that were either static/posed or deemed to be inauthentic activity. Inauthentic activity can be understood as activity where the image is not in line with other markers one might expect to see associated with that particular activity (sweat, redness, hair pulled back, etc.). Yvonne, Zoe, and Xia illustrated this in one of our conversations:

> **Yvonne**: I – I really like these two images [active photos] that you've gotten whereas ours have been pictures of people who just look like that [static/posed], yours are pictures of people actually doing it, which I find more inspiring. Like, now I kind of want to go to the gym, do some lunges. Whereas with these ones [static/posed], I'm just sad. Like I would go home, take a photo in the mirror and be like, 'Wow, I don't look like that.'
>
> […]
>
> **Zoe**: We just broke ground.

Xia: I think one of the reasons why I follow certain fitness accounts is because I want to be able to look at pictures of people working out and videos and see their form and be able –

Zoe: Totally! [gasp]

Xia: - to be like, 'Ok, are my knees in the right place when I'm squatting? What's a new workout I could do? Oh, this cool twisty thing. I want to try that. It -it's going to target different muscle groups.' I guess I do get kind of put down whenever I see a picture – a picture like this [static/posed] on the same account. I'll be like 'Shit, I don't look anything like that' rather than seeing a video as Zoe said before– in motion. When you hear the pump up music you're like, 'Wow! That's a workout that I could try! That's something that's attainable for me.' Yeah, there's a big difference between the kind of posts that the account's making.

Me (Sarah): Do you think the line of empowerment and disempowerment sort of follows the line of active versus static?

Yvonne: Totally.

Zoe: Yes [emphatic].

Xia: Yes [emphatic]. Oh my god.

Zoe: Ohhh.

The question of active versus static was also illustrated by Olive and Pat:

Olive: Absolutely. Yeah, I'm definitely far more inspired [by active images]. They motivate you in different ways, I guess. I would never say I'm motivated by a picture of a 6-pack abs. But it's more like – I really want those. It's more of like, yeah, it's like almost like I feel bad. Because I'm looking at that and I'm like, 'Oh man. I should have something like that' or 'I want something like that' but if you see someone running across a hillside or something or –

Pat: Like, I want to go do that right now! I think I would really enjoy it!

Static or posed images appeared to encourage appearance comparisons more than images of activity or videos. This type of distinction was made by nearly all of the groups that I spoke with and it appeared to be linked to the perception of authenticity.

> **Uma**: And it's like [with static/posed images], 'Did you really climb all the way up there?' cause you don't look – like, your makeup's all done amazingly and everything. When I go for a hike that's not what I look like [laughter] when I get to the top.
>
> **Vera**: I think [videos are] motivational, but if you see pictures, I don't know, like these ones [gestures] and in lingerie and you're like, 'Why can't I be like that?' You know? So it's sometimes motivational if you watch videos on exercise and the progress that people have made. But it – I guess it depends.
>
> **Sabrina**: because also in photos it's easier to Photoshop, edit the photos. And also when they're static you can, say, suck in your belly or something. Right? So you can improve your posture for, like, 5 seconds to take the picture but then you relax, right? So I feel like videos [are] more like a real representation of what the person is.
>
> **Tay**: Yes. Stuff like that I find is motivating. . . . Cause you see how those people have worked to get to that. . . . And what they've gone through to get to that. And it's like, 'Yeah, I want to work on that and get there too' but when it's just a picture it's like, 'Look at me! Look at how I am and you're not like this' [laughter].

Yvonne discussed the idea that even images that might suggest activity can be deemed inauthentic and elicit more negative responses:

> **Yvonne**: the only thing I want to comment on, quickly at least, for these two is yes, they're doing activity, but it's posed. It looks very posed. Like their hair is down, but if you're working out your hair is not going to be down. I would never wear a hat if I was at the gym. Like, I literally have no idea what she's doing. They look very posed compared to some of the other ones we've seen.

Another group brought us back to the exclusion of sport from this type of health and fitness content:

Me (Sarah): Would you say that generally you don't actually see people working out or playing sports when you see this sort of [content]?

Olive: Oh I never see – not on Pinterest, no.

Pat: Yeah. And what's actually interesting - so the poster that I saw of you – the reason it caught my eye is because there's this girl running on it. And I'm like, 'That looks cool!' and I'm like, 'What is that?' And then it was this [focus group]. But generally it's not [active images]. It's usually this [gesturing to static/posed image] or that [gesturing to static/posed image] or them.

Olive: [laughter] Yeah.

It is possible that images interpreted as active or videos of activity may allow for less focus on the body as object to be looked at and more as subject that acts. As Fardouly et al. (2017) write, it is possible that these images, because they may not *only* emphasize appearance, but include things like fitness and strength as well, might cancel out strict appearance comparisons and subsequent self-objectification:

Zoe: I love following personal trainers, and all that on Instagram. I love watching those videos, like they're super - There's those ones, but they also just sometimes just do straight up compilations of their clients doing workouts, which are super motivational for me because they always have super fire tracks going on in the background too.

Xia: Well I think if you can't relate to the content of the image at all, like if the body looks nothing like you, then that can be disempowering […] I feel like it's a really fine line between the two concepts. It's weird because they're totally the opposite, but if you're only offering a single view of what a fit body looks like, for instance, [versus] if you're offering an array of different people working out in a motivational kind of - with like the different clients - then I feel like there's a big difference between being able to relate to what's in the image and not.

It can be hard to relate static images of any body to concepts of health and fitness (without eliciting appearance comparisons). And when participants are reporting that they rarely access

the textual content associated with the images, assuming it provides additional context, it is easy to see how this may influence the association of a particular bodily presentation with fitness and/or health.

> **Pat**: I feel like, just from – over the past few years the things that have popped up, it's just […] this ultra-strong - is like, not necessarily *the* mainstream, but it's definitely coming up more. Like this idea that fitness is a part of like looking good. That's sort of, for me – at least what I've seen - get more popular.

This idea of fitness as part of "looking good" seems to be in line with the conversations around active versus static images. As in traditional print magazines like *Shape* magazine and *Fitness* magazine "health is bypassed for the sake of beauty," (Washington & Economides, 2016, p. 146) and looking good is privileged over feeling good. This is where we can consider what specific content or imagery related to health and fitness, or fitspiration, might be more likely to elicit negative responses from audiences and what might, as discussed in the literature review, be linked to negative outcomes like social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and negative mood. Perhaps the more health and fitness content/imagery online mirrors commercial health and fitness content/imagery in print, since it is primarily static, the more likely there will be negative outcomes like appearance comparisons and body dissatisfaction.

Before moving on, it is important to note that the use of the terms authentic and inauthentic are undoubtedly problematic. By including the terms authentic/inauthentic (my own codes) these binaries might be seen as an extension of biopower, particularly in terms of its recursive nature and how it disciplines the body by labelling these depictions of health and/or fitness as authentic. Doing so may suggest that a body is desirable/undesirable or real/fake, regulating what constitutes a healthy body and what constitutes a fit body. This interpretation illustrates how such categories might create an environment that further disciplines the self and others through what we could be called an "authentic gaze" or lens. In other words, this could be seen as an act of discursive power that limits or polices what is allowable around the ideas of healthy and/or fit bodies. Alternatively, we should also consider that Instagram as a platform,

with the affordances and constraints as a technology, also acts in ways that enable or constrain, inviting this sort of policing by encouraging commentary, direct messages, the ability to like or follow, or create hashtags as biopedagogies (see Chapter 2) but perhaps more importantly, the ability for users to "flag" content deemed "inappropriate".

I have taken the time to point out this potential reading of the term authenticity to make clear that while this reading of authenticity might be possible, I do not believe that my participants were necessarily invoking what we might refer to as biopower. What I mean when I say that some images were perceived as authentic/active and others as inauthentic/static, is not that participants were judging them to be real or fake, good or bad. I have used the term authenticity to describe instances where participants seemed to identify with photos (or not). In other words, it was a question of *identifying with* the subject matter in the photo and negotiating or creating their own subjectivity versus a strict judgment of the subject matter and the actor/subject in the photo. Further, I believe that how the image was composed, particularly in the use of what Goffman (1979) has called gender displays, triggered for participants a reading of inauthenticity. While this idea was not explored in detail as a part of this study, it certainly would account for how participants used terms that I coded as relating to a concept of authenticity, which included being perceived as natural, pure, or true particularly in contrast to commercialized forms.[3] In sum, it appears as though images that are less closely related to commercial depictions of femininity and display are more inspiring and more authentic (for lack of a better term) in the eyes of audiences, resulting in fewer negative outcomes.

Social comparison, body dissatisfaction, negative mood. While social comparison, and body dissatisfaction, can in many ways be linked to the affordances (and constraints) of social media platforms as discussed above, what arose within the theme of authenticity is perhaps more novel. It may provide more insight into how these young women perceive certain types of images and the influence they might have on if (or how much) social comparison and the negative outcomes associated with it, take place. The literature review already identified some of the negative outcomes associated with viewing "fitspiration" imagery and the "athletic ideal." A

number of participant discussions seemed to confirm at least some of the research around social comparison, negative mood, and body dissatisfaction across groups, both specific to health and fitness content, or imagery related to "fitspiration," as well as social media more generally. But where researchers like Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) write that social comparison to fitspiration images may be higher given that the women presented, at least for the most part, are not models, but rather "everyday" women (p. 62), I suggest that this is short-sighted. In particular, audiences can easily "follow" celebrity women (and men) on Instagram. What I think is more compelling, at least from the data I gathered, is the idea that it is the *type* of bodily presentation, active versus static and subsequent perception of authenticity, that elicited more or less social comparison. Viewing bodies and viewing bodies categorized as healthy or as fit were sometimes described in terms of these outcomes:

> **Dawn**: …there's the empowerment part of me who's like, 'You know, I know I'm pretty happy with who I am' but I totally, as I see these photos I'm like, 'Well, maybe life would be better if I looked like that,' but then at the same time then there's the other voice in my head, like the devil and the angel […]. So, and I think it's the addiction […] like the more time you use [social media], the more you get involved. Kind of like when you have an addiction to something you get more attached […]. But then we also don't see it as a harmful thing cause it's like *social media* but I think it's also that's because it's new.

Dawn seemed to touch on some of the research that shows a correlation between time spent on Facebook and poorer body image among adolescent and adult women (Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). As mentioned in the literature review, the amount of time spent engaging in photo activity (liking, commenting, sharing, viewing) in particular has been associated with body image concerns (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017; Slater et al., 2017). And given Instagram's almost unique focus on photo activity, this is of particular concern:

> **Christy**: I know for me… that social media for me – it's really hard on my self-esteem. But I know I'm pretty addicted to it because I want to fit in. And I want to be normal. But

that's what everyone's trying to do. They're trying to be normal. So I keep up with it and seeing this, it doesn't make me feel great about myself, which is – I think we should target that instead. Like, making people feel happy with, comfortable with who they are instead of saying, 'Oh. Be this. Work out more. Eat better. Do all these things.' And those are important, but I think we need to focus on accepting who we are.

Uma: I think, yeah – these sort of things I definitely avoid searching. Fitspo or Thinspo […]. I don't understand why you would want to look at them. Cause it's just kind of – I don't find it motivating. I kind of just really [feel] like, 'Wow, I feel bad about myself.'

Even in instances where Kira talked to me about feeling inspired and motivated to exercise when viewing these images, and felt that her peer group would agree, she also discussed having negative feelings about these same images and seemed to hold both positions simultaneously. Hers was a very nuanced and complex interpretation:

Kira: I look to it for motivation, but then at the same time there's part of me, and multiple other girls, that's kind of sitting here like, 'Oh, you know, oh crap.' You look at yourself and [laughter] you know, you look at the photo and it's like, 'Well, um, that's not me. I'm not there yet!' kind of thing. Yeah, no. And sometimes it does make you feel a little bit bad about yourself cause it's like, 'Wow, if that person worked so hard and everything, you know….' Sometimes even for me, for example, or my friends or whatever, we work out and we still can't get there, you know? For our ideal image kind of thing. And so it – it doesn't matter whether you're actually putting in the effort to look like that or you're not. It does in a way make you feel bad, but then me personally I choose to turn it into motivation and be like, 'Ok, well, if you don't look like that yet – keep going.' But that's just how I look at it.

Me (Sarah): It's like a goal?

Kira: Yeah. It's a goal kind of thing. But no, I can definitely understand how it – yeah, it could really hurt some people's, you know, egos or whatever looking at it. Yeah. It can

make you feel bad about yourself a little bit, but I just, me personally, I decide to just turn it around.

Nadira had a similar, and very succinct, interpretation:

Nadira: …it is empowering to be seeing all these images of women being active and being fit, but at the same time it is just another source of comparison, which can be quite detrimental.

It is important to acknowledge the breadth of possible reading positions and also the capacity to hold numerous positions simultaneously. This content does appear to, at least in part, influence how audiences view health and fitness and how they interpret it. And it seems, similar to how Slater et al. (2017) described it, to not be benign. The exchange between Pat, Olive, and Quinn illustrated (again) the association of positive feelings towards imagery that is interpreted as active/dynamic (authentic) versus imagery that is interpreted as static/posed (inauthentic):

Pat: I think when I see things like this [static/posed health and fitness content], because I see it a lot […] I think it does motivate people because I think a lot of people really do want to kind of be able to, like, feel comfortable wearing that kind of thing. At least I know it affects me in that way. But it doesn't affect me in a positive way. It just sort of makes me feel bad.

Olive: Mmhmm.

Quinn: Same.

Pat: When I see images of people running or people who are actually, like, strong and healthy and are able to be active, that motivates me in a really good way. And it gets me excited about fitness. As opposed to something like this or this [gestures to static/posed image] where I'm like –

Olive: Like, yeah, I'd love to have that leg or body part, yeah.

Drawing on Mulvey, O'Brien & Szeman (2014) write that "[f]or women, whose relationships to their bodies have always been mediated by social codes that define them as objects-to-be-looked-at . . . display is at best an ambiguous form of empowerment" (p. 198). This

is an important comment to contextualize in light of these and other conversations like this, that I had with various focus groups. Olive spoke specifically to the body as object and objectified:

> **Olive**: It's such a – because it's such an objectify - objectification. Like, they're working hard for something and then […] they don't show them actually working hard. You never see pictures of people actually sweating. You see pictures of people, like, wearing a jean jacket. Like no one's going to work out in that, right? There's no bra support there! That bothers me.

Perhaps this type of imagery, fitspiration and otherwise, *can* be a source of motivation and empowerment for women, but it is perhaps a specific *type* and display of that imagery that is felt (often, but not for everyone) to be more empowering than those that simply display bodies as object-to-be-looked-at and not subjects *doing*:

> **Xia**: Well I feel like. . . it's problematic, if - cause if you see all this #fit and whatever and you're curvier or you, I don't know, you're just not that shape, but you still – you can go on runs and do yoga or whatever makes you happy, and you just […] no matter how much you work out you don't look like that. I feel like it would be really awful to think like, 'Oh shit, I- I'm – I must be doing something wrong because I don't look like this and they're fit and I want to be fit'….

When I put the theme of authenticity in context with some of the definitions that contextualize it, I included the notion of the spectacle, or 'society of the spectacle', as a cultural obsession with appearances and the image. To say that mass consumption and electronic media have created a society of spectators and inauthentic experience[1] may be slightly exaggerated, but electronic media have made spectatorship and obsession with the image of the body much more pronounced. I think it is worth considering this in conjunction with O'Brien & Szeman's (2014) description of a culture of organized sport that produced a culture of spectatorship as opposed to participation (p. 58). Perhaps our particular cultural moment with regards to health and to fitness is an extension of both of these concepts of spectatorship, and in particular a spectatorship that is individual rather than communal.

Summary. The notion of authenticity (and spectacle) is linked here to the demarcation of perceptions of imagery that is inspiring or motivating versus uninspiring or demotivating, though multiple reading positions may be held simultaneously. Perceptions of authenticity are also reflected in the ways in which women were perceived as object versus subject. This was discussed in more detail in terms of how static or images that seem inauthentic appear to invite more appearance comparisons, and body dissatisfaction, than those that depict activity that is deemed authentic.

Discussion and potential emerging themes and considerations

Again, as in the literature review, it is necessary to highlight the positive possibilities within this particular type of health and fitness media. Most of the groups I met with did not appear to perceive health and fitness content/imagery as particularly positive or liberatory, as perhaps it is intended to be. However, there were certainly a number of positive reactions to certain content. For instance, there was the discussion around the perception that (at least some amount) of female muscularity appears to be more socially acceptable and celebrated today versus previous generations. There were also the possible ties between displays of female physical strength to interpretations of feminism that might indicate at least a slight disruption of normative gender roles in media representations. Social media also broadens the capacity for audiences to seek out the type of content they want to see more of, which makes it easier to "entertain goals and lifestyles that are not specifically 'gender appropriate'" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 157) or reflective of gendered bodily ideals. Three different groups mentioned Ashley Graham as being very visible and very popular, and associated with the health and fitness lifestyle (she has her own brand of fitness apparel), and she does not fit the dominant "fitness" standard. Slater et al. (2017) write that young adult media consumers are demanding more appearance diversity in media (p. 88) such as this, and my perception of Ashley Graham's name being mentioned across 50% of the groups indicates that young adult media consumers are at least seeing or seeking more appearance diversity in contemporary media.

Dawn also described a friend who recently disclosed to her that she had an eating disorder in high school. They attended a course together where there was a week related to body image and gym culture. It is here that we need to think about in what ways health and fitness media and behaviours can also be a site at which individuals deploy positive agency. The positive association of exercise on mental health outcomes is well researched and we must absolutely consider that there are or may be audiences who are encouraged to eat and to exercise by viewing this media without the negative outcomes described in this paper:

> **Dawn**: my friend was talking about the reading and how […] one of the readings was talking about […] how, at the gym, you know there's this gym culture and it's really negative, because people over-exercise there but then she, as someone who had an eating disorder, that really offended her because […] the person was assuming that that's the only thing people go to the gym – is because of the eating disorder culture. But there's also the positive side to the gym where it's like people are just trying to be healthy.

Even if constrained, this media (and lifestyle) appears to move far beyond physical ideals relating to docility or weakness. Body modification, including diet and exercise to shape the body, is complex and not easily reducible to a single perspective:

> Whether these practices are motivated by health or by aesthetics, whether they uphold or challenge prevailing social norms, and whether they aim toward the accentuation or transcendence of the body – and few can be so simply classified – they demand examination in relation to the more fundamental questions of how they contribute to the production of individual and social meaning, identity, and power (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 195).

I think the participants in this study help to illuminate, in a number of nuanced ways, how health and fitness practices that often modify/alter the appearance of the body "contribute to the production of individual and social meaning, identity, and power" (O'Brien & Szeman, 2014, p. 195). The way the participants negotiated, critiqued, challenged, and explored these questions

add, I believe, so much more to this analysis than could have been achieved through quantitative data and statistical analyses alone.

Conclusion

Representation matters and the way(s) in which the healthy and the fit body is represented in Instagram in particular, but perhaps in social media more generally, tells us something. Who is inside and outside the frame creates a particular narrative of what is socially acceptable and approved as a representation of health and fitness. As O'Brien & Szeman (2014) explain:

> Elements of representation – the 'sign' of our times – might not point to the truth, but they do tell us, figuratively, where to go (and perhaps more importantly who can go where). Symbolic representation is, in other words, a crucial aspect of *political* representation, a subject that . . . informs practically every aspect of our social lives (p. 99).

Additionally, Orbach (2009) argues that the "photographic image… has created the new visual grammar" and that it is changing the way we relate to our bodies (p. 87). And to that I would add that the way the photographic image is displayed across newer forms of media is changing the way we relate to our bodies. In light of the conversations I had with seventeen young women across six sessions, I would argue that the healthy and fit female body online is one that is still associated with significant constraints (in terms of what appears to be socially acceptable), and one that is produced and performed in particular ways that are tied to race, class, and economic production. It is also one that when perceived as active and authentic subject can have potentially significant positive impacts on audiences (in spite of often being displayed as static object). In the next chapter, I will highlight the key findings from this study, discuss some of its limitations, avenues for possible future research, and a summarizing conclusion on the study as a whole.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In this final chapter I will highlight four key findings from this study. First, in spite of some of the affordances of social media, numerous constraints appear to normalize a particular body that is deemed healthy and/or fit. Second, the particular bodily representation in #healthy and #fit spaces appears to only be available to a select subset of the population. Third, the differences in perception of images of activity that may be deemed authentic versus those appearing to be static and deemed inauthentic on viewers' interpretations (positive versus negative feelings). And finally, the ways in which multiple reading positions came into play. I will also discuss some of this study's limitations, a personal reflection and implications of these findings, avenues for possible future research, and a summarizing conclusion on the study as a whole.

Limitations

Limitations highlighted in the methodology chapter include having a small sample size, participant demographic, recruitment strategy, and the researcher's own bias/position. It is important to remind the reader that participants who took part in this research likely already had some relationship with health and fitness content on social media, but we cannot assume that this is a commonality of all/most young women. This is especially true given this sample was restricted to seventeen women. However, given that audiences, including some of the participants in this study, are inadvertently exposed to this content (not actively following or seeking it), it is perhaps not entirely unrepresentative of a larger sample.

The perceptions, analyses, and discussions that developed throughout the focus groups were complex, nuanced, sometimes contradictory, and while none of this should be surprising given the polysemic nature of texts and media, it is still a challenge to interpret and analyze. Again, as the sole researcher and analyst of this data, it must be read via my own assumptions

and biases. This study and the data is drawn from a particular group of young women and a particular context and cannot necessarily be generalized to other women or other populations. I noted in the Methodology chapter that it may be most appropriate to see focus groups "as social contexts in themselves through which partial and multiple versions of social reality are constructed, thus rejecting any idea of there being one, ultimate, objective truth of social reality" (Munday, 2014, p. 238). However, the fact that a number of themes discussed in the literature review are present in the qualitative data, and that there was a great deal of convergence of responses across groups, suggest that this analysis has at least some material that can be useful for consideration beyond this specific study.

An additional limitation or challenge in this study may be the use of the word "fit" and the use of images posted as #fit given its association, particularly in Britain, as denoting physical/sexual attractiveness. While I do not think this impacted the image prompts as participants did not perceive the image prompts to be atypical of what they would normally see as health and fitness content, it might be worth replacing with another term should future research seek to analyse particular tags relating to health and/or fitness in social media.

Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) indicated that one of the limitations of their study was that participants were asked to "pay attention to the images in a way that they might not normally do in their homes or elsewhere" (p. 66), such as the ability to interact with the images (liking and commenting, for example). My study was the same, only I see this as both a limitation and perhaps a potential strength. The limited interaction with the image, only being able to observe and discuss, might have acted as a way to encourage reflection and to consider and discuss the various meanings that might be woven throughout the images. As Carrotte et al.'s (2017) study suggest, one possibility for reducing the negative impact of fitspiration could include focusing on "critically analyzing objectifying messages in fitspiration" and to "deconstruct the relationship between fitness, sexuality, and beauty" (p. 7). In a way, it is possible that this research begins to do this though it was not specifically conceptualized as a tool to do so.

In spite of the limitations this study offers a substantial contribution to this emerging area of research and extends previous research in health and fitness media, both in print and now online. It is my hope that the content of this research will be helpful in filling some of the gaps, addressing some of the limitations, and encouraging more researchers to include meaning-making and audience analysis in future media-based studies.

Summary of key findings

Numerous findings and issues were discussed in detail across the themes of constraint, production, and authenticity in the analysis chapter. I would like to conclude here by highlighting four of the key findings from this study.

First, in spite of some of the affordances of social media, in particular the ability for users to contribute content that might challenge traditional and/or stereotypical media representations, numerous constraints appear to normalize a particular body that is deemed healthy and/or fit. The way(s) health and fitness are most commonly displayed on social media are extremely narrow and limited compared to how viewers might otherwise conceptualize these terms. The tension around constraint figured prominently in the limited representation of the healthy and fit female body in social media, the restrictions on size and muscularity for women, on Instagram's affordances and constraints as a platform, as well as some of the discursive themes within health and fitness content on social media. Popular health and fitness content on social media appears to act as a social influence that may lead to a climate of conformity to (gendered) social norms and expectations within this particular space. Thinness is still very much associated with health even if framed as healthy and/or fit. And this is significant in that fitspiration (fitness + inspiration) and mottos such as Strong is the New Skinny and Strong is the New Sexy are often conceptualized as promoting a less constrained beauty ideal, and more empowered identity, than other feminine ideals. My research and discussions with participants indicate that the fit, athletic, and healthy woman's bodily ideal may in fact be more constrained and disempowering. As noted by Robinson et al. (2017), even if this imagery may be intended to inspire, which is at least

insinuated discursively (fitness + inspiration, for example), it may actually result in the opposite effect for a number of viewers and can lead to a decrease in body satisfaction. A number of my participants seemed to agree that this body commands even greater restrictions than other idealized bodies in media, which was suggested by Jong & Drummond (2016).

It might be possible to read athletic femininities as a form of resistance to more traditional gendered bodily ideals, which is how I imagined more participants would conceptualize the shift to fitspiration and representations of athletic femininities, but these appeared to nevertheless be constrained both by societal perceptions and the ability to comment on, and in ways police, challenges to the size requirements associated with femininity. Many participants confirmed that "muscle-enhancing behaviors" like changing diets, exercising more, and using protein powders, steroids, and other substances (Eisenberg et al., 2012) are common amongst their peer group, but there were still gendered constraints associated with behaviours that would enhance muscularity and size. This seems to confirm Carrotte et al.'s (2017) and Dworkin & Wachs' (2009) research which suggests that healthy and fit equates to conforming to, or fitting in with, feminine and masculine bodily ideals (Carrotte et al., 2017, p. 7). It may also confirm the restrictions on women's size as indication of "the potential for cultural devaluations of women's strength" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 80).

And while participants discussed the limits to women's size and muscularity, some also offered a possible feminist interpretation of what pushing against those constraints might signify. We could interpret this as what O'Brien & Szeman (2014) describe as an example of a body modification practice (increasing in visible musculature) that can be read as challenging social norms, but that "cannot avoid negotiating them" given that "bodybuilding still draws attention to the female body as the repository of female worth" (p. 198). We might see muscularity and perhaps slightly fewer constraints on female size as a small success, but it appears as though along gendered lines, there are still significant restrictions for women in the physical space that their bodies may occupy. Like Washington & Economides (2016) noted, while "CrossFit expanded possibilities for the female body," it continues "to mirror the hegemonic archetype of

attractive and heteronormative femininity" (p. 143); it seems as though representations of an athletic ideal within health and fitness content does the same.

Second, the particular bodily representation in #healthy and #fit spaces, as well as in conversations more generally with participants on health and fitness in social media, indicate that this particular presentation of the female body is only available to a select subset of the population. The body that seems to represent women's health and fitness content is typically young, thin, usually white, seemingly economically privileged, non-disabled, and representative of Western beauty ideals. Those who are not white, young, thin, economically advantaged, and non-disabled do not appear to embody health and/or fitness in popular social media spaces in the same way. This is in line with Dworkin & Wachs' (2009) work on print media. This also appears to be an extension of Azzarito's (2010) description of the *Future Girl* in which [sports] "images subsume race, class, religion and disability" (p. 261), which defaults to able-bodied, Western, and primarily white (p. 262).

This particular bodily presentation appears to be its own brand, one that is an easily reproducible cultural product/concept of health and fitness, and excludes sport from that brand. Beyond the physical appearance markers mentioned above, numerous consumer symbols (access to a gym and equipment, access to organic foods, energy drinks, and supplements) are associated with a particular class and the luxury to access it. The fit body has moved far beyond the actual reality of fitness in the physiological sense. By having a relatively well-established and stable set of appearance (both physical and consumer-related) markers, having a visible health and fitness community can perhaps be understood as a consumer identity and therefore more easily marketed to. A standardized and predictable form aligns well with economic production and market segmentation and can therefore be very profitable. It allows cultural producers to tailor the production of consumer goods. And again, appearance markers are crucial in that they tie more centrally to individualized consumption narratives. This focus on the individual also means that governmental and structural inequities and their impact on health disparities are obscured or ignored: it becomes simply a question of making the right choices and managing one's time

appropriately to achieve the image of the healthy/fit body (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Jong & Drummond, 2016; Maguire, 2006). As noted by Azzarito (2010), sport and fitness participation has become a sign of the successful woman, but participation may be limited to those who can afford participation in this process.

Third, another significant finding was the difference in perception of images of activity and authenticity versus static and inauthentic images. The appearance and the image of the body as object versus subject seems to have a significant impact on the way health and fitness media is perceived. In the literature review, I noted that Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2015) recommend that future research try to disentangle the various components of fitspiration images and what might be responsible for the observed effects (p. 66). Robinson et al. (2017) also note that it "might be useful to explore the mechanisms by which fitspiration images might inspire fitness" (p. 70). It is my conclusion that the perception of authenticity and viewing bodies engaged in activity (video and still images) are read more positively and have the potential to encourage exercise behaviours for health or pleasure because they seem to generate fewer strict appearance comparisons versus static images or those deemed inauthentic representations of physical activity/"healthy" behaviours. While this appears to be the case for the majority of participants, I should reiterate that this is not the case for all participants. Perhaps it is possible, as Fardouly et al. (2017) write, that these images, because they may not *only* emphasize appearance, but include things like fitness and strength as well, might cancel out strict appearance comparisons and subsequent self-objectification. The appearance of fitness, or health/fitness as part of "looking good," appears to generate more negative outcomes such as social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and negative mood. Static images or images deemed inauthentic, seem to follow themes in traditional print magazines where "health is bypassed for the sake of beauty," (Washington & Economides, 2016, p. 146) and looking good is privileged over feeling good. Unfortunately, static and/or inauthentic representations of health and/or fitness behaviours appear to be the norm, which is problematic given the negative readings of these types of images.

And finally, a fourth key finding of this study is that participants (and viewers) cannot be reduced to having a single reading position and interpretation of the imagery associated with health and with fitness media. It is important to acknowledge the breadth of possible reading positions and also the capacity to hold numerous positions simultaneously. This specific content does appear to, at least in part, influence how audiences view health and fitness and how they interpret it, but these interpretations and readings are also not static. Even in instances where, for example, Kira talked to me about feeling inspired and motivated to exercise when viewing these images, and felt that her peer group would agree, she also discussed having negative feelings about these same images and seemed to hold both positions simultaneously. The same was true for Nadira and many others who felt that some of the imagery was empowering or positive or *better than* other beauty ideals, particularly the thin ideal, but were also likened to just another (unattainable) source of comparison. Many participants held competing interpretations of the images and discussions necessarily fluctuated throughout the group sessions.

This finding does not align with the idea that the popularity of athletic and muscular fitness-idealised images, and subsequent saturation, makes this particular bodily presentation potentially "both attainable and normative, desensitizing women from their generally unobtainable nature" (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 69). While some participants indicated that this particular imagery represented a more attainable bodily presentation than thin-idealised imagery for them, most still indicated that the bodies represented seemed just as, if not more, unobtainable than other popular media imagery. Moreover, the participants in this study were highly analytical when it came to reading and negotiating imagery related to health and fitness, as well as in considering their own experiences with this content more generally and did not seem to be desensitized to the implications of this content. Like many scholars who have worked with young people have noted before me, the participants in this particular study are far from "cultural dupes" and are individuals able to resist and negotiate performative ideals (Depper & Howe, 2017). The participants in this study remind us that "audiences *read* – rather than passively consume – cultural texts" often in complex and nuanced ways (O'Brien & Szeman, p.

93). Some of these nuances and complexities, as well as the affordances of semi-structured questions, open up new possibilities for future research as well.

Before turning to possibilities for future research, I would first like to turn to a reflection and discussion of the findings.

Reflections on the study and its findings

What I learned from this study is that qualitative research is complex, nuanced, and challenging to work with, particularly audience readings of media texts. I can understand why there appeared to be a gap in the literature with regards to this type of research. It is time-consuming, painstaking work, and certainly challenging to do alone. If I were to do this, or another similar study, again, I would likely seek out other researchers to collaborate with in order to better elaborate on the data. Having two or three more readings of the transcripts might make for better analysis and might buffer against some biases and offer alternate interpretations. There are, however, logistical problems with this suggestion. If I were to do this type of study again, I would also consider in what ways it could benefit from a survey as supplement to the focus group and interview data. That is, in what ways could I gather information from participants to better situate or understand the data (what are their typical habits when it comes to social media, what kinds of accounts do they follow, would they consider themselves part of the online health and fitness community, etc.). These types of questions were not central to my study, but I do think there is value in asking them.

I am also keenly aware that the results of my study and findings are quite critical of this particular bodily presentation and media. I have made a point to try to highlight more positive aspects of this particular content and, to this end, I do think that social media can provide new and potentially positive elements when it comes to health discourses. In particular, it may offer a new/different lens through which to view these discourses, and the potential to challenge and to create alternative discourses of health, which can be seen as “opportunities for rebellion and resistance” (Jong & Drummond, 2016, p. 765). Social media may certainly contain and allow

access to a broader range of content and images than traditional media and it is also true that those who may not fit the dominant standard are increasingly visible, though as noted in the previous chapter there are still a number of constraints to consider. Slater et al. (2017) note that "consumer demand for greater appearance diversity in media images is present among young adult consumers" (p. 88). And this came up in a number of focus groups at least in terms of participants following specific accounts that might not fit a traditional "idealized" standard such as Ashley Graham and women in trail running media. But when I asked groups whether or not they wanted to see greater variation in body types, shapes, sizes, etc., represented in media, the conversation sometimes took a turn that surprised me. For instance, on the topic of whether or not we are moving towards a greater acceptance of more varied representations of body types in social media and media more generally, Tay and Uma had the following conversation:

> **Tay**: I think we're getting there.
>
> **Uma**: I don't know. I don't know if people truly believe it. And mean it when they say that. Like, 'Oh yeah! Every body is beautiful' or whatever. And, like, ok that's what you're just saying cause that's kind of what you think you should say – but do you actually think that or do you actually still think, 'But if I had the choice, I'd wanna be this one' [gestures]. Or whatever.
>
> **Tay**: 'I'm just saying this to be politically correct.'
>
> **Uma**: Yeah. Exactly.

At one point, this group, like others, also expressed wanting to do away with the focus on bodies no matter what the size, shape, or type:

> **Uma**: I would kind of just like less focus on bodies in general.
>
> **Sabrina**: I think if people were motivated more by their passions instead of their vanity, and their ego, it would be better, but I mean –
>
> **Uma**: Yes.
>
> **Tay**: Yeah. That's a good way to put it.
>
> **Sabrina**: – it's social media so […]. Yeah.

Throughout this study, and in light of my conversations with a number of the participants, I kept thinking back to an article I read early on in my graduate studies: "The (Ironic) Dove Effect: Use of Acceptance Cues for Larger Body Types Increases Unhealthy Behaviors" by Lin & McFerran (2016) out of Simon Fraser University. I think there are at least a few questionable observations and/or conclusions, not least of which their framing of being larger bodied as contagious (and the negative implications that that type of language suggests) and assertion that exposure to such bodies and messaging increases unhealthy behaviour.[4] But when I initially read this article I also remember the following excerpt, though it now resonates with me in a different way:

> . . . it may be optimal from the standpoint of consumer well-being for marketers and policy makers to encourage the use of images of people with a healthy weight and refrain from drawing attention to the body-size issue. Such restraint may motivate people who are both underweight and overweight to strive for a healthier weight. Further research could calibrate what this 'healthy' image should look like and how it should be framed to increase well-being, but we speculate that explicitly presenting it (or any body) as acceptable is likely to backfire, as previous efforts seem to have. Ironically, for marketers' and policy makers' efforts in 'solving' both the body image and obesity issues, the best medicine may be to say less rather than more to consumers. Making this issue "top of mind" does not seem to be working. (p. 85)

Having completed this study, it does not appear to me that past depictions of "healthy" and fit models in conventional print media, and now contemporary images of people tagged in popular health and fitness spaces in social media, have contributed much to consumer well-being in terms of body image. This may be shifting, but it seems unlikely that there can be consensus regarding what a "healthy" image should look like and how it should be framed given that fat continues to be "a powerfully feared cultural transgression for both women and men" (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009, p. 34) and presented as a problem or a crisis. Given the discourse around the "quote unquote obesity crisis" and the censoring or banning of certain depictions of thinness, it

would seem that leaving out a range of bodies, though presumably still healthy, will continue. And doing so continues to refute the possibility that a range of healthy bodies is possible, and indeed, natural. If the suggestion by Lin & McFerran (2016) is directed at marketers and policy makers, that coupling is also problematic and suggests that we are still relying on visual cues as one of, if not *the*, main determinant of health or fitness in popular culture. If this is the case, saying less to consumers, as they suggest, may be possible, but including certain bodies and excluding others still says *something*.

My recommendations for future research include a need for further investigation regarding portrayals of the body in media as well as audience readings of that media applied to a larger demographic. But part of me also wants to consider what some of my participants said about hoping for less focus on bodies going forward, and avoiding idealized images and promoting any kind of standard. This also aligns with Lin & McFerran's (2016) suggestion to avoid drawing attention to a particular size as the "accepted" standard. Given the ubiquity of media and social comparison across a number of social media platforms, as well as the continued increase in health and/or fitness media on Instagram and in other spaces though, that may be wishful thinking. It is possible that the inclusion of *all* bodies in media and having as diverse a representation of people in media as exists in society will eventually achieve less emphasis on any body in particular, but this too remains problematic given the association with consumer narratives. I do not have a clear answer to the question, "Where do we go from here?" But I think part of the way forward is likely continuing to problematize media representations and to consider in what ways, and perhaps more importantly why, some are left out of the frame and some remain firmly in it. I think it is also necessary to problematize the relationship between consumption and the economic implication of the #healthy and #fit body. With these considerations in mind, I'd like to highlight some future research opportunities.

Future research opportunities

Some of the future research opportunities noted below are either drawn from the literature review, participant discussions, or a combination of both. While this list is not exhaustive, the following areas appeared most prominently throughout my research.

Similarities between fitspiration and thinspiration. While the athletic, fit, healthy body may be presented as a positive given publications and policy makers that/who note and discuss rising rates of obesity, as well as the negative reaction to the trend of thinspo, or thinspiration, Xia, one of my participants, discussed how the two may be inter-related. A brief look at her comments help identify a possible area of future research.

> **Xia**: […] it almost seems like […] the by-product of the 'be super skinny' fad cause – it's like these people aren't – they're not trying to call themselves skinny, but they're still very on the slim side. And yeah, *it almost feels like the health and fitness thing has grown out of the skinny fad so it's like we're not necessarily over being obsessed with a very, I don't know, like, smaller figure. We're just showing it in different ways*. And we've kind of equated being, still, thin-*ner* with being healthy and then what – what does that say about people who, naturally, just carry a few more pounds on them and stuff like that? Like, what does that say? I don't know. […] that's just something that I had observed before on the different posts. […] When I was younger, I guess, I had my Tumblr account and whatever and I followed people who were super thin and stuff and in hindsight I'm like, that really wasn't good. But will I be saying that [in] a few years about the accounts that I follow now?

Uma, from another group, also noted that whether "thinspo" or "fitspo," the imagery had the same effect, which was to make her feel badly about her body. This may be because the images, videos, and hashtags for fitspiration "often reference or imply the need for self-control, [dietary restraint], and discomfort to achieve goals, and can therefore contain guilt-inducing messages" (Slater et al., 2017, p. 94) similar to "thin ideal" or "thinspiration" messages. These comments suggest an area of potential future research: to compare the two sets of content and

evaluate in what ways they might be promoting the same messages. Anecdotally, I did observe similarities between hashtags on Instagram such as #skinny and #thin versus #healthy and #fit based on the month of data I collected previous to this project in terms of the visual images associated with these hashtags.

Positive body image and self-compassion research. Another area of future research may be to evaluate in what ways self-compassion messaging may act as a buffer to negative outcomes of viewing idealized fitness imagery. In June 2017, #selfcompassion yielded over 60,000 images and, in October 2017, that number had increased to nearly 81,0000 on Instagram. In June of 2017, #selflove yielded over 8 million returns and, in October 2017, it yielded 10.5 million returns on Instagram. Slater et al. (2017) discuss positive body image considerations and self-compassion, which they describe as "engaging in self-kindness, rather than self-criticism, and learning to accept your own 'humanness'" including all of the flaws and mistakes that are a part of that humanness (p. 88). I cannot comment on the nature of the #self-compassion posts on Instagram because I did not evaluate them in any detail, but in the context of Slater et al.'s (2017) research, where participants felt more positively towards their bodies after viewing fifteen images of fitspiration alongside five quotes with self-compassion messaging (p. 94), I wonder in what ways self-compassion messaging both in social media and elsewhere might result in a more positive and empowered body image. It would seem to be a novel idea to expose audiences to positive messaging (that isn't commercialized, hopefully) around their bodies and plausible that this may have a positive impact on women's body image. The research on the impact of media on body appreciation and research on self-compassion interventions are still in their infancy (Slater et al., 2017, p. 94), but the notion of self-love and self-compassion was briefly mentioned by both Dawn and Xia from different groups:

> **Dawn**: The diversity is another thing because I've noticed that it's – so it's like when you look at […] the typical fit model, you're like, 'Oooh, that's ideal.' But then you see someone like Ashley Graham and you're like, 'Well, but that's ideal.' So it's like we see all these typical ideals, always want to make an ideal body type, so it's always like,

> ‘That’s how you should look. That’s how you should look.’ Where there’s not like, ‘Oh, just love yourself how you are and you can look like that, but you could also look like this.’ I, I think you have to make that linkage yourself.
>
> **Xia**: I feel like there’s a difference between - being motivational can be like, ‘Wow, yeah! Go me! I *did* this, I’m *able to do* this,’ rather than being like, ‘I’m not good enough.’ There’s a difference between what is actually motivating and what’s just depriving yourself of love for your body and then saying, ‘Oh no that’s a goal.’

Given my participants comments, I do agree with Carrotte et al. (2017) that focusing on the benefits of fitness without also emphasizing thinness may offer promising results regarding body image and physical activity for young women (p. 7). But I also question if this this even possible if the content is being accessed in primarily visually-based platforms where traditional gendered bodily ideals appear to be the norm. This suggests to me, in light of my own study, that the focus may always be on appearance markers or the appearance of fitness rather than the enjoyment of physical exercise, or the health and wellness benefits of physical activity, and loving one’s body no matter its shape, size, etcetera. Perhaps self-compassion messaging can in some way challenge this notion, I am just not sure how it could effectively be implemented.

Communities challenging traditional gendered bodily ideals. In the above summary of findings, I noted that it is important to acknowledge the breadth of possible reading positions and also the capacity to hold numerous positions simultaneously. This content does appear to, at least in part, influence how audiences view health and view fitness and how they interpret it. It is important to continue to interrogate the notion that size, muscularity, and athleticism might resist traditional gendered bodily ideals, particularly in exploring how women who engage in practices such as bodybuilding see themselves in relation to the findings of this study and the literature more broadly. I think it is important to consider future qualitative research with women (and men) who may be resisting, either intentionally or unintentionally, gendered bodily ideals on social media and how they perceive the imagery associated with health and fitness content on social media. This would offer an interesting comparison to the results of this study. In the

context of new media and the affordances and constraints of new media, I think it is worth exploring how women pursuing muscularity and bodybuilding may or may not perceive the pursuit of maximizing instead of minimizing the body as challenging conventional feminine gender ideals/norms and view it as a representation of empowerment (O'Brien and Szeman, 2014, p. 198). And to also explore in what ways this practice is the focus of display and how the display of a body that might challenge traditional gender norms is negotiated or perceived by others. Do they find acceptance in online communities? Are their bodies subject to surveillance and scrutiny/policing by others? These kind of inquiries with participants in this particular subset of the fitness community might represent another dimension and response to the current study.

Cherland (2008) reminds us that "cultural phenomenon give us the images, the story lines, and the language to use in constructing ourselves as people who belong" and goes on to say that "[g]irls and women and other subordinates can refuse to take up the subject positions and the discourses that mark them as inferior" (p.279). Particularly today where people have greater agency in the creation and distribution of their own media than ever before, it may be possible to produce new story lines and to construct ourselves as people who belong where traditionally gaps and silences have existed (Cherland, 2008, p.279). But I wonder to what degree this is possible on platforms where those story lines and those subject positions are increasingly subject to commentary and behaviour that limits these positions? A number of participants in this study indicated their hesitation and their lack of participation and production of health and fitness content on social media due to fear of negative commentary, increased scrutiny and comparisons of their own bodies with what appears to be the norm under categories of health and fitness. I wonder if women engaged in muscle-enhancing behaviours and bodybuilding consider themselves to be refusing to take up the subject positions and discourses that typically mark them under the seemingly feminine ideal distributed in health and fitness content online.

Food. The notion of constraint, as highlighted above and discussed in the analysis chapter, could also be extended to the display of food in health and fitness content. A number of

participants, particularly at the end of sessions when I asked if there was anything they would like to add, brought up issues around nutrition and messaging about restricting certain foods or caloric intake. Lottie and Nadira discussed this in terms of messaging around eliminating certain foods:

> **Nadira**: Yes. People are like, 'Never eat carbs. Ever! Don't ever.' But, you know, your body does need some carbohydrates at some point?

Xia, Yvonne, and Zoe in another group described restricting caloric intake and also concern for younger women:

> **Xia**: This might be slightly outside of what you're looking at, but I find with some of the healthy pages that pop up on my feed – that I'll look at the photo and there will be a nice meal or something. And then I look at it and it's like a meal plan for the day and it's like, the caloric intake is so low that it's like, they're advertising it as health and fitness, but it's actually depriving yourself. It's like total 1,200 calories and it's supposed –it's all, like, healthy food, but it's like, that's not enough to feed yourself. Especially if you're working out. I don't know. I feel like there's that aspect of it as well. Or to achieve a certain body type you're kind of expected to eat a certain way that isn't necessarily – although it's good food, it's not necessarily enough for you therefore it's not that great.
>
> **Zoe**: I used to see that stuff in *Seventeen* magazine, which is geared towards, like, 15 to 17 year-old girls and that's so unhealthy! Those are important years!
>
> **Yvonne**: Yeah!
>
> **Zoe**: Eat!

Xia, Zoe, and Yvonne may be suggesting that, in spite of its focus or emphasis on "health," this type of content might still be influencing "girls growing up today who think that constant dieting and being frightened of food are natural states" (Orbach, 2009, p. 96). Another question relating to health and fitness content in social media, and perhaps "fitspiration" specifically, is in what way does food and its display factor into this trend and suggest discipline and constraint in its display? Orbach (2015) has noted that "food becomes this completely

fetishized and privileged thing . . . the basic underlying psychology of it is terror food – something that could do terrible things to the way you look" (as cited in Kiberd, 2015, para. 5). As noted by Lottie, certain foods displayed in health and fitness content appear to be associated with a particularly Western notion of health and fitness, but also thinness. She says that "none of this grows in India. But we still feel – we think the Western people are thin […] because they have these foods." The same seems to be true of relationships with food in the #fitspiration phenomenon.

Audience demographics. Concern for younger women, like that which pertains to food and nutrition discussed by Xia, Zoe, and Yvonne above, also arose across a number of the groups. But I was surprised that there was less concern for women their own age, given the challenges they expressed with viewing this type of content. I think Orbach (2009) says it best when she writes about a visual culture where digitally altering images and staging is the norm and how there are significant implications for children in this culture: "children are losing an accurate record of their visual history. When they look back, they will not see their own bodies but the bodies somebody else wanted them to have" (p. 90). Olive, Kira, and Quinn are a few of the participants who commented on concerns for younger girls:

> **Olive**: […] here's someone who I think would better represent a healthy, down to earth person maybe.
>
> **Quinn**: She looks happy.
>
> **Olive**: […] she looks happy. And I don't know, maybe it's my own values going into this picture. I'd rather see this picture than someone like that [gestures] because I feel that isn't forcing objectification. And – I don't know. Like, to me that doesn't look healthy because I would – I would never stand out and pose in a picture like that.
>
> **Me (Sarah)**: So you would rather see someone who looks happy?
>
> **Olive**: Mmmhmm. Especially for young girls or girls growing up. Because what are you trying to enforce as values?

Kira also expressed concern for younger girls and discussed her peers' younger siblings:

> **Kira**: And so now I see my friend's little sister's on Instagram and I just think, 'Oh my gosh. What are they looking at?' Cause you know, I know what's on there. Like this kind of stuff. I mean– if I was twelve I'd be like, 'What are they doing?' You know? But nowadays they're so aware of their bodies and everything. I feel like they're maturing at such a young age. And so seeing stuff like this could, I don't know, mess with their heads really bad. Because, like, 'Why don't I look like that?' It's like, 'Well, your body's not mature enough to do that yet' you know? I don't know, I feel like it would be – it would be really damaging for young girls to be seeing stuff like this […].

All of the images I observed during a month of data collection (of Instagram's top posts for health and fitness-related tags) in March 2016 revealed that no still images depicted young girls or teens. All were young adults or adult women (the vast majority of images being young adult women). There were six videos, three under #crossfit and three under #fit. One featured a teen, one featured a child, and the remaining four were children who appear in a video with adults. Under #fitspo and #healthy, there were no children or teens in the top posts. This makes me wonder, especially with regards to social and appearance comparisons, what the impact of viewing these images might be on young girls when the majority of bodies they are seeing might not reflect their stage of physical maturation. And as Kira suggested, it might be even more damaging for younger women who are still growing and developing to only see images of mostly fully physically mature women in this content displayed in particular ways. If health and fitness can be conceptualized in terms of performance, is this type of physique a goal for emulation? I think there might be an opportunity to consider in what ways emulation, intimacy, and the notion of community as outlined in the analysis chapter might come together to result in the feeling of peer pressure to conform to a particular bodily presentation. It is possible that the intimacy of the photograph and the relationships that we have with personal technology may exacerbate these feelings. My question is, with regards to young girls, are there increased negative outcomes if this demographic is engaging in social/appearance-related comparisons to the imagery of a healthy and/or fit body, given the discrepancy in physical age and bodily maturation?

Finally, as mentioned in the literature review, men's experiences and the influence of health and fitness content online on men's body image, and specifically in fitspiration spaces, is lacking. This research did not address this gap. As Carrotte et al. (2017) note, men are very likely either following/liking fitspiration-type content, or are being exposed to it, and this "may influence the body image, exercise, and health behaviors of male followers as well as female followers" (Carrotte et al., 2017, p. 6). In a study of pro-muscularity websites, Murray et al., among other findings, note the prevalence of "derogatory labeling of the non-ideal body (11.4%)," specifically a "skinny" body (Murray et al., 2015, p. 19). This seems to be in line with the images I observed through a month of data collection in specific hashtags (#healthy, #fit, #fitspo, #crossfit). As mentioned in the literature review, this might also be a space in which to consider, and reconsider, the gaze as perhaps more fluid and not uniquely male. It would seem that more and more males feature prominently in similar ways to how women have traditionally been portrayed in media, particularly their prominence in sexualized and objectified positions in health and fitness media online. It might be time to revisit how we conceive of the gaze and what impact a more nuanced gaze may have on men and men's body image.

Conclusion

This research sought to fill a gap in the literature, specifically qualitative data regarding young women's perceptions of health and fitness media/imagery on social media. I believe it begins to address the complexity and ambiguities, and sometimes contradictions, in reading and negotiating health and fitness discourses on social media in a way that quantitative research cannot adequately do. Meaning is generated where texts and audiences interact. And that interaction, I think, is not necessarily easily quantifiable. I agree with McIntosh & Cuklanz (2014) who write:

> while patterns of reception and understanding of most texts are quite predictable, it is simply not possible that all audiences will share interpretations of all elements of any given text. High-quality media analysis identifies and illuminates patterns within texts as

> well as their significance, but also acknowledges at least some of the limitations that multiple readings generate (p. 289).

The images in particular social media spaces that depict health and fitness seem to form a particular and narrow discourse. Discourse matters, representation matters, but it is complicated by the fact that this is socially constructed by those who choose, or feel they *can* safely choose, to participate in this particular online space unlike more traditional patterns of publication and representation in conventional media. Social media can be policed in different ways than print media. And there are different boundaries. Those boundaries, however, are increasingly challenging to discern because of the inclusion of commercial and corporate elements of many personal social media accounts.

Ultimately, it would appear that certain bodies (are allowed to) perform health and fitness in specific ways and these representations have implications that relate to race, ethnicity, class, and consumption as noted in this chapter, the previous chapter, and the literature review. In popular media it appears that lifestyle and health are synonymous, and both gender and health may be performed and produced simultaneously in this content. In the introduction chapter, I questioned whether the shift to "fitspiration" is interpreted as problematic or empowering by audiences. I also indicated that this study would extend the work of previous researchers, such as Dworkin & Wachs (2009), in tracing the relationship between gender, race, body, and sexuality. Sexuality did not figure prominently in the focus groups and interview I conducted, but the other findings seem to mostly align with Dworkin & Wachs's (2009) findings in print media and Azzarito's (2010) discussion of the Future Girl femininity. When it comes to the depiction of women's bodies in popular health and fitness spaces online, it appears to me that both fat and ultra-thin are now "bad" in popular consciousness, but fit-- though seemingly "good"-- may be synonymous with thin in social media spaces and appears problematic given the constraints and outcomes noted by participants. The healthy and fit body in at least some social media spaces, and as noted in a number of participant discussions, appears to be marked as thin, white, economically privileged and appears in ways that others do not, which insinuates that bodies that

do not conform to that type are unhealthy, unfit, and any number of descriptors that are associated with those words.

This study has explored how (some) young women and girls access, view, produce, and interpret health and fitness content (images and narratives) on social media. It addresses some of the limitations of previous research in health and fitness media, particularly where audience readings and meaning-making is lacking. Also, it moves beyond a focus on disordered eating and body dissatisfaction as primarily measured by psychological tests, toward conversations about larger societal discourses of health and fitness. This may be the first or one of few studies that explores and engages young women in conversations about body image, muscle definition, and the way health and fitness is displayed on contemporary social media platforms. And while I believe this conversation has been started, I think there is more space to continue it as well as to move it in different directions. I hope that this conversation continues, and particularly with young women and men who find themselves immersed in a world of social media.

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Notes

1. The 2015 PEW Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview was administered in English and Spanish to "a nationally representative sample of over 1,060 teens ages 13 to 17 and a parent or guardian" (Lenhart, 2015).
2. CrossFit is described as a high-intensity training program focused on gymnastics and Olympic weightlifting and powerlifting. For more, see: Washington and Economides, 2016 and crossfit.com. Relevant, I believe, because Heywood attributes visual representation to making CF as popular as it is (Washington & Economides, 2016, p. 144). And there is also a large following on Instagram (over 29 million posts) where posts are often cross-posted with #fitspiration, #healthy, #fit.
3. All definitions for constraint, production, and authenticity were informed and drawn from Oxford Reference via the University of Victoria Libraries' catalogue. The three resources I consulted are: The Oxford Dictionary of English (3rd ed.), the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication (2nd ed.), and the Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science and Medicine (3rd ed.). The link to Oxford Reference as hosted by the UVic Libraries can be accessed from http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/. Public access to Oxford Reference is found at http://www.oxfordreference.com/.

   Search results for **constraint** are found here:

   a. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095634259

   b. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780191800986.001.0001/acref-9780191800986-e-57#

   Search results for **production** are found here:

   c. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199571123.001.0001/m_en_gb0619520?rskey=nwTk21&result=2

   d. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199599868.001.0001/acref-9780199599868-e-1468?rskey=8LR5eV&result=5

   e. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780191800986.001.0001/acref-9780191800986-e-2152?rskey=8LR5eV&result=6

Search results for **authenticity** and **spectacle** are found here:

f. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780191800986.001.0001/acref-9780191800986-e-175?rskey=yEh1wk&result=8

g. http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780191800986.001.0001/acref-9780191800986-e-2593?rskey=WntdXS&result=1

4. For a sample of media coverage, see:

   a. CBC: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/obesity-plus-sized-models-1.3358377 or

   b. Science Daily:

      https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/12/151209183550.htm.

Appendix

Appendix A

The following are the questions that guided the semi-structured focus group sessions and interview.

1. As a bridge, I will chat with the participants about my research so far on Instagram. At this point I will show them 4-5 images from Instagram of what I would call a typical representation of what is tagged as healthy or fit.

I will tell participants that researchers have noticed that young women are the demographic that is most often accessing visually-based social media platforms like Instagram and Pinterest, but also health and fitness content online, which is why I've invited them to talk about their perceptions of health and fitness on social media.
Next, I will explain what the intent of this focus group is and the expected outcome: a better understanding of how young women read and negotiate images of health, fitness, and femininity on social media. I will frame it as a discussion about media and studying how the media effects people.

2. The session will start with these opening questions to help orient the participants to the questions of my study:
    a. When I say health and fitness, what comes to mind?
    b. Do you and/or your friends access or follow health and fitness content on Instagram? What about other social media platforms?
    c. Do you produce content online around health and fitness? Why or why not?
    d. Did anything about the images I showed you at the beginning surprise you or stand out to you for any reason?
3. Next, participants will be asked to look at a series of images focused on health and fitness. A total of 4-5 images will be shown.
    a. I'm wondering if you could comment on the images and tell me whether or not they align with your concept of health and a healthy body? Do they influence your perceptions of a healthy body (or health and fitness more generally).
    b. How do you interpret them? What do they mean to you?
    c. Do you notice any stereotypes, patterns, themes?
    d. Do these images fit with your perception of a healthy female body? Why or why not? Is anything missing?

4. The final section will involve a set of summary questions including:

    a. There is research into how male bodies in media are increasingly muscular, masculinity in popular culture and effects on body image and dissatisfaction in young men, but it doesn't seem like the same questions are being asked about the way women's bodies are changing in media (or if they are). Media typically focuses on the "excessive thinness" or the "thin ideal" of female models or celebrities in pop culture. Do you think there's more of a focus on women's bodies being visibly muscular in media today?

        i. In social media

        ii. In other forms of media

What do you think about this? Do you think this is changing the way we conceptualize a healthy body or an ideal body?

    a. (Depends on the outcome of question 5. a. i.) Do you think having visible muscle is a factor in whether or not girls are satisfied with their bodies?

    b. (Depends on the outcome of question 5. a. i.) Are you noticing more "muscle-enhancing behaviors" in your peer group/age demographic (muscle-enhancing behaviors are often things like taking supplements or protein powders, changing diets to include more protein, taking steroids)? Do you see this in social media?

    c. Health and fitness is extremely popular in social media, particularly on Instagram, with millions and millions of images populating health and fitness-related hashtags. Often people categorize these images as empowering and as a positive step away from the thin ideal and excessive thinness. Do you agree?

    d. Is it possible that body image issues and cultural ideals may be expressed via health and fitness discourses today?

5. Before ending the session:

    a. Is there anything else you want to add or anything we didn't cover that you think I should think about going forward?

Appendix B

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Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Sarah Warder**	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Minimal Risk Review - Delegated	**16-389**
UVic STATUS:	**Master's Student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	02-Dec-16
UVic DEPARTMENT:	**INTD**	APPROVED ON:	02-Dec-16
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	01-Dec-17

PROJECT TITLE: **Negotiating and decoding: femininity and the healthy female body online**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER None

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: **None**

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

[redacted]

Associate Vice-President Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 02-Dec-16

16-389 Warder, Sarah

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Modification of an Approved Protocol

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Sarah Warder**	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Minimal Risk Review - Delegated	**16-389**
UVic STATUS:	**Master's Student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	02-Dec-16
UVic DEPARTMENT:	**INTD**	MODIFIED ON:	10-Apr-17
SUPERVISOR:	**Catherine McGregor; Janni Aragon**	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	01-Dec-17

PROJECT TITLE: **Negotiating and decoding: femininity and the healthy female body online**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER None

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: **None**

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[redacted]

Associate Vice-President Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 10-Apr-17

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