Abstract

Purpose

The present thesis seeks to shed light upon the social media concept of #fitspo from a male perspective, thus to contribute to existing literature that mostly concern the female aspect of the concept. Fitspo is initially a short form of the word 'fitspiration', which is a compound of the word 'fitness' and 'inspiration'. We hope to uncover if and how #fitspo content may contribute to body dissatisfaction and adverse health risk behavior among males.

Scope

As Instagram is one of the most popular visual-based social media sites, we have in the present thesis chosen this platform from which to collect our data, furthermore since our study seeks to contribute to the existing literature, most of which have based their research on Instagram, it seems only natural to base our research on the same platform.

Method

We further chose Instagram as the platform for our data as the fitspo phenomenon is relatively popular with 53 million posts as of March 2018, with the addition of the data being easily accessible through the search of the hashtag. In order to study and collect our data, we used a netnographic approach through which we screenshotted our observations. After the data collection process was completed, the data was coded using the Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) program NVivo to categorize and further allow us to find themes and connections. The data was split in three parts; 'pictures', 'hashtags', and 'comments' as a means of answering our three research questions which worked as a guide to answer our problem statement.

Results

Our analysis revealed different correlations between both pictures, hashtags, and captions of male #fitspo content such as a drive for muscularity, comparatively higher focus on appearance rather than body functionality (the feelings and functions of the body), a rather homogenous representation of the ideal male body, which was presented as having broad shoulders tapering to a narrow waist, a muscular torso, and defined biceps. Furthermore, there did not appear to be a noticeable difference in the portrayed idealized male bodies across different countries, ages, and races of the male Instagram users.

Conclusion

The findings of the present thesis can be interpreted as potentially increasing body dissatisfaction and health risk behaviors among male Instagram users, as even a very brief exposure to images of

idealized male bodies may increase male's body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, body image disturbances as a consequence of repeated exposure to images of unrealistically muscular ideal bodies among men have been connected with impaired self-esteem, body insecurity, chronic thoughts about weight loss and weight gain, disturbed eating habits, symptoms of mood, anxiety, excessive exercise, and dysmorphic disorders. Furthermore, captions can similarly be seen to encourage the engagement in potentially adverse health-risk behaviors such as compulsive exercise and restrictive eating among men in order to achieve the portrayed and idealized male body ideal.

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1. Introduction

‘Strong is the new skinny’ is the title of an academic article written by (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016) thus highlighting a change seemingly happening with our ideas of the ideal body today. Through time, various body types have been the ideal, from curvy during the Renaissance era to the thin ideal from the 20th century for women (The List a 2017), and from heavy (portrayed you were wealthy) during the Neolithic era to being tall during the 50s and a hairy chest but no defined muscles during the 60s for men (The List b 2017). However, as Tiggemann and Zaccardo’s title suggests, having muscles (thus being psychically strong) is now in for both men and women. The trend started earlier for men than it did women, as stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger became popular during the 80s and “hitting the gym hard made you more of a man (The List b 2017)” as stated by an online article by The List. The List uses the transformation of male protagonists in superhero movies through time as an example for the increasing craze of a muscular body portrayed in both movies and traditional media; “Now, anybody who plays a "hot guy" in film has to be cut. Just being thin or athletic isn't good enough and from the '90s to today, it's only become more extreme (The List b 2017)”. ‘Cut’ is one the words used in the above citation, which is a term meaning to lose fat while gaining muscle at the same time (GA Gymaholic), which is one of many terms in the world of fitness which will be explored in later paragraphs. However, what is interesting in today’s world is that men have seen an increase in pressure from both movies and popular media as aforementioned, with the addition of social media which is something women has experienced for a longer period of time in terms of the thin ideal. To this, The List adds; “Though this is something women have been dealing with for decades, men are now getting near equal media pressure to have unattainable bodies. And they might be able to blame Superman (The List b 2017).” Another noticeable phrase in the mentioned article from The List is that of “made you more of a man (The List b 2017)”, thus also highlighting that the current ideal of a muscular body seemingly makes one more masculine, which in itself is a concept that is very fluid and changes both over time, place, and situations as stated by Morrell (1998); “The contours of these masculinities change over time, being affected by changes elsewhere in society and at the same time, themselves affecting society itself (Morrell 1998, 607).”

Thus, the growing emphasis on the muscular male body ideal and what it brings to the table in terms of masculinity is interesting to explore in itself, however, adding to the mix is, as mentioned, social media which adds a contemporary view on the male body image while every man gets the ability to explore their own take on the ideal body and their version of masculinity with their peers in a more

personal and convenient way (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 560), as social media generally consists of User Generated Content (UGS), which will be explained further in the paragraph 'Social Media'. The full name of the academic article by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) is ''Strong is the new skinny': A content analysis of #fitspiration images on Instagram (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016)' which brings us to a special social media aspect that may allow us to dig deeper into men's body ideals, body images, and views on masculinity; the concept of 'fitspiration'. Fitspiration is a compound of the words 'fitness' and 'inspiration (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 62)' which the Urban Dictionary describes as "A healthier alternative to thinspiration, fitspiration is using examples of good fitness (people, photographs, skinny jeans, etc) as inspiration to attain a fitness goal (K-fig 2011)." Though there are multiple ways online to find fitspiration such as Pinterest (Pinterest), blogs (Hip and Healthy), and YouTube (Canchola 2015), our initial focus will be on Instagram as it has features such as photo sharing and captioning (i.e. "a title or explanation for a picture or illustration (Dictionary)"), thus both showing what men post as fitspiration on Instagram, what they have to say about their bodies, transformations, masculinity etc. in their caption on said posts allowing for a more complete picture than just, for example, a random picture of a model in a magazine. Searching for particular hashtags is another feature allowing us to narrow down our search on Instagram, so that 'regular' fitness posts will be omitted, as only the more popular form of the fitspiration hashtag; fitspo, will be searched for. Fitspo is simply a shorter form of the word fitspiration; however, the fitspo tag has more posts on Instagram than that of fitspiration (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2), thus, that particular hashtag will be used for our data. Furthermore, the rise of social media has in general increased men's concern with their body and overall attractiveness (Davis, et al. 1993, 302), as role models are no longer just that of professionals or movie actors as mentioned above, but also that of like-minded peers, from both near and far as apps such as Instagram is international thus allowing people to follow said peers and/or role models from everywhere. Furthermore, academic articles such as Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) has discovered links between time spent on social media and increased body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 61). Thus, though the phenomenon of fitspiration is meant to inspire people to become fit in a healthy way, it appears that is not always the case. Though it will not be entirely possible to explore and analyze men's view and use of fitspiration as no interviews will be conducted, exploring the contents of the pictures and their captions may give us a bigger insight into how fitspiration is used and how it connects with different aspects of the negative outcomes that other researchers and scholars have found and how they portray their own masculinity.

1.1. Literature review

The following paragraph seeks to place the present thesis within the existing thematic framework of fitspirational literature by examining existing knowledge and limitations within the field.

The majority of recent social media-based fitspirational literature has primarily focused on women and the potential link between idealized media image exposure and what has been dubbed "normative levels (Grabe, Ward and Hyde 2008, Tiggemann and Miller 2010)" of poor body image, body dissatisfaction, internalization of thin ideal, and disordered eating behaviors among especially adolescent girls and young women as a consequence of frequent exposure to fitspirational content on social media platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, private blogs, etc. (see e.g. (Prichard, et al. 2017, Holland and Tiggemann 2016, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, Tiggemann, Churches, et al. 2018, Brown and Tiggemann 2016, Robinson, et al. 2017, Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, Sumter, Cingel and Antonis 2018, Santarossa, et al. 2016)).

Though fitspirational content is supposedly intended to inspire, empower, and encourage social media users to exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 560) through the sharing of content such as exercise tips, recipes, before-and-after images, etc., the ostensibly inspirational, idealized social media imagery has, however, been linked to mood swings, body dissatisfaction, decreased state appearance, low self-esteem, body surveillance, dieting, and body objectification among women (Tiggemann and Slater 2014, 615, Tiggemann and Miller 2010, 85, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 65). Supporting this, Holland & Tiggemann (2016), on the basis of an experimental study with 101 female participants who post fitspirational images on Instagram, conclude that:

> "women who post fitspiration images on Instagram are more likely to engage in eating and exercise behaviors that are potentially harmful to their physical and mental health (…) even though they may present as fit and healthy, regularly posting fitspiration is a culturally sanctioned way of rationalizing dietary restriction, disordered eating, and over-exercising (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 78)."

A meta-analysis by (Grabe, Ward and Hyde 2008) of 77 experimental and correlational studies on the link between idealized media image exposure and body image concerns among women similarly

found evidence suggesting a "robust" link in both the experimental and correlational studies between idealized media image exposure and women's "generalized dissatisfaction with their bodies, increased investment in appearance, and increased endorsement of disordered eating behaviors (Grabe, Ward and Hyde 2008, 471)." They thus conclude that "we can see that media exposure appears to be related to women's body image negatively regardless of assessment technique, individual difference variables, media type, age, or other idiosyncratic study characteristics (Grabe, Ward and Hyde 2008, 471)."

Comparatively, a relatively small body of literature has examined the link between the exposure to idealized media body images and the subsequent health risks and impact on body image among males. A literature review on body image in boys by Cohane & Pope (2001) notes that "recent years have witnessed a striking increase in body image concerns among men (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373)," and concludes, on the basis of 17 reviewed qualitative studies, that males, like females, suffer body image disturbances, even from a young age (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 377) – though men typically strive to become more muscular (muscular-ideal), whereas women typically strive to become thinner (Knauss, Paxton and Alsaker 2007, 353, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, Botta 2003, 390) (thin-ideal). Similar suggestions have been made by (Ricciardelli and McCabe 2001, 328, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 357, Muris, et al. 2005, 19, Pope, Jr., et al. 1999, 66, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566) Davis et al. (1993), with the latter noting that "body perfectionism is no longer a phenomenon exclusive to women. It seems that men are experiencing a greater degree of concern with physical attractiveness than was present a few decades ago (Davis, et al. 1993, 302)." In this relation, Peat et al. (2011) further notes that age may play an important role in the experience of male body dissatisfaction. They thus conclude that young men may be at particular risk for body dissatisfaction, crediting the role of the media and its differential effect on younger and older males as the potential explanation for this (Peat, et al. 2011, 198).

Cohane & Pope (2000); Botta (2003), conversely, suggest that body image disturbances among males of all ages may have potentially adverse consequences for their mental and physical health (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373, Botta 2003, 389). As such, Botta (2003) states that "a drive to be muscular may be as dangerous for adolescent boys as a drive to be thin for adolescent girls (Botta 2003, 389)," while (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 1, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 153, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Mishkind, et al. 1986, 556, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566) posit that men – like women – are

most likely to experience body dissatisfaction due to an unrealistic, pervasive media appearance ideal, which many men feel increasingly pressured to live up to (Botta 2003, 390).

As such, the cultural ideal body shape for men is widely described as v-shaped, muscular, and mesomorphic (Muris, et al. 2005, 12, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 153, Pope, et al. 2000, 30, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Olivardia, et al. 2004, 112, Botta 2003) (i.e. "well-proportioned, average build, well-developed chest and arms, wide shoulders, narrow waist (Dallesasse and Kluck 2013, 309)") – an ideal which has also been suggested by Pope et al. (1999), who conducted a study documenting the evolution of the Western male body ideal as manifested through popular plastic male action figures (such as GI Joe figures, superman, spiderman, and batman) over 30 years. Their overall findings, when converted to human size, showed not only that each action figure had consistently grown exponentially more muscular than its predecessor, but also that modern-day action figures, if extrapolated to human size, represents a physical ideal which is wholly, if not more, unattainable to boys than the Barbie doll is for girls (Pope, Jr., et al. 1999, 65 & 70-71) – thus suggesting a steadily evolving, and increasingly unrealistic cultural muscular ideal and male body image. Similar findings were made by Leit et al. (2000), who conducted a study documenting the evolution of the Western male body ideal as illustrated through Playgirl magazine models over 25 years. Their findings suggested that male models (who are believed to represent the cultural body ideal) had progressively grown both "denser" and more muscular as the years progressed (Leit, Pope, Jr. and Gray 2000, 90-92), while Dallesasse & Kluck (2013) in a study examining the predominant body ideal among contestants in popular US reality programs likewise found that male contestants exhibit a much greater muscularity than US males on average. As such, they conclude that: "although RTV [reality TV] purports to cast "real" people in "real-life" situations, few "real" U.S. men can achieve the muscular ideal on RTV programming popular among young adult male viewers without use of unhealthy strategies (…) (Dallesasse and Kluck 2013, 314)"

Similar to women, Cohane & Pope (2000); Botta (2003); Hargreaves & Tiggemann (2004); Galioto & Crowther (2013) associate body image disturbances and repeated exposures to images of unrealistically muscular ideal bodies among men with impaired self-esteem, body insecurity, chronic thoughts about weight loss and weight gain, disturbed eating habits, symptoms of mood, anxiety, excessive exercise, dysmorphic disorders (especially muscle dysmorphia) etc. (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, Botta 2003, 389). Added to this, Botta (2003) (Muris, et al. 2005, 12, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, De Jesus, et al.

2015, 137) link the desire to be muscular among men with extreme health-risk behaviors such as the intake of steroids, various powders, and supplements in order to gain muscle – behaviors which may cause "irreparable damage to their bodies in much the same way adolescent girls vomit, abuse laxatives, and stop eating (Botta 2003, 389)".

Supporting the above findings, (Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, De Jesus, et al. 2015, 140, Daniel and Bridges 2009, 36, Peat, et al. 2011, 198, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 159) have found evidence supporting that even a very brief exposure to images of idealized male bodies increase male's body dissatisfaction. When examining the effects of young males' exposure to muscular and hyper muscular images, (Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 159), however, found that "men with high muscularity concerns were more affected by the muscular than the hyper muscular images (Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 159)" – a finding which they hypothesize could be caused by the fact that media representations of the male body predominantly favors a muscular ideal over a hyper muscular ideal, meaning, in turn, that males are more likely to consider muscular images to be "ideal (Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 159)."

Existing literature, as such, suggests increasing levels of body dissatisfaction among males as a consequence of the increasing exposure to unrealistically muscular, idealized media body images, with some scholars (such as Peat et al. (2011)) suggesting that especially young males may be at particular risk for body dissatisfaction, which, in turn, may have implications for their physical and mental health. Most research on male body image has, however, to our knowledge, focused primarily on print and television sources (Talbot, et al. 2017, 2), though the Internet, as noted by Simpson & Mazzeo (2016), "is increasingly the primary media source used by young adults," which presents "a unique way for users to obtain information from like-minded peers and to communicate with others more personally than in conventional mass media (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 560)." The relatively recent phenomenon of fitspirational content on social media thus emerges as an interesting source of content examination in relation to uncovering whether online images posted by "normal" users mirror the idealized media images presented in print and television sources. Though a growing body of research has done various research on fitspirational content (cf. the top of this paragraph for sources), only few scholars have, to date, to our knowledge, included males in #fitspo studies (see e.g. (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Deighton-Smith and Bell 2017)); and none have – again, to our knowledge – focused entirely on men. A more in-depth analysis of male-centered #fitspo content is thus warranted in order to not only contribute with new perspectives

to the existing body of predominantly female-centered fitspirational literature, but also to offer a comprehensive understanding of #fitspo content posted by, and aimed at, men as a potential contributing factor to problems with increased body dissatisfaction among male audiences.

1.2. Problem Formulation

A growing body of literature has repeatedly linked frequent exposure to fitspirational content on photo-based social media platforms such as Instagram to increased feelings of body-dissatisfaction and internalization of normative, unrealistic body ideals among women, despite ostensibly purporting to promote a healthy, active lifestyle to its audience through the visual display of toned bodies, health quotes, exercise tips, etc. (Prichard, et al. 2017, Holland and Tiggemann 2016, Tiggemann, Churches, et al. 2018, Brown and Tiggemann 2016, Robinson, et al. 2017, Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, Sumter, Cingel and Antonis 2018, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Tiggemann and Miller 2010). The implication of these findings, as such, seems to suggest that fitspirational imagery and messages may play a part in increasing body-dissatisfaction among its audience – a state which has been linked to low self-esteem, body insecurity, chronic thoughts about weight loss and weight gain, disturbed eating habits, etc. (Botta 2003, 389, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373). Supporting this, a small body of content analysis literature on photo-based female-centered fitspiration sites (such as (Boepple, Ata, et al. 2016, 134, Boepple and Thompson 2015, 100, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 65) has found that #fitspo content aimed at women, similarly to traditional print media, promotes homogeneous, idealized tall, extremely thin bodies, which are likely to be unattainable for most women. As such, they conclude that fitspirational content is "likely to communicate messages that are potentially harmful to women's body image (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, 88)" – findings, which recognize fitspirational content as potentially harmful to its users and viewers, and thus highlight a need for more research exploring the potentially negative impact of fitspiration content.

Despite the growing body of literature linking female-centered #fitspo content with increased body-dissatisfaction among women, only an extremely limited body of #fitspo-related content analysis research has thought to included imagery and textual messages posted by, and presumably targeted at, men (with the notable exceptions of (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Deighton-Smith and Bell 2017)), while no #fitspo research (to the best of our knowledge) has focused exclusively on men and male users.

As such, in spite of related research suggesting that men, like women, appear to experience greater degrees of body-dissatisfaction (a state which, among other things, has been linked to impaired self-esteem, body insecurity, excessive exercise, dysmorphic disorders, etc.) when exposed to idealized media body images (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 1, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 153, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Mishkind, et al. 1986, 556, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566), very little is known about how male social media users portray their bodies in - and engage with - #fitspo content, as well as how men, by implication, may contribute to problems with body-dissatisfaction as uploaders. A systematic and comprehensive investigation of exclusively male-centered #fitspo images and textual messages is therefore highly warranted. Following the suggestion of Slater et al. (2016), who note that:

> "it has been proposed that rather than overall social media usage driving the association with poorer body image outcomes, a more nuanced approach, which considers specific components of the social media environment, may be required. Specifically, photo-based activities, such as sharing, viewing, and commenting on images of oneself and others, have been highlighted as playing an important role (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, 88)".

The aim of the present thesis is thus to systematically analyze images and text (both in the form of image captions, and hashtags) found in male-centered #fitspo content on the popular photo-based social media platform Instagram in order to cumulatively interpret whether #fitspo content posted by, and presumably targeted at, men may potentially increase body dissatisfaction among male followers. In order to comprehensively examine each of these aspects of the content, we propose the following problem formulation with related research questions:

PF: How can male centered #fitspo content be interpreted as potentially increasing body dissatisfaction and health risk behaviors of male Instagram users?

RQ1: What themes/ideas of masculinity and male body image standards can be recognized in the #fitspo pictures on Instagram?

RQ2: What other hashtags do males use in their #fitspo posts and do they show any connection with the overall message of fitspiration and/or negative body image outcome?

RQ3: What are the general themes in the captions of the male #fitspo posts and what behaviors for achieving body image ideals are encouraged.

1.3. Structure of thesis

The following section seeks to briefly outline the structure of the present thesis in order to provide an overview of its individual sections, as well as how these sections cumulatively interrelate to answer the posed problem statement and research questions.

The present thesis seeks to systematically investigate the social media phenomenon #fitspo (an amalgamation of the words "fitness" and "inspiration") and its potentially negative impact on body satisfaction and health-risk behaviors among male Instagram users. To answer our problem statement and research questions, the thesis consists of five overarching sections: Introduction and background, methodology, theory, analysis, summary of theoretical results, conclusions.

The first section, *introduction and background*, seeks to introduce the concept of #fitspo, and place the present thesis within the thematic framework of existing fitspirational literature by reviewing related literature on #fitspo, body dissatisfaction, muscle dysmorphia, and steroid use. On this basis, we present our problem formulation and three research questions. As part of building a background knowledge of the phenomenon and possible implications of #fitspo, as well as the social media platform on which it originated, Instagram, these concepts are introduced in separate background paragraphs.

The second section, *methodology*, presents and explores the methods and methodologies which form not only our fundamental world-view and outlook as researchers – an outlook which inevitably affects our approach to studying and interpreting the phenomenon of male-centered #fitspo - but also guides our data collection process. As such, our ontological, epistemological, and methodological reflections are first introduced, followed by a paragraph chronicling our reflexive use of the netnographic method to collect our empirical data, as well as, lastly, a paragraph explaining in detail our coding strategies and processes of our data.

The third section, *theory*, presents the combined theoretical framework of the present thesis – a framework which we liken to the "glasses" through which we look at, understand, and make sense of our empirical data. This section thus introduces, in separate paragraphs, the theoretical concepts of masculinities and hegemonic masculinity, objectification theory, and social cognitive theory.

The fourth section, *analysis and summary of theoretical results*, comprises our analytical endeavors to answer the problem formulation posed in the present thesis. As such, the analytical section first presents our empirical coding results, followed by the analysis of our empirical data, guided by the theoretical framework presented in section four of the thesis. The analysis systematically describes the general themes of masculinity and objectification messages in male-centered #fitspo content, as well as why these themes may potentially be detrimental to body satisfaction and mental health of male Instagram users. On the basis of existing literature, we lastly interpret how #fitspo content and messages may be argued to contribute to body dissatisfaction and engagement in health-risk behaviors among male Instagram users.

With the basis on our problem formulation, the fifth and last section, *conclusions*, summarizes the overall findings of our analysis.

2. Background

The following paragraphs seeks to explore the concept of fitspiration and the world of social media to better understand the overall platform of the thesis.

2.1. Fitspiration and Fitspo

The following paragraph seeks to provide an overview of the concept of fitspiration and its brother and shorter form 'fitspo'.

As will be discussed in the later paragraph 'Social Media', social networking sites and apps are becoming more and more popular as more people gain internet access (Statista a 2018), and with the rise of the user generated content, people are now able to share their daily life in various ways to both friends, family, and strangers. This is where 'fitspiration' has shined through the traditional media and broken with the typical 'thin ideal' which have been the type of body women have been expected or encouraged to pursue (Chasler 2016, 23) approximately since the 20th century (msu). However, as Chasler (2016) states;" the thin ideal portrayed in advertising and the media has a negative impact on body image (Chasler 2016, 16)", may be one of the reasons why a shift to a more toned and muscular body has seen a rise in popularity in men and women alike. The word 'fitspiration' is a compound of

the words ‘fitness’ and ‘inspiration’ which, as the words imply, are “designed to motivate people to exercise and pursue a healthier lifestyle (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 62)”. Thus, the focus here initially seems to focus on health and the importance of a fully functional body rather than that of one’s appearance which seems to be the case with the thin ideal as Time writes; “TV and fashion magazines giving girls unhealthy ideas about how thin they need to be in order to be considered beautiful (Gupta 2008)”. However, USA Today states in an article that fitspiration images on Instagram may not live up to the initial message of just getting healthy by exercising as they write that it “have become synonymous with images of buff biceps, butts, bellies and breasts (Sheinbaum 2014)”, thus indicating that it too is focusing on the appearance a person can achieve by exercising and ‘getting fit’. It is, however, unclear when exactly the phenomenon of fitspiration began, but to illustrate how much it has grown on Instagram for the past few years can be seen from an academic article by Santarossa et al. written in 2016. In this it is stated that the hashtag for fitspiration had around 3.3 million posts while #fitspo had around 30 million (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2), compared to today (March 2018) where fitspiration contains around 14 million and #fitspo with over 53 million posts, it is clear that the phenomenon has spread widely and used regularly on Instagram. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the hashtag for fitspo has more than double the posts as fitspiration, which is why this is the hashtag we in the following thesis will be focusing on, and it is clearly the dominating and most popular of the two, though there does not seem to be a noticeable difference between the posts, which correspond with the fact that fitspo is simply a shortened form of fitspiration. This fact may further explain why fitspo is more popular, as people often use multiple hashtags in one post, the process becomes a lot easier for people when they are short, easy to remember, and fast to write when you are on the go as the website Small Business Trends writes: “It’s best if a hashtag is an understandable word, phrase or abbreviation. Hashtags that are long, hard to pronounce or hard to remember, will be hard for people to use, too (Campbell 2015).”

Another interesting aspect about the phenomenon of fitspiration is that it seemingly emerged on social media, contrary to for example the thin ideal which is promoted on official advertisements, movies, magazines etc., thus, it is promoted by the ‘general public’ which Cambridge Dictionary defines as; “ordinary people, especially all the people who are not members of a particular organization or who do not have any special type of knowledge (Cambridge Dictionary)”. However, this also entails that people who promote health and fitness motivation via the fitspo tag are not professionals, thus the information may not be accurate according to for example a fitness coach or a nutrition expert (Clark

2017, 67). However, it is to be noted that big as well as large businesses use Instagram for promotion, thus, some of the people using the fitspo hashtag may be a professional (Grigonis 2017).

2.1.1. Fitness media and its impacts

The following paragraph will seek to uncover some of the negative and positive impacts as found in other studies, which will thus seek to provide some background information as to why the following thesis is interested in analyzing the #fitspo posts further.

As stated by Boepple et al. (2016) "As a whole, fitspiration promotes health and well-being through the promotion of healthy eating, exercise and self-care, and the overall philosophy is one which emphasizes strength and empowerment (Boepple, et al. 2016, 2)", thus, as discussed in the above paragraph, the initial message of fitspiration is very positive. However, as further stated, Instagram is a social media site used by the 'general public', it is easier to follow peers on their fitness journey instead of a regular model from a fitness magazine etc. which make it more likely for people to make social comparisons (Boepple, et al. 2016, 2). This is where it for people viewing these #fitspo images can go one way or the other, either positively or negatively as social comparison theory "serves as the basis for self-evaluation of one's abilities and opinions (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2)". A study by Santarossa et al. (2016) found that females who viewed fitspiration images got a positive attitude and newfound motivation for being healthy, however, they also found that they experienced poor body image because of the highly appearance focused posts to which they compared they themselves with (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2). A poor body image can have negative effects both mentally and physically. This has been shown in various researches is the case for both men and women, although there seems to be a larger number of researches on the effects on women. For example, Clark (2017) states that being exposed to a both thin and muscular body ideal leads to what she calls quick diet fixes, such as "diet pills, quick diet fixes, magic cleanses and myriad forms of food restriction that claim to fix any body flaw (Clark 2017, 66)" which are not deemed healthy choices. However, more often people tend to go the route of extreme and unhealthy diets and exercise habits (Chasler 2016, 12) which may lead to a more permanent state of getting an eating disorder, especially in the case of women who desire the lean and toned body that is mostly being portrayed on fitspiration posts (Clark 2017, 67), which, as indicated by Boepple et al. (2016), that fitspiration in reality is more exclusive and more commanding in the type of body ideal is the 'one' in contemporary sociocultural ideals (Boepple, et al. 2016, 5-6). As aforementioned, it seems that fitspiration is still highly engaged by appearance reasons, thus the thin ideal for women does still seem to be present, however, an added

amount of muscle is supposed to represent the healthy and strong part of fitspiration. But this again makes the ideal of fitspiration even more unattainable for most with the added expectation and focus on muscles (Boepple, et al. 2016, 6). Furthermore, research by Holland and Tiggemann (2016) suggests that fitspiration images on Instagram are promoting extreme and compulsive attitudes towards exercise which also "often coexists with dietary restriction, purging, and other unhealthy weight loss behaviors (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76-77)". Extreme and compulsive exercise has been described by the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) as "Exercise that significantly interferes with important activities, occurs at inappropriate times or in inappropriate settings, or when the individual continues to exercise despite injury or other medical complications (NEDA)" along with various other consequences that the person may encounter with this behavior such as using exercise as a means to permit oneself other joys in life such as social gatherings, or basic things needed to survive such as eating, as one set a goal for oneself to complete before any of these can be done (NEDA). Thus, it may affect one's mental health in various negative ways with additional possible physical problems such as persistent sore muscles, joint and bone pain that may be permanent, injuries getting more frequent because of overstressing the body etc. (NEDA). Holland and Tiggemann (2016) found that compulsive exercise and the impacts it may accompany were frequent for women who themselves posted fitspiration images (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 78), though the effects of compulsive exercise is not exclusive to women, but also men.

Indeed, though 4 of the 5 academic articles mentioned above focuses primarily on women (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, Boepple, et al. 2016, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Chasler 2016), the research by Boepple et al. (2016) found that 30 percent of the fitspiration images on Instagram were of men which they state, "clearly distinguishes fitspiration imagery from its thinspiration counterpart, as the latter is almost exclusively directed at women and girls (Boepple, et al. 2016, 6)", and that especially the muscle aspect of fitspiration has similar negative effects for men as the thin ideal has on women (Boepple, et al. 2016, 6). Another academic article, written by Carrotte et al. (2017), states that men exposed to the muscular ideal get an increased drive for muscularity (which may lead to compulsive exercise mentioned above), depression, and general body dissatisfaction as they, contrary to the ideal for women, want to get bigger and not thinner (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017), which the research by Clark (2017) further concluded from a survey of 2000 male Canadian high-school students as most actually wanted to gain weight (thus getting more muscle) instead of losing it (Clark 2017, 67). An added factor for men wanting to get the ideal muscular body is another form of what Clark (2017) calls quick diet fixes such as anabolic steroids (Guðnadóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2014,

151) which, if used diligently, can cause liver damage, kidney failure, and mental problems among others (NIH 2016). With the desire to become bigger and entering a state of excessive exercise is another disorder called 'muscle dysmorphia (Guðnadóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2014, 151)' which means that a person "obsess about being small and undeveloped. They worry that they are too little and too frail. Even if they have good muscle mass, they believe their muscles are inadequate (ANRED)".

In short, viewing and posting of fitspiration images has been shown by various academic researches to affect people both mentally and physically, furthermore affecting both men and women in both similar and different ways as they, according to the fitspiration images, have different ideals when it comes to the type of body that is most desired. However, as stated by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016), "Fitspiration is, by definition, designed to be inspirational (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 66)", thus, fitspiration posts do also have positive effects on many people.

2.2. Social media

The following paragraph seeks to provide a brief introduction to the concept of social media within the scope of fitspiration content. This paragraph will further describe the world of social media and Instagram in particular in order to get more familiar with its functions and why the phenomenon of #fitspo can have wide ranging impacts.

The Oxford Dictionary of Social Media defines social media as:

> "The online and mobile technologies or platforms people use to interact and share content, including social networking sites, social bookmarking and social news sites, geosocial networking sites, blogs, online forums, file-sharing and media-sharing sites, social gaming sites, social commerce sites, virtual worlds, and wikis (Chandler and Munday 2016)."

Social media, with its wide array of different technologies enabling individual users and communities to gather, network, collaborate, and share content, can thus be seen to constitute a form of computer-mediated communication (Fuchs 2014, 35), which, by means of social media tools such as personalized user profiles, sharing of pictures, videos, texts, files, lists of contacts, creation of - and interaction with - single or multiple groups of friends, acquaintances and likeminded users, both across, between, and beyond national borders and time-zones, creates not only a time-space

compression (Warf 2017), but also manifests "a convergence between personal communication (to be shared one-to-one) and public media (to be shared with nobody in particular (Meikle and Young 2012))." For similar reasons, social media technologies have fundamentally changed the way news and information are generated, shared, stored, and retrieved (Rutsaert, et al. 2013, 85).

Though social media usage is highly diverse, with platforms such as Facebook focusing mostly on exchanges between family and friends, while platforms such as Twitter specialize in rapid, tightly compressed communication (Statista a 2018), what makes social media social is, according to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), that it in large part is based on and driven by User Generated Content (UGS) – a term which is usually applied to describe "the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61)." The ever-growing user engagement and popularity of various social media platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook (2.2 billion monthly active users), YouTube (1.5 billion monthly active users), Instagram (800 million monthly active users), Twitter (330 million monthly active users), Pinterest (200 million monthly active users), LinkedIn (260 million monthly active users (Statista a 2018)), etc. can thus further be linked directly to global increases in internet access, availability, and usage. Indeed, statistics show that social networking is one of the most popular online activities, alongside connecting with family and friends, expressing opinions, and seeking out online entertainment (Statista b 2018).

The previous years have witnessed a spectacular growth in the numbers of global internet users, active social media users, and active mobile social media users ("active users" meaning users who have been logged in to one or more social media accounts during the last 30 days (Statista c 2018)), with 2017 figures showing that 50% of the global population now have internet access, while the penetration rates of active social media users on non-mobile and mobile devices are 37% and 34%, respectively (Kemp 2017). Towering above the global average, 2017 figures similarly showed an 89% online penetration rate in North America, while Western Europe boasted an 87% penetration rate (Statista d 2018). Concurrently, due to slow or underdeveloped broadband technology in some developing countries, many users rely exclusively on mobile connections for internet access (Statista d 2018). As such, more than half of the global mobile phone population [a number expected to pass the 5 billion mark by 2019 (Statista e 2018)] access the internet from their mobile phone (Statista d 2018) - a figure, which is forecast to jump to almost 65% in 2019 (Statista d 2018)." This thus suggests an increasing technical convergence (meaning the ability to access several technologies from one device (Vaterlaus, et al. 2015, 152)), which lends users access to social media at all times.

The growth in technological popularity is, however, only one aspect of social media, as noted by (Rutsaert, et al. 2013, 85)). Rather, it is suggested that "the increase in the amount of time people are spending on these applications is changing the way people spend their time online as well as off-line (Rutsaert, et al. 2013, 85)", meaning, essentially, that trends, advice, and consumption encountered online is often transferred to the decision-making processes of everyday life (Rutsaert, et al. 2013, 85).

The growing global accessibility of online technologies coupled with the increasing proliferation and expansion of online User Generated Content has thus sparked concerns regarding the legitimacy of the largely unregulated content and often non-scientifically based advice being shared, circulated, and consumed via various social media; in the context of the present thesis, concerns regarding health- and fitness-related content on social media have been voiced, with one study noting that:

> "social media also affords the opportunity for users to control how they present themselves to their social network (…) users can present the version of themselves that they hope for, rather than their actual selves, which could potentially influence the content they post relating to their health behaviors (Vaterlaus, et al. 2015, 153)".

Contentions aside, social media, along with its ability to create and share information, has been credited as a potentially powerful and important contemporary health information source on the internet (Vaterlaus, et al. 2015, 152). Supporting this, studies have found that up to eight in ten U.S. internet users look online for health information (Oh, et al. 2013, 2073), while other studies have likewise suggested that U.S. young adults increasingly utilize their social network to seek health related support and information (Oh, et al. 2013, 2073, McKinley and Wright 2014).

In relation to this study, the continuous increase in access to social media platforms such as Instagram, may be argued to potentially increase the range and influence of #fitspo content on males all over the world.

2.2.1. Instagram

In the following paragraph, we will dig deeper into the world of Social Networking Sites (SNS), or rather, a more specific social media site called Instagram which we have chosen as our primary source of data collection.

Instagram was launched on October 6th 2010 (Lux 2011) as a mobile app created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Wikipedia a 2018), though also getting a website in 2012, the mobile application remains its primary focus as the website does not allow one to upload anything, thus making the website purely usable for watching photos (Tsotsis 2012). And photos are indeed what Instagram is all about as its specialty is publishing photos and videos, either directly from a picture taken with the application itself or with already existing ones on your phone (Lux 2011). Furthermore in 2012, Instagram was bought by Facebook, which has a longer history in the social media world as it was founded in 2004 (Wikipedia b 2018), however, the two applications share both its similarities and differences, and the differences and particularities of Instagram are the reason why we have chosen Instagram as our primary source rather than Facebook although it is unarguably more popular than that of Instagram as can be seen from the numbers of monthly active members listed in the above paragraph.

One of the distinctive features of Instagram is the ability to put filters on one's photos along with other edits such as contrast, brightness etc., thus making people able to manipulate or highlight what they perceive as their best selves (or make a sunset even more beautiful etc.) with which Hendrickse et al. (2017) ads; "This type of filter-manipulation makes it more likely that Instagram users will be exposed to the best representation of others on Instagram (Hendrickse, et al. 2017, 93)". A second feature Instagram is known for is its use of hashtags which involves key words or sentences (put together without any space between the words) along with the # sign (Harris 2018); thus, for our research, we will be searching for the hashtag #fitspo. As will be further explained in the paragraph 'Netnography', Instagram has its own algorithm that decides which posts make it to the 'top posts' list when searching for a specific hashtag, though it is not officially announced how it decides, it seems that it is mostly bigger accounts (with many followers) that make it, although smaller accounts may have a higher probability with a lesser used hashtag as the top posts will then not change as often (Marshall). Comparable to Facebook, one can also 'follow' and be 'followed' yourself thus enabling the pictures and videos from the people you follow to show up on your feed (Lux 2011) (the wall on Facebook), however, in early 2018 Instagram implemented a new feature where one can now follow a specific hashtag, such as #fitspo, instead of a particular person, thus people will be able to see you on their feed without specifically following you (Gilbert 2018). Unlike following people, however, it is not possible to view the number of followers on a hashtag, only the amount of posts with that hashtag can be viewed. This new feature has thus made it even easier and more convenient to access #fitspo content for Instagram users.

As mentioned in the paragraph 'Social Media', the focus on Facebook is mostly between family and friends to share with each other and communicate with one's social relations, on the other hand, studies have shown that people who use Instagram is more focused on self-promotion (Sheldon and Bryant 2016, 90) which the features specific to Instagram mentioned above make possible as Jackson and Luchner (2017) concludes: "These findings suggest Instagram users are more concerned with carefully selecting images to promote their self-concept rather than connecting with others (Jackson and Luchner 2017, 2)". Furthermore, it is estimated that 59% of adults aged 18-29 are using Instagram (Jackson and Luchner 2017, 1), with around 68% of users overall being female and 32% male (Wikipedia a 2018), with 80% being outside the US (Aslam 2018). Thus, although the male demographic is rather small compared to the female, they still make up a considerable number of users which, as mentioned, have been omitted from many researches. Furthermore, the number of users outside the US points to Instagram as a worldwide social media platform which may give us results from various parts of the world.
However, pictures and videos are not all that is to Instagram, as it is still possible to create a caption on one's post describing the picture etc., furthermore one is able to comment on said picture, thus creating a kind of feedback for the one who uploaded the picture. Jackson and Luchner (2017) states that the feedback one receives on Instagram is further a part of the creation of the presented self (Jackson and Luchner 2017, 2). Thus, we have in the current thesis decided to use and analyze Instagram posts in three different dimensions; pictures, hashtags, and captions in order to find a conclusion and/or further discussion of our problem statement.

Though there are multiple social media sites as mentioned in the paragraph 'Social Media', we believe that Instagram is the best candidate for analyzing the fitspiration (or fitspo) movement across the globe as fitspiration is very much linked to an ideal body image for both men and women and Instagram's main focus are photos and presentation of a better self as stated above, it gives us the perfect opportunity to discover how male users use and interpret what fitspiration is for them.

3. Methodology

The following paragraphs seek to, in detail, account for the methodological and analytical reflections, which collectively make up the research paradigm and design of the present thesis. The following

paragraphs thus hold a fundamental and central role in our thesis, as they collectively provide an overview of how we as researchers interpret and create knowledge in our research.

According to (Jonassen 1991, 8); Lincoln and Guba (1994), a research paradigm is imperative to all research, as it constitutes "a set of basic beliefs" held by the researcher(s) about their worldview (Lincoln and Guba 1994, 107). As such, these beliefs define, for its holder(s), "a nature of the "world," the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Lincoln and Guba 1994, 107)." Lincoln and Guba (1994) describe a research paradigm as the collective sum of three interrelated elements; methodology, ontology, epistemology (Lincoln and Guba 1994, 108). The ontological element deals with "the nature of reality (Jonassen 1991, 8)," and, subsequently, what there is to know about it (Lincoln and Guba 1994, 108), while the epistemological element brings to question what can be known and thought, and how one knows it (Jonassen 1991, 8, Lincoln and Guba 1994, 108). The methodological element tackles the question of how the researcher plans to go about "finding out whatever he or she believes can be known (Lincoln and Guba 1994, 108)."

3.1. Hermeneutics

The overall analytical approach of the present study will be hermeneutical which was chosen on the basis that the hermeneutical method exactly draws attention to the circularity of understanding and interpretation of the male #fitspo phenomenon as a ubiquitous activity (Mantzavinos 2016). As such, hermeneutics posits that "the same way that the whole is, of course, understood in reference to the individual, so too, the individual can only be understood in reference to the whole (Mantzavinos 2016)". Thus, the hermeneutic production of knowledge, in other words, is thus constructed in a continuous, contextual interplay and dialogue between the researcher and that which is researched, as both we as researchers and the male Instagram users of the #fitspo content, it is assumed, hold a set of unique preconceptions which ultimately shape their horizons of understanding (until they are challenged and negotiated through new input and experience). Mirroring the words of Charles Taylor, the analytical approach of the current study thus accepts that "what we are trying to establish is a certain reading of text or expressions, and what we appeal to as our grounds for this reading can only be other readings (C. Taylor 1985, 18)." Furthermore, hermeneutics subscribes to the same ontology and epistemology as social constructionism which will be accounted for below (Lincoln and Guba 2005, 165).

3.2. Ontological and epistemological considerations

As mentioned above, our knowledge production process in the present thesis has been very fluid and plastic, thus, knowledge has been constructed and negotiated throughout the whole research both in regards to our review of existing fitspirational literature and during our coding process (discussed in the paragraph 'Coding'). Our ontological and epistemological position is therefore constructivism, as we posit "that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision (Bryman 2012, 33)." Thus, we believe that the world is comprised of multiple realities which are constantly constructed and interpreted between individuals, as we, as a team, for example experienced during our coding process as discussions and agreements had to be made in the construction of the codes (N. Wang 1999, 354), which means that there is no 'real' reality as it is dependent on the subject (Lincoln and Guba 1994, 111). Similarly, our choice of data collection method, netnography, carries similar notions: "All constructions of 'reality' and 'authenticity', practicality, and even 'adequacy' and 'holism' are contextually determined, consensually maintained, collaboratively enforced, and contingent upon standards that we deem or do not deem to accept (Kozinets 2015, 81)".

Thus, we see our data collection and coding process as a co-construction between us and the Instagram users which was continually negotiated throughout both our coding- and analysis process.

3.3. Qualitative and quantitative methods

Based on our ontological and epistemological position discussed above, a qualitative approach has been taken to gather and analyze our data as we, as mentioned, embody "a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation (Bryman 2012, 36)". However, when constructing the results of our coding of the data (see appendix A), the findings will be presented in a semi-quantitative manner to create an overview of the amount of times each coding category has been encountered.

3.4. Data collection method

The following paragraphs seek to account in detail for the methodological approach, and analytical considerations and choices constituting the study design of the present thesis as part of the collection and subsequent processing of our empirical data.

As a whole, the process of selecting, collecting, and processing the empirical data of the present thesis can be said to have taken place in three overarching stages, all of which will be accounted for in greater detail in their respective paragraphs below; the first stage can broadly be termed *a preparatory stage of data generation*. In the present thesis, this stage thus included the selection of a social media platform from which to source our empirical data by means of the netnographic method – a process, which in and by itself brought with it a variety of practical and ethical decisions regarding how to approach the documentation of our online observations while at the same time protecting the privacy of the observed users. The second stage can be termed *the processing of the collected data*. In the present thesis, this stage thus entailed the process of taking and sorting screenshots to document our observations. The final stage can be termed *data analysis*. In the present thesis, this stage entailed the numerous coding considerations and strategies applied to our data in order to systematically group and dissect them in order to answer our research questions.

3.4.1. Method: Netnography

Seeing as how the concept of #fitspo originated within an online environment, we found it only natural to source all of the present thesis' empirical data from an online social media platform. Furthermore, as the research questions of the present thesis seeks to shed light on a variety of aspects of a phenomenon which can be said to fundamentally hinge on the study of online groups and communities, a netnographic method was chosen.

Though originally created and coined by Robert Kozinets in the mid 1990's (Brand New Worlds) under the definition: "the name given to a specific set of related data collection, analysis, ethical and representational research practices, where a significant amount of the data collected and participant-observational research conducted originates in and manifests through the data shared freely on the Internet, including mobile applications (Kozinets 2015, 79)," the netnographic method (an amalgamation of the words '(Inter)net' and 'ethnography') has since been expanded upon and contested by a variety of scholars. As such, the qualitative methodologies for the online environment (Costello, McDermott and Wallace 2017, 1) have, among other examples, to date been called "online ethnography (Tunçalp and Lê 2014, 60)", "virtual ethnography (Beaulieu 2004, 142)", "cyberanthropology (Beaulieu 2004, 142)", "computer-assisted webnography (Horster and Gottschalk 2012, 229)" , "cyber ethnography (Ward 1999, 95)", "ethnography for the Internet (Hine 2015, 1)", "connective ethnography (Dirksen, Huizing and Smit 2010, 1045)", and "netnographic

grounded theory (Healy and McDonagh 2013, 1528)", etc. While some scholars view and use these terms synonymously and interchangeably (Grincheva 2014, 10), others have argued for a need of a more distinguished understanding of the nuances and differences between the methodological approaches of the respective terms (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 839). In acknowledgement of this potential terminological confusion, the present thesis mainly draws on and engages with the methodological framework provided by netnography, though supplementing views and perspectives on the process and potential pitfalls of doing research online from a variety of scholars will likewise be consulted. This choice was made primarily because netnography more so than competing frameworks has attempted to provide a methodological framework, which is at once finely detailed and offers "a systematic, step-by-step approach to addressing the ethical, procedural, and methodological issues specific to online research (Costello, McDermott and Wallace 2017, 2)", but also clearly distinguished from traditional ethnography (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840, Kozinets 2015, 79, Costello, McDermott and Wallace 2017, 2, Wiles, et al. 2013, 20).

Among the most noticeable and often emphasized distinctions between traditional ethnography and netnography are thus netnography's departure from a defined, physical field, which, as noted by (Hine 2000, 65, Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840); Tunçalp and Lê (2014), is "the most characteristic element of any ethnography (Tunçalp and Lê 2014, 59)," in favor of a more "fluid and diffuse (Kozinets 2015, 118)" and "fuzzy (Tunçalp and Lê 2014, 59)" time-and-space conceptualization characteristic of online spaces, as well as the lack of face-to-face interaction and communication which is often associated with traditional ethnography (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840, Kozinets 2010, 5). As such, netnographic engagement may take place with multiple geographically dispersed individuals at once across multiple online platforms (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840, Kozinets 2015, 118), and data may be generated and gathered completely covertly, i.e. without any interaction passing between the researcher and the observed online community (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840, Costello, McDermott and Wallace 2017, 4). Lastly, rather than relying on field notes and textual accounts of ethnographic observations, netnography offers the unique possibility of utilizing a wide range of data (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840-841), which may be "textual, graphic, photographic, audiovisual, musical, commercially influenced and sponsored or not (Kozinets 2015, 80)." In this relation, Costello et al. (2017) thus note that "despite netnography often being explicitly described and understood as online ethnography, it is not synonymous with this term nor is it suitable for use as a generic term applicable to any study of material generated in online environments (Costello, McDermott and Wallace 2017, 2)." Following the guidelines devised by the netnographic

framework the guidelines are divided into the five following phases: 1) *Making cultural entrée,* 2) *Gathering and analyzing data,* 3) *Ensuring trustworthy interpretation,* 4) *Conducting ethical research*, and 5) *Member check* (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 841, Kozinets 2002, 63-66), the present thesis thus seeks to utilize the genre-specific tools provided by the netnographic method to collect the empirical data needed in the present thesis in order to shed light upon the way men visually portray their bodies (via images), and discursively construct their view on health and masculinity (via image text captions). As such, from a methodological perspective, it is our hope that by observing male online user activities (both in terms of what they post with regards to pictures, the captions, and the hashtags) and gathering evidence of their participation within an online social media space, we will be able to analyze males' online behaviors, values, and identities in the context of #fitspo (Grincheva 2014, 8).

3.4.1.1. Making cultural entrée

The first phase of netnography, *making cultural entrée*, involves the researchers' identification of, and search for, online platforms (or, alternatively, virtual fields) which are appropriate and relevant to the research question(s) at hand (Kozinets 2002, 63). Similarly, (Garcia, et al. 2009, 54); Tunçalp and Lê (2014) venture that the first challenge for netnographers is to "draw space boundaries" on the basis of their research questions, and "to decide over the degree of online/offline integration" of their netnographic inquiry in order to determine what constitutes the virtual field of research for the netnography in question (Tunçalp and Lê 2014, 61). This phase thus involves significant considerations for the researchers, as the netnographic field of choice lends the research a context, which, as stated by Kozinets (2015) "is everything, and context is constantly changing (Kozinets 2015, 104)." In relation to selecting online platforms for netnographic inquiry, Kozinets (2010) furthermore outlines six guiding criteria for suitable platforms, stating that they should generally be: 1) relevant to the research focus and questions; 2) active, with recent and regular communications; 3) interactive, having flows of communication between participants; 4) substantial, in terms of numbers of users; 5) heterogeneous, involving different participants; and 6) data-rich (Kozinets 2010, 89).

Seeing as how the concept of #fitspo has its roots in social media, the present thesis has chosen to base the present netnography in an exclusively online setting. Furthermore, as the present thesis seeks to contribute with new male-centered perspectives to the existing body of predominantly female-

centered fitspirational literature, it seemed only natural to conduct the present netnography on the most commonly featured popular social media platform of existing literature: Instagram (see, e.g. (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, Boepple, et al. 2016, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Chasler 2016). Furthermore, seeing as how the present thesis aims to systematically observe and analyze male #fitspo images and messages (both in the form of image captions, and hashtags), the choice of Instagram was further motivated by the format of the platform, which is at once highly visual (i.e. image-based) compared with competing popular social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017), yet simultaneously encourages high user engagement by letting users 'like' pictures and actively interact with peers via comments and private messages (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2). Finally, Instagram furthermore lets users use image-captions and hashtags to complement their posted photos and videos – a practice, which turns any word that directly follow the '#' into an organized, searchable link that help users track discussions and content of their interest posted by other users (Hiscott 2013). Furthermore, as stated by Slater et al. (2017), the user-generated nature of content posted on social media platforms such as Instagram may potentially "allow for the possibility of a wider variety of images and content than has been customarily transmitted via traditional media channels (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, 88)." Within the context of #fitspo, Instagram as a virtual field on which to conduct a netnographic inquiry thus offers the possibility to observe and source heterogeneous content posted by a variety of different male participants.

3.4.1.2. Gathering and analyzing data

The second stage of netnography, *gathering and analyzing data*, entails the researchers making decisions and considerations – again, guided by their research question and available resources (Kozinets 2002, 64) - which should ideally answer the questions: "what will constitute 'data' for you. How you will collect them. How your ongoing analysis will be conducted (Kozinets 2015, 101)." Seeing as how netnographic data may be multimodal, i.e. make use of several modes of communication such as text, sounds, images, videos, etc. (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 840, Kozinets 2015, 80), this, as noted by Lugosi et al. (2012) notes, means that "the researcher has to broaden his or her repertoire in gathering, interpreting and integrating vastly different data (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 841)."

Seeing as how the present thesis, cf. our problem formulation and three research questions, seeks to observe and analyze a variety of data, i.e. both visual (images) and textual (captions and hashtags) content posted by male Instagram users, our primary empirical data will be comprised by screenshots documenting our observations of the male-centered #fitspo content which was posted on Instagram over a 4-week observational period from March 15, 2018, to April 15, 2018. Though the length of the period in which netnographers collect data from their virtual field(s) of choice should ideally continue for "as long as new insights on important topical areas are still being generated (Kozinets 2002, 63)," the length of our observational period was decided on the basis of temporal considerations. As a way of compensating for the relatively short period of active data collection, we, however, made sure to peruse the #fitspo hashtag on a daily basis in the month leading up to, as well as the month following our data collection. These pre- and post-observational visits were made to ascertain ourselves of the relative saturation of our observations and data – a certainty which grew at the end of our post-observational visits, when many of our observations started to recur regularly. Though scholars who have previously included male data in their fitspirational content analysis have uniformly collected and included data of both women, food, and men (see e.g. (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Deighton-Smith and Bell 2017)), the present thesis has, owing to its exclusively male-centered perspective, chosen to only take screenshots of images which featured at least one identifiable male, and which were posted by a male user.

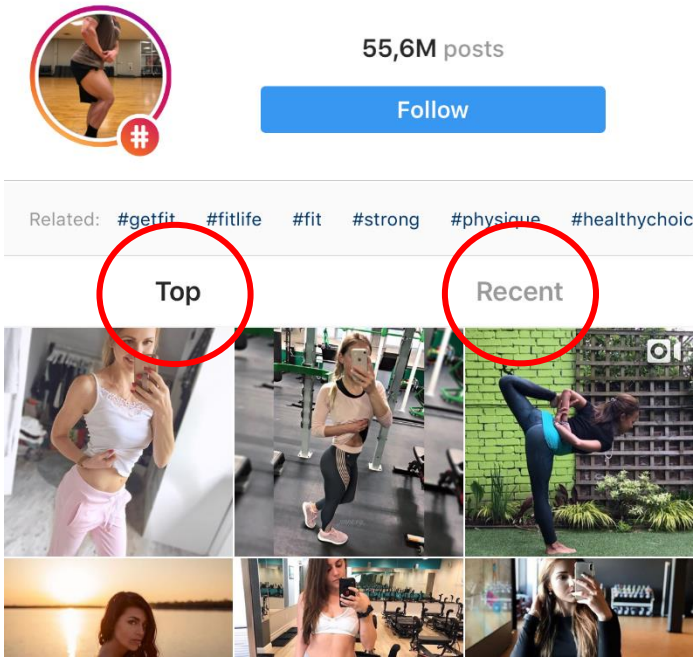


Figure 1

Put into practice, our observations and data collections were split between the two group members. As such, this thus meant that we each took daily screenshots on our phones of the first five images to 1) match our criteria of including a male in the image, and 2) which appeared under the #fitspo category on Instagram, along with the caption(s) and hashtags pertaining to each of these images.

Seeing as how the Instagram smartphone application (app), as mentioned in the paragraph "Instagram", divides hashtag categories into two main sections when browsing the photos posted under the hashtag #fitspo: 'top' and 'recent' (for reference, see figure 1 above), which may, depending on Instagram's algorithm, display different images at different times of the day (the 'top' category, as briefly mentioned in the paragraph "Instagram" may typically showcase images by popular user accounts, i.e. accounts with a great number of followers and follower engagement, while the 'recent' category showcases the most recently posted images featuring the hashtag #fitspo, including those by user accounts with small amounts of followers and low follower engagement), each group member was assigned one of these categories from which to collect observations and screenshots. This decision to actively collect data from both categories was made, as we - to the best of our abilities - were interested in observing and documenting male-centered #fitspo content in its entirety, and seeing as how each specific category offered the potential of showcasing different aspects of the #fitspo phenomenon, it thus seemed only natural to include both in our observations. In order to ascertain a degree of homogeneity in the way data was collected by the two group members, each member furthermore took their screenshots at approximately the same time of the day. When processing the screenshots afterwards, duplicate images and corrupted image files were deleted. The total amount of images after the observational period was thus 260, along with a corresponding number of screenshots of these images' hashtags and captions (some of which stretched over two screenshots, depending on the length of the caption text).

The combined collected qualitative data set will subsequently be analyzed by means of coding – a process which will be discussed and detailed in its entirety under the paragraph "Coding."
As part of the referencing system chosen for the appendices in the present thesis, each referenced screenshot (whether of an image, hashtag list, or image caption) was subsequently assigned a letter of the alphabet, with the first appendices thus going by the names A, B, C… and so forth. Upon depletion of the alphabet, a duplicate letter was added to the next round of appendices, thus making their names AA, BB, CC… and so forth. This process was repeated throughout the entirety of the thesis. Furthermore, each picture was given a number before the coding process began, thus 1, 2, 3

etc. with the accompanying screenshots of captions and hashtags given numbers in decimals such as for example; 1.1, 32.2 etc.
As an additional note, the title of the appendices will be stated at the top of each screenshot, furthermore, every screenshot (specifically the screenshots of the pictures) which is explicitly featured as part of the analysis will not be included as an appendix, as they will already be visible within the thesis.

3.4.1.3. Ensuring trustworthy interpretation

The third phase of conducting a netnography, *ensuring trustworthy interpretation,* tackles the issue of the validity (termed 'trustworthiness' by (Kozinets 2002, 64)) of the collected netnographic data. This question is of especial interest to netnographers, as the task of collecting and interpreting netnographic data presents a number of challenges which are unique to computer mediated communication. As such, (Kozinets 2002, 64, Tunçalp and Lê 2014, 60, Garcia, et al. 2009, 53) have noted that some of the most pertinent pitfalls of netnography vis-à-vis face-to-face ethnography are the comparatively higher risks of "misrepresentation, difficulties to interpret non-contextualized data in an impoverished social context (Tunçalp and Lê 2014, 60)." Added to this, Kozinets (2002) suggests how the "uniquely mutable, dynamic, and multiple online landscape (Kozinets 2002, 64)" may render the identities of online users problematic to discern, and thus offers the observed users the possibility of presenting a "more carefully cultivated and controlled self-image (Kozinets 2002, 64)." To counter these possible limitations, Kozinets (2002) suggests that "to be trustworthy, the conclusions of a netnography must reflect the limitations of the online medium and the technique (Kozinets 2002, 65)," while Kvale (2007); (Garcia, et al. 2009, 54) suggest that the question of valid data is tied to its relevancy to the specific research questions being examined (i.e. is the data being collected useful to my research purposes (Kvale 2007, 98)).

In acknowledgment of the possible limitations of netnography outlined above, we thus seek to provide methodological transparency to the best of our abilities in regards to how we collect and analyze our data, in hopes of thus laying bare the grounds on which we reach all of our conclusions. In the present thesis, this thus especially entails a thorough account of our coding methods – an issue, which, as briefly mentioned above, will be dealt with in a separate paragraph below. Regarding the aspect of uncertainty in ascertaining the identity of the individual users of our collected data, we, with reference to the research questions of the present thesis, posit that our unit of analysis "is not the person but the

behavior or the act (Kozinets 2002, 64)", meaning that it is the combined health and exercise practices presented in male #fitspo content that is of relevance to us rather than the individual experience. In relation to the potential limitation of users possibly presenting a calculated and controlled self-image online, we, as similarly suggested by Santarossa et al. (2016); (Chua and Chang 2016, 191) consider this an engrained feature of social media, as it allows users "to have greater control over their self-presentation as users create personal profiles, controlling what images and/or posts they share to represent themselves (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2)." This, however, need not inflict on the validity/trustworthiness of the observed male #fitspo behavior. As noted by Garcia et al. (2009): "while some argue that the "virtual" world is a different "social space" than the "real world," (…) "Virtual reality" is not a reality separate from other aspects of human action and experience, but rather a part of it (Garcia, et al. 2009, 54)." While male #fitspo representations of health and fitness may, as such, arguably be presented in an idealized and controlled online environment, they may, however, still be real in their consequence for both the users posting the images and messages and the users viewing and internalizing them.

3.4.1.4. Conducting ethical research

The next, and, in the present thesis, last phase of a netnographic inquiry, *conducting ethical research*, entails a deliberate consideration of how the researcher will choose to represent him/herself, as well as how (s)he will handle his/her research ethically (Kozinets 2015, 101). According to (Garcia, et al. 2009, 58); Kozinets (2002), the potential ethical pitfall of netnography can be argued to boil down to the issue of the netnographer being "a professional lurker (Kozinets 2002, 65)", who, by implication, may access, use and appropriate online information without the informed consent of the observed participants (Kozinets 2002, 65). To accommodate this limitation, online researchers have generally adopted a variety of perspectives on "the advisability and ethics of lurking (Garcia, et al. 2009, 58)," with some opting to do a short period of covert observations of the online phenomenon of interest before later introducing him/herself to the observed online community (see e.g. (Shoham 2004, 857)), while others advocate for a completely covert (e.g. (Langer and Beckman 2005, 195)) or overt observer role (e.g. (Bell 2001, 198)). Each perspective carries its own pros and cons, with Lugosi et al. (2012) noting that though an overt observation may indeed inform and protect the rights and privacy of the research participants, the interaction and engagement with informants may, as a consequence, be "fragmented and asymmetric (Lugosi, Janta and Watson 2012, 842)." Similarly, Garcia et al. (2009) cautions that "in some cases disclosing one's presence to ask for consent may

sacrifice participants' anonymity and disturb naturally occurring behavior (Garcia, et al. 2009, 59)." Opponents of the covert observer, however, state that "lurking is a one-way process, and one of the strengths of ethnography is its emphasis on *dialogue* with respondents—recasting research as collaboration rather than appropriation (Bell 2001, 198)," while proponents state how the advantage of netnography is exactly "its unobtrusive nature (Costello, McDermott and Wallace 2017, 3)." The debate of covert vs overt netnographic observer further hinges on the issue of whether online spaces should be considered private or public. In this relation, Kozinets (2002) recommends approaching online research subjects fully disclosed in order to obtain informed consent before using quotes and idiosyncratic stories (Kozinets 2002, 65). Conversely, Langer and Beckman (2005) posit that the key criterion for deciding whether one is dealing with private or public communication should be the ease with which one may gain access to the online space in question. As such, they note:

> "if access is restricted (e.g. by use of passwords) and thus reserved for members only, we can talk about a (semi-) private communication within the community and should apply those guidelines and procedures, Kozinets recommends. If access is not restricted, i.e. if anybody can participate in the communication without any restrictions, this can be defined as public communication (Langer and Beckman 2005, 194)."

On the basis of our research questions, as well as the above potential limitations and considerations pertaining to doing a netnography, we, in the present thesis, have opted to assume a completely covert, "lurking" researcher role – i.e. researchers who do not disclose their online presence and intentions to the observed community members. This choice was motivated by two primary considerations; first, given the relatively extensive size of the collected body of data in the present thesis coupled with the relatively short observational period, we found it unfeasible to privately contact every observed Instagram user to request their informed consent to use their #fitspo images and captions. Furthermore, our chosen role as covert observers may be argued to support the trustworthiness of our findings, as we observe the users in a context and setting that is not influenced by our presence (Garcia, et al. 2009, 59, Sandlin 2007, 290, Langer and Beckman 2005, 195). Secondly, we have made a conscious decision to only collect #fitspo data from public user profiles on Instagram, i.e. profiles which can freely be viewed and engaged with without us having to 'follow' the user in question. With reference to the discussion of Instagram as a public vs private sphere, we have made this choice as we argue that the general premise of any publicly accessible, popular social media platform such as, in the present context, Instagram, is that all content which is willingly uploaded by users with a public profile will in effect be made available to a public audience – indeed, it has been

argued by (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 7, Chua and Chang 2016, 191) that the practice of posting photos of oneself explicitly for the viewing and engagement by others is the very DNA of especially photo-based platforms (such as Instagram). This implicit consent is further underlined by the fact that Instagram, as part of the uploading process of images and videos, requires its users to press "share" as the final step before the content is made available for other users to see. By explicitly agreeing to 'share' their #fitspo content, we thus argue that the male users of Instagram discursively consent to their content being made available for scrutiny, evaluation, and observation by not only fellow Instagram users with an account, but also non-users simply perusing the app (such as, in the present context, researchers studying an online phenomenon). As such, we justify the potential ethical reservations of us observing and collecting male #fitspo data without the users' explicit knowledge and consent in much the same way.

3.4.1.5. Member check

The final phase of conducting a netnographic inquiry, *member check*, entails a process in which the implicated users of the studied online spaces and platforms are presented with the final research findings as a way of both extending the information and feedback flow between researcher and subjects, and circumventing some of the ethical limitations discussed above (Kozinets 2002, 66). Because we, as mentioned above, have chosen to remain completely covert throughout the duration of the present netnography, we, however, argue that this phase is not relevant to the present thesis.

3.5. Coding

The following paragraph seeks to explain the essence of the coding process in the current thesis. Firstly, a code "is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data (Saldaña 2013, 3)". Thus, coding is not exclusively designed to be used on actual text, but also on photographs, videos, audio etc. (Saldaña 2013, 3, Gibbs 2012, 2), which in the case of this thesis will be used to both categorize pictures and text (captions and comments from our Instagram sample data). The purpose of coding is to split up the data samples into categories, themes, or otherwise related or similar parts of the data to later be easily retrieved (Gibbs and Taylor 2005, Gibbs 2012, 2), thus

making comparisons, “pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes (Saldaña 2013, 4)” more manageable and accessible (Bryman 2012, 607).

3.5.1. Coding methods

Firstly, an eclectic coding method has been used which entails that more than one type of coding method has been used in the process (Saldaña 2013, 188). Saldaña (2013) describes this method as being particularly useful for beginners in coding (Saldaña 2013, 188) and we furthermore found that the preliminary coding thoughts for this thesis would not be sufficiently done using a single method. The specific methods used for coding our sample data are subcoding, initial coding, and provisional coding. Firstly, Saldaña (2013) describes subcodes as “a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry, depending on the volume of data you have or specificity you may need for categorization and data analysis (Saldaña 2013, 77)”, which indicate that the method is suitable for studies with various forms of data samples (Saldaña 2013, 78), thus for this particular thesis which seeks to both analyze pictures and text. Initially, subcoding was implemented as a way of easily identifying codes belonging to a research question; the code ‘Pictures’ was created for research question 1, and the code ‘Captions and tags’ was created for research questions 2 and 3 (see appendix A). Furthermore, codes within each ‘parent’ code has ‘children’ code(s) (Saldaña 2013, 77), though in the case of this thesis, the ‘parent’ code may be more of a ‘grandparent’ as even the sub codes of these may have one or more sub codes. For example, the ‘grandparent’ code ‘Pictures’ has a subcode titled ‘Location’, and in order for that code to be more specific it has the subcodes ‘Gym’, ‘Indoors – not gym’, and ‘Outdoors’ (the specifics of each code will be further examined later in the paragraph). Thus, we found the subcoding method to be appropriate in the current thesis as to both have overarching codes for each category and more detailed codes for further indexing of each category (Saldaña 2013, 78).

A second coding method used was ‘provisional coding’ which “establishes a predetermined ‘start list’ set of codes prior to fieldwork. These codes can be developed from anticipated categories or types responses/actions that may arise in the data yet to be collected (Saldaña 2013, 144)”. As aforementioned, the categories of pictures and captions were already incorporated into the research questions early on, moreover, extensive research of former studies relating to our research area was conducted which generated multiple themes and hunches to start building up coding categories before initiating the coding process (Saldaña 2013, 144). Similarly, we have also used ‘initial coding’ as a method to further “reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of your (our) data (Saldaña 2013, 100)”.

Our reason for this were to further allow us to find connections, similarities, dissimilarities between our three overarching codes ‘pictures’, and ‘captions and tags’, as we do not only want to investigate and analyze each section separately, but also in connection as our problem formulation entails.

3.5.2. NVivo

Before describing each of the codes created during the coding process, an introduction to the way we went about the coding process is needed. We in the current thesis chose to code using the Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS (Bryman 2012, 591)) ‘NVivo’, thus creating and managing the codes electronically instead of manually. This method was chosen as both picture- and text-based data were collected and are to be analyzed, thus making the online tool NVivo, were all the data could be stored together, the perfect choice as all sorts of data is available to be uploaded on their program (NVivo) and to retrieve and browse through with ease (Gibbs 2012, 4). Furthermore, “It is possible to construct a collection of codes in a codebook without, at first, using them to code the data (Gibbs 2012, 8)” which were consistent with our coding methods as we again had hunches and plans for some of our codes. New codes can be constructed with ease as the coding process is initiated and new themes arise within our data, and the preliminary codes could be edited if needed be (Bryman 2012, 596). Bryman (2012) states the following: “CAQDAS software, like NVivo, invites the analyst to think about codes that are developed in terms of ‘trees’ of interrelated ideas. This can be a useful feature, in that it urges the analyst to consider possible connections between codes (Bryman 2012, 593)” thus further suggesting a relevant and possible convenient coding and analysis process. However, Bryman (2012) further notes that “It has also been suggested that the fragmentation process of coding text into chunks that are then retrieved and put together into groups of related fragments risks decontextualizing data (Bryman 2012, 592)”. This potential pitfall of using a CAQDAS software is, however, in the case of NVivo not that relevant as one can simply click on the source the code is from, thus enabling one to see/read the whole source thus in its original context.

3.5.3. Description of codes

As mentioned above, two ‘grandparent’ codes exist each with ‘parent’ subcodes, and some ‘parent’ subcodes may have related ‘children’ subcodes. A full list of all the codes can be seen in appendix A.

3.5.3.1. Captions and tags

Firstly, the overarching code 'Captions and tags', as aforementioned, is made to harbor all codes created from the captions (i.e. description of a picture) of each of the screenshotted pictures from our sample data. The first subcode is titled 'Anecdotes' which in itself has not been coded, but instead serve as a category for two other subcodes: 'Fitness' and 'Other'. The 'Fitness' subcode entails all references to fitness related events, stories, etc. that the user mentions, such as a specific workout he has done, a fitness related event/competition he went to etc. while the 'Other' subcode entails other stories and happenings that do not relate to fitness such as for example going on vacation and the like. A second code is titled 'Appearance motivation' which entails incidents where the user both explicitly and implicitly mentions or imply some correlation between motivation and physical appearance or in other ways makes appearance related comments. Next is the code 'Body functionality' which has the same principle as 'Appearance motivation', though with focus on the feelings and functions of the body.

The next code titled 'Branding', like anecdotes, has not been coded itself but instead carries three subcodes. The first of these subcodes is 'Business' which is used when users promote any type of business such as for example a fitness clothing brand, fitness center etc. the second subcode 'Fitspo related keywords' which is used in the same way just with the promotion of non-businesses, such as another Instagram user. The third subcode 'Self-promotion' refers to when the users promote himself in any way.

The next code is 'Diet tips' which entails both specific diet suggestions or simply mentions of the user's own diet and the like. 'Diet tips' further has its own subcode; 'Endorsement of supplements and other' which, as the name implies, is for the specific mention and positive attitude towards supplements.

The 'Drive for muscularity' code is similar to appearance motivation and body functionality, though in this case the focus is on the mentioning and focus on muscles. The code 'Exercise tips' is also similar to a previous code; diet tips. In this case, any mention or recommendation of how one should exercise is coded. The next code titled 'Guilt inducing' entails any form of message that may suggest either self-guilt or to make others feel guilty, furthermore, many guilt inducing messages are more implicit or insinuated. Next is the code for 'Hashtags' which simply contains all the hashtags from every Instagram post in our sample data.

Another code with related subcodes is that of 'Inspirational quotes', though in this case it has also been coded with every remark that resembles some form of inspiration. Any inspirational metaphor

has been coded under the subcode ‘Metaphor’, any message intended to motivate or other expressions of motivation has been coded under the subcode ‘Motivation’, any sign of satisfaction for either the user himself or another person is coded under the subcode ‘Pride’, and lastly, any remarks on how to take care of oneself is coded under the subcode ‘Self-care’.

The code ‘No caption’ is simply to note any number of users not writing anything in their caption, while the code ‘Non-English’ is for every caption originally written in another language than English. Here it is to be noted that Instagram has a translate function which (in most cases) made us able to still read the caption in English. The next code titled ‘Self-representation’ is also a rather complex category, as we have coded any form of remarks that may represent the user as a person, or something the user may signify is a representation of himself. The code ‘Stigmatizing fat’ is used for any comments that may ridicule, stigmatize, or otherwise negatively portray body fat.

The next three codes are more straightforward and more used to categorize who the users uploading these #fitspo pictures are. However, it is to be noted that only the users who state this information on their Instagram page have been coded, thus no guessing of these categories has been done. Firstly, the code ‘User age’ has three subcodes each split in age groups ranging from ‘15-20’, ‘21-25’, and ‘25+’. Secondly, the code ‘User profession’ contains the subcodes ‘Bodybuilder’, ‘Fitness center or team’ (thus an Instagram for that specific gym etc.), ‘Fitness equipment and apparel’, ‘Fitness model’ and ‘Personal Trainer and or health and nutritionist’, thus, these codes each represent a fitness related profession. Finally, the last code ‘Username’ contain three subcodes each representing what the user’s username refer to (note: many usernames could only be categorized after entering the user’s Instagram page where, for example, his name is stated). These three sub codes include ‘Fitness related’, ‘Other’, and ‘Real name (presumed)’.

3.5.3.2. Pictures

The first code within pictures is titled ‘Body percentage’ which entails three subcodes each describing a percentage of the body shown in the picture frame. It is to be noted that this code does not take into consideration any exposed skin, but rather focus on the body as a whole. The first subcode is titled ‘3-4’ thus containing the males who has ¾ fractions of their whole body within the frame of the picture. The next code titled ‘Full body’ entail any picture where the user has his whole body within the frame. However, pictures where for example some of the feet are cut of still count as a whole body. The last sub-code is ‘Upper body’ which includes the body from around the torso and up.

The next code is ‘Clothes’ containing four subcodes each with their own form of clothing. The first code ‘Everyday clothes’ contains those with regular everyday clothes such as jeans etc. while a second subcode, ‘Workout clothes’, contains any form of clothes made for fitness related purposes such as gym wear, running clothes, or other sport related clothes. A third code, titled ‘No visible clothes’ entails any picture where it is not certain whether the man wears any clothes or not as it is not visible within the picture, whereas the last code, ‘Underwear’ contains those that only wear underwear.

The third code deals with those users that expose their skin in any way. The first related subcode is that of ‘Abdominal muscles’ thus referring to any instances in which the user exposed his abdomen, while the second subcode, titled ‘Arms and biceps’ contains any revelation of half or more of the arm. The third subcode, ‘Back muscles’, refers to revealed backs, the fourth, ‘Leg muscles’, refers to half or more of the legs revealed, while the last subcode, ‘Pectoral muscles’ contains an exposed chest.

The next code is titled ‘Face reveal’, thus containing any user who has a clear face in the picture. However, it is to be noted that those not counted in this may still have their face in the frame of the picture but are either hidden behind a phone, turning the other way, or is otherwise unclear. The code titled ‘Fitness progress’ comprises of those pictures showing some form of transformation of the body such as a before and after picture portraying his fitness/workout progress. The next code, ‘Flexing, posing’ entails any sign of the user either posing for the camera or flexing his muscles (i.e. “to contract one's muscles, especially to demonstrate their size and strength (The free dictionary)”). The next code is titled ‘Image text’ which entails that text has been added to the picture itself.

The next code, ‘Location’, has three related subcodes, however, the parent code itself has also been coded. Any user that has added their location on the picture has been coded here to specify the countries the users are from. The three subcodes are comprised of smaller locations, such as ‘Gym’, thus any picture where it is clear that the user is inside a gym area. The second subcode is titled ‘Indoors - not gym’, thus containing those who are still inside a building, but not specifically in a gym while the last subcode, ‘Outdoor’ are for those outside, thus on the streets, in nature, etc.

The next code which is titled ‘Number of people’, simply contains three subcodes each with the number of people present in the picture; ‘1’, ‘2’, or ‘More than 2’. The very last code, ‘Workout’ contains any users who can be depicted as either working out in the gym, running, or otherwise engaging in some sort of physical activity.

3.5.4. Team coding process

As a team, some measures had to be taken to ensure the most productive, harmonized, and reliable codes throughout the whole coding process. Firstly, "Multiple minds bring multiple ways of analyzing and interpreting the data (Saldaña 2013, 34)", thus, a meeting collectively discussing and agreeing upon all the pre-made codes was held and written down to ensure a consistent view on each of the codes. As new codes arrived throughout the coding process, they were further discussed and agreed upon, while also noting where the code emerged so earlier data would be focused upon to ensure that type of code did not occur in any of the earlier data. Furthermore, (Macqueen, et al. 2008, 132) suggest that a single team member "may be assigned primary responsibility as "codebook editor" – the one who creates, updates, revises, and maintains the master list for the group (Saldaña 2013, 34)". Furthermore, as NVivo had more functions and features in the Windows version than on the Mac version, and one of the team members only had a Mac computer, the member with the Windows based computer was assigned with maintaining the codes and making sure none were missing, uploading of the empirical data into the program etc. However, as discussed by Saldaña (2013), a critique of team coding is that it can seem to try to be too objective when two or more people have to create codes, however, as he is also arguing is that "the process is not so much being objective as it is simply achieving similar results between two or more people (Saldaña 2013, 39)". Thus, we argue that this process corresponds with our ontological and epistemological perspective that there are no 'right' codes as they depend on the individual.

4. Theory

The following paragraphs seeks to describe some of the theories and concepts which will contribute to the analysis of our data.

In order to examine possible general patterns of representations of masculine bodies and behaviors, we found it necessary to first get an understanding of gender identities and masculinities, as this may provide valuable insights into how men enact and signify their masculine selves in relation to others via #fitspo content. As #fitspo content is shared by a variety of men of different ages from all over the world, an understanding of hegemonic, normative assertions of masculinity and masculine values

may furthermore be useful on the part of the researcher in relation to identifying common traits in the ways men present themselves and their bodies in #fitspo content.

4.1. Masculinity

As part of our stated objective of examining the ideas of masculinity and male body image standards presented in #fitspo images on Instagram, the following paragraphs seek to provide a brief overview of the concepts of masculinities and hegemonic masculinity in order to build sufficient background knowledge of the concepts, and thus place the present thesis within a broader framework of literature.

When discussing the contested concept of masculinity, the current predominant consensus among various scholars is that masculinity should not be treated as a singular, but rather as fluid and plural (Connell 2005, 44, Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280). As such, multiple scholars have argued that there are numerous different *masculinities* (Campbell and Bell 2000, Imms 2000, de Visser and Smith 2007, Cheng 1999, Morrell 1998, 607, Connell 2005), which, as noted by Connell (2005), can be defined as "configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change (Connell 2005, 44)." Wiegers (1998) similarly argues that masculinities are the unique outcomes of "social power struggles between men and women of different classes, races and sexual orientations (Wiegers 1998, 152)." Adding to this, Carrigan, Connell & Lee (1985), however, caution that the distinction between masculinities based solely on power relations is too simplistic a phrasing. Rather, they argue that "masculinities are constructed not just by power relations but by their interplay with a division of labor and with patterns of emotional attachment (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985, 591)." Similarly, Schrock et al. (2009) warns that while the conceptualization of plural masculinities "usefully sensitizes us to differences and inequalities among groups of men, (…) it can also make it hard to see what it is that masculinities have in common, other than enactment by male bodies (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280)," while Cheng (1999) states that "it is important to realize that both masculinities and femininities are extremely diverse; not homogenous, unchanging, fixed, or undifferentiated (Cheng 1999, 300)". Furthermore, Cheng (1999), Connell (2003), Wang (2000) and Imms (2000) argue that one man can adhere to multiple masculinities depending on the context (Cheng 1999, 300, Connell 2003, 251, Wang 2000, 114, Imms 2000, 160), with Imms (2000) noting that the concept of intramasculinity mobility lacks additional exploration (Imms 2000, 160).

Challenging the definition of masculinities as proposed by Connell (2005) and Wiegers (1998), Schrock et al. (2009) claim that this definition both tends to take the category "men" for granted, while at the same time failing to make clear "precisely which of men's practices constitute masculinity (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280)." Instead, they thus suggest a definitional strategy which posit that males "must signify possession of a masculine self (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280)." This masculine self, they state, is, however, to be understood as a "virtual reality, a dramatic effect, or a consequence of how an actor's appearance and behavior are interpreted by others (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280)." As such, signifying one's masculine self is not an innate male psychological entity or an embodied feature of the male body, but rather "a self imputed to an individual based on information given and given off in interaction (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280)." A similar notion is voiced by Morrell (1998), who notes that "masculinity is a collective gender identity and not a natural attribute (Morrell 1998, 607)."

In relation to the performative quality of masculinities and signifying the masculine self as suggested in the above, (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 280, Wang 2000, Gahman 2017, 702, Morrell 1998, 607, Willer, et al. 2013, 1016) argue that the qualities seen as masculine are mediated by various factors such as gender, class, culture, history, audience, situation, time, and race. As noted by Morrell (1998), this thus means that "there are many masculinities, each with a characteristic shape and set of features. The contours of these masculinities change over time, being affected by changes elsewhere in society and at the same time, themselves affecting society itself (Morrell 1998, 607)." As such, depending on the contextual constellation of the mediating factors mentioned above, one man may invoke practices which he judges signifies his masculine self (such practices could, in the context of the present thesis, be to pose half-nude in an Instagram post meant to showcase his fitness progress to his Instagram followers), while another man may judge this practice to be effeminate and vain.

In this context, Schrock et al. (2009) notes that media imagery targeting a wide variety of male age-groups such as Hollywood movies, superhero comic books, educational software, men's magazines and social media provides a repertoire of signifying practices and values that males can draw on to craft manhood acts (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 283), with Frederick et al. (2016) especially noting that paragons of masculinity in society often exhibit physical strength and muscularity (Frederick, et al. 2017, 156). At the base of these signifiers, they thus argue, lies the affirmation of "a male body as a baseline signifier of a masculine self (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 283)." A similar notion is voiced by (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279) and Connell (2005), who states that "true masculinity

is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body (Connell, Masculinities 2005, 45)." Adding to this, Wiegers (1998) states that "the relationship between the male body and the dominant discourses of masculinity converge upon the issue of desire. Consumer culture stimulates men's desires to be attractive, intelligent and effectual individuals through the lure of achieving an ideal masculine body (…) (Wiegers 1998, 153)," while Frederick et al. (2017) similarly suggest that feelings of masculinity and muscularity are closely tied for men (Frederick, et al. 2017, 156). Seeing as how a body of literature (see, e.g. (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 1, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 153, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Mishkind, et al. 1986, 556, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566), has previously linked body dissatisfaction among men with exposure to, and internalization of, a culturally pervasive, unrealistic, muscular ideal body shape, which for men is widely described as v-shaped, muscular, and mesomorphic (Botta 2003, 390, Olivardia, et al. 2004, 112, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Pope, et al. 2000, 30, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 153, Muris, et al. 2005), it may thus be inferred that men who (feel like they) fail to meet the socially dominant standard of muscularity are likely to experience body dissatisfaction when looking at, and engaging with, #fitspo content showcasing muscular male bodies. Supporting this, (Galli and Reel 2009, 115); Gunadóttir & Gararsdóttir (2014), interestingly, found evidence that men, when exposed to muscular-ideal images, "can feel driven to achieve a more muscular body despite being satisfied with their bodies (Guðnadóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2014, 156)" – a drive, which has often been described as a precursor of steroid use and dysmorphic disorders (Guðnadóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2014, 151). Based on this, the exposure to ideals of masculinity and male bodies in #fitspo content may, as such, potentially be linked to problems with body dissatisfaction among male Instagram users.

On the basis of the above masculinity literature review, and in accordance with the constructivist stance assumed in the present thesis, we thus argue that it may be difficult to define the concept of masculinity in definite terms, as the meanings associated with - and practices signifying - masculinity are largely dependent on the constructions of the individual, and mediated by factors such as age, class, race, etc. Furthermore, one individual may invoke several varying masculinities depending on the context. We, as such, argue that the individual's construction and signification of his masculine self may change according to his subjective experiences. At the same time, we, within the context of Instagram (which is primarily a visual medium), and specifically within the context of #fitspo images, argue that the way males portray their bodies (via images), discursively construct their masculinities (via image text captions), and negotiate a shared masculine identity (via comments) may often reflect

“how men should behave and how putative 'real men' do behave, as the cultural ideal (Morrell 1998, 608).” Within the framework of the present thesis and its presented research questions, the concepts of masculinities and hegemonic masculinity are thus helpful theoretical tools with which to recognize and categorize potentially normative assertions of masculinity and masculine values presented in screenshots of the male-centered #fitspo content, which makes up the empirical data of the present thesis.

4.1.1. Hegemonic Masculinity

According to Reed (2013), theoretical frameworks used to analyze men’s health have typically been based upon the framework of hegemonic masculinity, with various studies (e.g. (Mahalik, Burns and Syzdek 2007, Basterfield, Reardon and Govender 2014, O’Brien, Hunt and Hart 2005, Banks 2001)) often suggesting a link between hegemonic masculinity, macho behaviors and high risk health practices among men (Reed 2013, 908).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity first emerged in the 1980s, and is described as the dominant and currently most honored embodied form of masculinity which allows some men to enjoy more relative and comparative power than other males and females (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832), and which at any given time “constitutes the practices denoting the most acceptable ways of engendering ‘manhood’ (Gahman 2017, 701)”. According to early formulations by Connell (2005), hegemonic masculinity is thought to be normative in nature, and is only enacted by a minority of men over women and other subordinate masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832) (i.e. men who do not adhere to the culturally defined conventional masculinity, e.g. gays, non-Whites, non-Westerners (Lease, et al. 2013, 85)). In relation to this, Connell (2005); Morrell (1998); Donaldson (1993); Carrigan et al. (1985); Wang (2000) further argue that hegemonic masculinity is the vehicle which ideologically legitimizes the global subordination of women to men (Donaldson 1993, 645, Morrell 1998, 608, Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985, 592, Wang 2000, 114, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832), with Morrell (1998) noting that “hegemonic masculinity is a key element of patriarchy (Morrell 1998, 609).” As such, the enactment and perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity requires that all other masculinities position and subordinate themselves hierarchically in relation to its privileges and values (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832) to signify that “certain ideals associated with “being a man” are granted ascendancy over others (Gahman 2017, 701).” In this relation, Cheng (1999) further argues that “one’s membership in either the dominant group or a marginalized group is based on our conformity to hegemony. Conformers often belong to the

dominant group. Non-conformers usually belong to a marginalized group (Cheng 1999, 300-301).” Despite being enacted by only a minority of men, the hegemonic masculinity ideal is, as argued by (Carrigan et al. (1985); (Lease, et al. 2013, 85, Hearn 2004, 52) thus sustained by a very large number of complicit men (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985, 592). Donaldson (1993) thus argues that hegemonic masculinity is “exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent (Donaldson 1993, 645).”

According to (Ridgeway 2009, 159); Donaldson (1993), the media relies heavily on hegemonic masculinity imagery, which purports to present universally ideal depictions of males and females, to create and organize “social institutions in ways that appear “natural” “ordinary” “normal (Donaldson 1993, 645)”.” In this relation, (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985, Imms 2000, 155, Gahman 2017, 701, Cheng 1999, 297, Morrell 1998, 608, Lease, et al. 2013, 85); (Kane 2006, 152, Connell 1995, 77); note that hegemonic masculinity reflects the *current* ideal of masculinity, meaning, in essence, that the concept is contested, and “is constantly responding to challenges, accommodating, or repelling rival representations of masculinity (Morrell 1998, 608).” To fully embody hegemonic masculinity is, as argued by Gahman (2017), thus impossible “due to the fact that “masculinity” itself is an illusory construct functioning in a perpetual state of redefinition and instability (Gahman 2017, 701).” In this relation, Connell (1995) underlines that "hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations (Connell 1995, 74)."

(Wiegers 1998, 152, Cheng 1999, 298, Morrell 1998, 608, Kimmel 1994, 124-125, Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 284) (Ridgeway 2009, 159) however, argue that hegemonic masculinity has, in a western historical perspective, been characterized by the cultural dominance of white, middle-class, heterosexual males (Wiegers 1998, 152), with Cheng (1999) elaborating that “in addition to being white and male, important demographic characteristics include being able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian (or, perhaps Jewish), first world (as opposed to colonized men), and ranging in age from 20 to 40 (Cheng 1999, 298).” Similarly, Kimmel (1996), quoting Erving Goffman, states that: “In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports (Kimmel 1996, 5).”

In addition to these characteristics, (Lease, et al. 2013, 85, Cheng 1999, 298, Imms 2000, 153, Kane 2006, 153) further argue that hegemonic masculinity is defined by attributes such as dominance,

toughness, aggression, limited emotionality, competitiveness, athletic prowess, self-reliance, stoicism, and control. To this, Kimmel (1994) adds that "the hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man of *power.* We equate manhood with being successful, capable, reliable, in control (Kimmel 1994, 124-125)." In this relation, (Imms 2000, 157) and Cheng (1999) further argue that hegemonic masculinity performances "must be constantly validated by "proving" itself as dominant and in control of itself and others (Cheng 1999, 298)." This strive for validation, argues Willer et al. (2013), "is a near ubiquitous aspect of men's lives because of the hierarchical nature of masculinity, the esteem accorded to it, and the presence of a narrowly defined set of ideal masculine traits (Willer, et al. 2013, 1013)." In the context of male #fitspo content on Instagram, this drive for validation can thus be argued to be present in the act of publicly uploading an image for the viewing and engagement of other users. At the same time, (Hearn (2004); (Donaldson 1993, 646), however, argue that the display of the cultural ideal of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily correlated with holding powerful positions in society, as "the individual holders of power may be very different from those who represent hegemonic masculinity as a cultural ideal (Hearn 2004, 57)."

One way of enacting and continuously proving this performance of hegemonic masculinity could be by displaying muscularity, especially of the upper body – a practice which has been linked to greater perceptions of physical formidability (Sell, et al. 2009, 581), behavioral dominance (Sell, Hone and Pound 2012, 41), more positive evaluations of leadership, and higher social status (i.e. respect, influence, and deference) in cooperative groups (Lukaszewski, et al. 2016, 402). As such, Lukaszewski et al. (2016) concludes that "men's physical formidability, unlike other more task-specific determinants of social value, will prove to be a fairly consistent determinant of status allocation across different types of groups and societal contexts (Lukaszewski, et al. 2016, 402)." Within the context of #fitspo content on Instagram, the performance of hegemonic masculinity practices such as the display of physical muscularity, verbal assertions of dominance, competitiveness, high pain tolerance, or athletic prowess is thus interesting to explore as part of how males present, construct, and position themselves and their bodies on Instagram.

Another way to prove and enact hegemonic masculinity is to reject and act aggressively toward what is considered "feminine" (e.g. passivity, excessive emotionality and displays of love, affection, pain, etc. (Kane 2006, 153, Cheng 1999, 298)) or atypical. As such, (Cheng 1999, 298, Kimmel 1994, 119, Frederick, et al. 2017, 157, Lease, et al. 2013, 85, Donaldson 1993, 648); Connell (1987); argue that

anti-femininity and homophobia lies at the heart of hegemonic masculinity, with Connell (1987) stating that “the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual. (…) Contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men (…) is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987, 186).” Supporting this, Frederick et al. (2017); (Willer, et al. 2013, 1013, O’Connor, Ford and Banos 2017, 578) and has similarly found that men facing threats to their masculinity are likely to enact extreme demonstrations of masculinity (Frederick, et al. 2017, 157) by practices such as the verbal assertion of “the superiority of men, derogation of homosexuals, support for war, and desire for a large, powerful vehicle (Willer, et al. 2013, 1013).” Similarly, O’Connor et al. (2017) found that men who had faced a threat to their masculinity and hierarchical status within a group were likely to respond by expressing amusement with sexist and homophobic jokes (O’Connor, Ford and Banos 2017, 578). On the other hand, Pleck (1995) - with his proposition of the gender role strain paradigm - suggests that men who are unable to meet or maintain the hegemonic masculinity ideal may experience low self-esteem and negative psychological consequences (Pleck 1995, 12).

Contesting the concept of hegemonic masculinity, (Howson 2006, 1); Lease et al. (2013), however, argue that “constructions of what is termed as traditional masculinity ideology are often based in a Western perspective of hegemonic masculinity (Lease, et al. 2013, 85),” while Imms (2000) suggests that that concept is ethnocentric and Eurocentric (Imms 2000, 154). (Campbell and Bell 2000, 537); Hearn (2004), on the other hand, notes that the widespread application of the term can be argued to be a conceptual and empirical weakness, and points out that hegemonic masculinity, despite being defined as a configuration of gender practices rather than a specific character type, is sometimes used exactly as such by some scholars (Hearn 2004, 58). As such, Whitehead (1999) suggests that many scholars have used the concept in an “unproblematical, uncritical fashion (Whitehead 1999, 58),” while Campbell et al. (2000) argues that “scholars sometimes engage in a largely unrelational analysis of what was intended to be a highly relational concept [hegemonic masculinity (Campbell and Bell 2000, 537)].” Supporting this, (Imms 2000, 155, Whitehead 1999, 58, Hearn 2004, 58, Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279) (Donaldson (1993) have likewise argued that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is unclear and at times contradictory, with Donaldson (1993) noting as an example that “when we look to see why many young men take up sport we find they are driven by "the hunger for affiliation" (…); we see the felt need for "connectedness" and closeness. How hegemonic is this? (Donaldson 1993, 647).” A similar weakness is noted by Whitehead (1999), who questions: “if we consider hegemonic masculinity to be ‘the culturally idealized form of the masculine character’ (…)

does it then follow that women and gay men cannot behave in a hegemonic masculine fashion (…)? (Whitehead 1999, 58)".

(Donaldson 1993, 644, Campbell and Bell 2000, 537, Hearn 2004, 59) (Imms (2000); Howson (2006) claim that the concept of hegemonic masculinity inadvertently creates and perpetuates the monolithic categories it is trying to refute (Imms 2000, 160), with Howson (2006) stating that:

> "The bulk of the works that sit under this rubric continue to express traditional interpretations of gender relations and practice, in which biologically based gender delineations and functional reciprocity are sustained as legitimate grounds for knowledge about normative gender behavior (Howson 2006, 1)."

Imms (2000) similarly argues that many males construct versions of masculinity which recognizes women as their equals, and further states that "to classify them as part of a hegemonic order oversimplifies the structure of contemporary society and fails to acknowledge a powerful force within masculinity working *against* oppression and domination (Imms 2000, 160)." As such, (Whitehead (1999); (Connell 2003, 255, Donaldson 1993, 646, Hearn 2004, 58) argue for the need of a more diverse, situational, relational, scrutinizing conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity, with Whitehead (1999) calling for attention to males' "investment of identity, the personal/political self, embodiment, resistance, knowledge, male subjectivity, and subversion. Any broad-brush, macro-structuralist interpretations can only reveal so much (Whitehead 1999, 61)."

Having identified potential limitations to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, we, as such, acknowledge that the use of the highly relational concept within the mostly de-contextualized and almost exclusively visual setting of #fitspo content on Instagram poses a limitation to its theoretical use in the present thesis. To name but a few of these limitations, many Instagram users do not reveal their land of origin, let alone their economic class, age, marital status, interpersonal competencies, etc., which consequently poses a challenge in relation to localizing the users within a situational, relational framework, as suggested above. Despite these limitations, we, however, do not conclude that the concept of hegemonic masculinity, if viewed as a configuration of practices, cannot usefully be applied to the present thesis. Rather, the international format of Instagram lends an opportunity to explore multiple masculinity practices, which may differ by cultural settings. The medium of Instagram thus offers an opportunity to explore both various visual representations of embodied

masculinities, and their interpersonal attitudes and interactions by means of posted images, image captions and comments.

4.2. Objectification theory

To further understand how people may encounter negative outcomes discussed in the paragraph 'Fitness media and its impacts' through the process of viewing and posting #fitspo content on Instagram, the objectification theory may guide us in analyzing both the pictures and further interaction with these pictures as it "represents a cohesive framework for understanding how sociocultural pressures are translated into psychological risk factors that can promote body image and eating problems (Moradi 2010, 138)". Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) are some of the most prominent scholars discussing the objectification theory, and they originally targeted this theory for women; "This theoretical framework places female bodies in a sociocultural context with the aim of illuminating the lived experiences and mental health risks of girls and women who encounter sexual objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 174)", which Daniel and Bridges (2009) discuss as being because it has been mostly believed that men do not, or at least to a lesser extent, have body image issues (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 32). However, in later years there has been a greater focus on male body image (e.g. (Boepple, Ata, et al. 2016, Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017)), furthermore, the objectification theory has been expanded:

> "the theory has been extended to examining sexual minority and heterosexual men's experiences (e.g. (Hebl, King and Lin 2004, Martins, Tiggemann and Kirkbride 2007, Wiseman and Moradi 2010) as well as experiences posited to be uniquely salient for subgroups of women such as lesbian women (e.g. (Kozee, et al. 2006), African American women (e.g. (Buchanan, et al. 2008), and Deaf women (Moradi 2010, 139)."

Furthermore, as stated by Moradi (2011), objectification theory incorporates other theories which further widen its use to various populations (Moradi 2011, 154). First of all, it incorporates two aspects of the objectified body consciousness framework; body surveillance and body shame (Moradi 2011, 155). As stated by Daniel and Bridges (2009) and Moradi (2010), body surveillance occurs when one is objectifying oneself (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 33), mostly called self-objectification (Moradi 2010, 33), which Wiseman and Moradi (2010) states "is manifested as body surveillance or persistent monitoring of how the body looks (as an object) rather than attending to how it feels or functions (Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155)", which may lead to a sense of body shame when one

does not meet the cultural standards of the ideal body (or general attractiveness) (Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155). However, it is to be noted that according the body consciousness framework, one can and should obtain the body ideals of the cultural standards which is not the case with the objectification theory as it states some negative impacts of trying to comply with these standards (Moradi 2010, 139). (Moradi 2011, 154, Heath, et al. 2015, 298) states that the monitoring of one's appearance that usually follows when one is objectifying oneself may lead to severe body shame which often leads to eating disorders, or at least some of the symptoms of this, such as restricted eating, low self-esteem, and depression or a higher degree of depressed mood (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 33). Though these consequences do not always happen, as Martins et al. (2007) further note that "body shame is thought to mediate the relationship between self-objectification and these maladaptive behaviors (Martins, Tiggemann and Kirkbride 2007, 636)." Similar effects of body dissatisfaction can happen with another theory which is adopted within the objectification theory; the dual pathway model which "suggests that perceived pressure to be thin promotes internalization of the thin ideal (Moradi 2010, 139)" with the addition of the tripartite influence model which suggest that the internalization of a cultural standard of attractiveness (or in this case the ideal body) leads to peer pressure from both family, friends, and media alike thus furthermore leading to distractive eating and possible eating disorders (Moradi 2010, 139).

According to (Moradi 2010, 139, Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155, Deighton-Smith and Bell 2017, 5) Frederickson and Roberts (1997), one of the most prominent things that leads to self-objectification is the occurrence of sexual objectification which "occurs whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 175)", thus, they are treated as objects or merely their bodies for the pleasure of others. Thus, when one has been experiencing sexual objectification, one starts to look at one's body and appearance from an observer's perspective, leading to some of the consequences mentioned to meet these cultural standards (Moradi 2010, 139, Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155). In media in particular, sexual objectification occurs when - in for example a picture in a magazine - the face is either cut of (thus not in the frame of the picture) or otherwise unclear or blocked thus focusing on the body parts alone, which again depicts them as being merely objects of pleasure for others (Deighton-Smith and Bell 2017, 5). However, (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 33) further state that on a personal level (i.e. face to face), men do not experience as much sexual objectification as women do, however, in popular and social media, "men are similarly bombarded by body type ideals and sexually objectified images

(Daniel and Bridges 2009, 33)". In particular, compared to the drive for thinness for women, men tend to want a muscular body instead, which Moradi (2010) in a sample of (mostly) white men found as a consequence along with self-objectification and body dissatisfaction when pursuing the cultural standards of attractiveness (Moradi 2010, 140). However, the differences in the application of the objectification theory should still be noticed as the "standards that idealize thinness and vulnerability as attractive for women (Moradi 2010, 140)" and the "standards that idealize muscularity and dominance as attractive for men (Moradi 2010, 140)" still makes the man seem more powerful than the woman. However, as aforementioned, research has been conducted for men that still do find a correlation between objectification and the drive for muscularity in men which, as mentioned in the paragraph 'Fitness media and its impacts', leads to various negative body views and behaviors (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 32).

However, Heath et al. (2015) suggest two limitations to applying the objectification theory to men, with one of them being that it was originally designed to research women and thus focus on many of the linked consequences to the thinness ideal and the cultural standards of attractiveness in general and "characteristics such as *strength* and *physical fitness* may have very different meanings for males and females because of the different body ideals across genders (Heath, et al. 2015, 299)". However, as stated in the beginning of the paragraph, later studies have expanded its use and proven it to be applicable to other than women (Moradi 2010, 139). A second limitation Heat et al. (2015) suggest that men's drive for muscularity does not always entail a dissatisfaction of one's current body, thus no feelings of body shame, compared to a seemingly higher degree of body dissatisfaction for women's drive for thinness (Heath, et al. 2015, 299). Thus, based on the above, we in this thesis find that the objectification theory is a tool that may enlighten us and allow us to dig deeper into both the pictures and the messages from male #fitspo content on Instagram despite its original intent on focusing on women and although no interviews or questionnaires could be conducted.

4.3. Social cognitive theory

According to scholars such as (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561, McNary 2009, 18, Jordan and Romer 2014, xii, Lin and Chang 2018, 2), the potential influence of a wide variety of mass communication, such as fitspirational images and messages, can be examined and understood through the framework of social cognitive theory.

Originally formulated by psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1960's (McNary 2009, 18), social cognitive theory postulates that human learning and skill-acquisition is greatly influenced by observing modeled behavior by other individuals of specific actions and their subsequent consequences (McNary 2009, 18, Basen-Engquist, et al. 2013, 1138, Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561). As noted by Bandura (1971):

> "traditional theories of learning generally depict behavior as the product of directly experienced response consequences. In actuality, virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people's behavior and its consequences for them (Bandura 1971, 2)".

Though human learning was previously believed to be primarily dependent on real world models, particularly those from one's immediate environment (such as family members and institutionalized authority figures), rapid advances in technology and modes of communication have since resulted in an increasing, extensive exposure to, and reliance on, symbolic modeling (McNary 2009, 21) by a vast range of diverse models who far transcend the bounds of the observer's immediate environment (Bandura 2001, 271), such as, in the present context, Instagram users from all over the world regularly posting #fitspo related content. A similar notion is voiced by (Prichard, et al. 2017, 1) Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2016); Carrotte et al. (2017), with the latter noting that "fitspiration is perceived to "model" ideas about health and fitness, shaping health beliefs and encouraging a "moral obligation" to achieve a particular body type (…) (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017)," while Tiggemann & Zaccardo (2016) state that "people often turn to the media (e.g., TV, the Internet) to determine appropriate behavior and cultural appearance standards (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 132)." This thus suggests, in essence, that individuals, such as male users of Instagram, may to an ever-increasing extent form and develop large parts of their knowledge and behaviors vicariously through transmissions made by other, often personally unknown and physically dispersed, users – a tendency which is also reflected in the term often used interchangeably to denote popular user-accounts on various social media platforms: *influencers* (Influencer Market Hub). As such, Bandura (2001) notes that "a vast amount of information about human values, styles of thinking, and behavior patterns is gained from the extensive modeling in the symbolic environment of the mass media (Bandura 2001, 271)."

In acknowledgement of the fact that most psychological theories were formulated "long before the advent of extraordinary advances in technology of communication (Bandura 2001, 271)," Bandura (2001) expanded on the framework of social cognitive theory to also include reflections on modern mass communication. As such, Bandura (2001); (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561) note that symbolic modeling today plays a "powerful" role in the lives of "countless people in widely dispersed locales (Bandura 2001, 271)," and poses a significant psychological and social impact, which has the potential to serve as "a major vehicle for sociopolitical change (Bandura 2001, 271)." Due in part to the accelerated growth and evolution of technologically mediated communication such as that found on social media, platforms such as Instagram can thus, according to social cognitive theory, be argued to instill in its users "new ideas, values, behavior patterns, and social practices (…) [which are] being rapidly diffused worldwide by symbolic modeling in ways that foster a globally distributed consciousness (Bandura 2001, 271)." By possibly displaying and promoting potentially unrealistic and normative male body ideals and unsafe health practices, #fitspo content on Instagram may thus be argued to similarly influence male users to adopt and internalize these health practices and body ideals.

Simpson & Mazzeo (2016); (Bandura 2001, 8) further argue that social modeling in electronic mass communication may have a socially self-regulating effect on its users, as "individuals learn the societal rules of behavior and ascertain personal standards for regulating conduct (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561)." Furthermore, (Bandura 2001, 8, Borzekowski, et al. 2010, 1526) note that symbolic modeling in mass media may have a strongly motivational effect on its viewer insofar as the outcome of the presented behavior is portrayed as socially desirable and rewarding (Bandura 2001, 7, Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561). As such, viewing #fitspo images and messages linking physical activity and muscularity with success, happiness, and a societal normative standard of beauty may likewise serve to motivate male Instagram users to engage in exercise behavior (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561). In this relation, (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2, Chua and Chang 2016, 195, Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561, Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, 88) highlight the engaging practices of "liking" and commenting on social media content (features which are commonly available to users across a wide variety of social media platforms, including those on Instagram) as tools signifying social validation, attention, reward, and acceptance, which may assist in "the transmission of ideals about beauty and body shapes (Santarossa, et al. 2016, 2)" to other users, and facilitate the "acceptance and adoption of the modeled behaviors and attitudes (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561)." Relatedly, Chua & Chang (2016) thus posit that "motivations for self-presentation are derived from

the (…) evaluative presence of other people and by others' (even potential) knowledge of one's behavior (Chua and Chang 2016, 191)." They later conclude that "through self-presentation, a person pleases the audience by matching her [and his] performance to audience expectations and preferences (Chua and Chang 2016, 191)." Male Instagram users may, as such, be more likely to engage in, be influenced by, and imitate modeled behaviors, values, and attitudes regarding exercise practices, health-risk behaviors, and body ideals if these modeled behaviors are visibly and openly rewarded by socially desirable, explicit acknowledgements, validations, and endorsements by their peers, i.e. fellow Instagram users (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561, Borzekowski, et al. 2010, 1526)).

On the basis of the above, social cognitive theory of mass communication thus lends a valuable framework through which to explore and understand several central aspects of why #fitspo content and messages (presented both in the form of visual presentations of masculinity and male body ideals, as well as through the users' selection of hashtags, commenters' engagement with the content, the general themes in #fitspo captions, and what behaviors for achieving the presented body image ideals are encouraged) may cumulatively be interpreted as potentially leading to adverse outcomes such as increased body dissatisfaction, internalization of unrealistically muscular body ideals, and engagement in high health-risk behaviors such as the intake of steroids and other supplements among male Instagram users.

5. Results

The following paragraph will seek to summarize the results of the coding process, starting with relevant categories found in pictures (RQ1), followed by themes in captions and used hashtags (RQ2 and RQ3). For further clarifications of the codes and their meanings, refer to the paragraph 'Coding'.

5.1. Pictures

To investigate how much of the body is shown in the pictures as well as how many reveal their face – thus as to examine if there is focus on specific body parts (especially exposed skin) which other researchers have discovered as potentially leading to the objectification of women. In terms of how much of the body is shown in the pictures overall (with or without clothes), the majority showed their

'full body' (38% or 100/263 people), 33.8% (or 89/263 people) only showed their upper body, while 28.1% (74/263) showed ¾ of their body. Out of the total of 260 pictures, 81.5% (or 212/260) revealed their face, however, it is to be noted that some of those not revealing their face may still have their face in the frame of the picture but are either hidden behind a phone, turning the other way, or otherwise unclear. In terms of showing actual skin, the most on-show body part was arm and biceps (72.3% or 188/260), followed by 25% (66/260) showing their abdominal muscles, 17.7% (46/260) showing leg muscles, and 9.6% (25/260) showing pectoral muscles. The location in which the pictures were taken was most likely to be inside a gym (40.4% or 105/260), while 34.6% (90/260) were inside but not discernibly inside a gym, the remaining 25% (65/260) were in outdoors environments. In most of the pictures, people were alone (84.6% or 220/260), followed by only 8.8% (23/260) being two people, and lastly 6.5% (17/260) being more than two.

Regarding clothes, four categories were coded; workout clothes were the most commonly worn (60.8% or 158/260), the second most common were regular everyday clothes (29.6% or 77/260), the last two were the most exposed; underwear and no visible clothes with 5.4% (14/260) and 4.2% (11/260), respectively. Despite most individuals being inside a gym and most having workout clothes on, a relatively lesser percentage engaged actively in a workout activity; 18.5% (48/260). Out of the total individuals pictured inside a gym, 45.7% (48/105) were actively working out, and 30.4% (48/158) of those wearing workout clothes were active. Besides working out, 51.5% (134/260) either flexed their muscles, did some kind of pose, or in other ways showed off their muscles. Only 5% (13/260) demonstrated some kind of fitness progress (with for example before and after pictures), and 4.2% (11/260) featured image text.

5.2. Captions

Firstly, most users presumably used their real name as a username (51.9% or 135/260), while 24.6% (64/260) had a fitness related username, the last 23.4% (61/260) had random usernames not related to either their real name or fitness. Regarding their ages, only 25 officially state their age on their profile page; 4.6% (12/260) of them were between the ages 21-25, 3.5% (9/260) were between 15-20, and 1.5% (4/260) were above the age of 25. The majority of the remaining users that did not explicitly state their age, however, appeared to be within the same age brackets. Some also announced their profession or at least identified themselves as such, with many of those being personal trainers (18.8% or 49/260), 3.8% (10/260) were professional bodybuilders, 3.5% (9/260) were businesses dealing with workout gear or apparel, 2.3% (6/260) were some kind of fitness center/team, and lastly,

1.2% (3/260) were fitness models. Furthermore, 14.3% (37/260) wrote their caption in another language than English, while 7.7% (20/260) did not have a caption at all.

In terms of what have been written in the caption, we termed some of them as anecdotes regarding either fitness or other events. 22.7% (59/260) wrote some kind of fitness anecdote, while 12.7% (33/260) wrote about other events. Some also promoted either their own or another business or in other ways promoted themselves (such as personal trainers); 7.3% (19/260) promoted a business, 5.4% (14/260) promoted themselves, lastly 2.3% (6/260) promoted other Instagram users. In relation, 20.8% (54/260) also represented themselves in various ways by statements of who they are, their friends, their opinions etc. 6.9% (18/260) stated that they were motivated for appearance related reasons, while 7.7% (20/260) wrote about their body functionality, and 9.2% (24/260) wrote about their fitness progress. 4.2% (11/260) had some sort of diet tips, while 8.8% (23/260) had exercise tips. 3.8% (10/260) explicitly stated some kind of drive for muscularity, 1.5% (4/260) explicitly endorsed the use of supplements, and 1.9% (5/260) stigmatized or shamed fat, furthermore, 13.5% (35/260) wrote messages that could be interpreted as guilt inducing. Lastly, some wrote messages that were inspirational both in terms of fitness motivation and generally about life; 10.8% (28/260) had inspirational quotes, 13.1% (34/260) had motivational messages, 9.2% (24/260) showed pride in either themselves or others, 5% (13/260) promoted self-care, 2.7% (7/260) used a metaphor.

6. Analysis

The following paragraph seeks to answer the research questions by, firstly, analyzing the pictures, hashtags, and captions and lastly sum up some of the main findings categorized by theories. We will combine our coding results with the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, social cognitive theory, and objectification theory along with some examples from our empirical data.

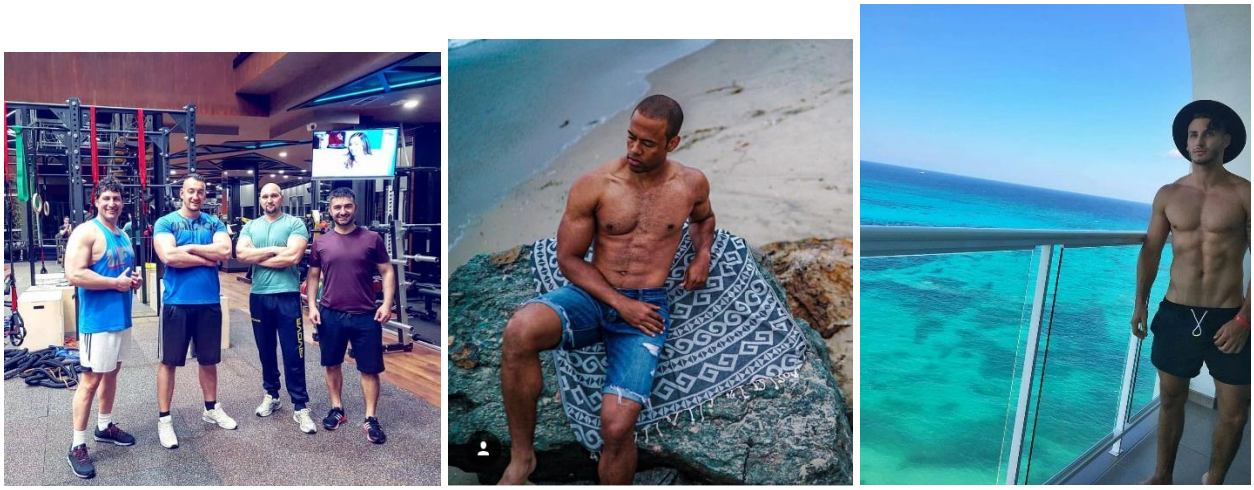
6.1. Pictures

The following paragraph seeks to answer research question 1:

RQ1: What themes/ideas of masculinity and male body image standards can be recognized in the #fitspo pictures on Instagram?

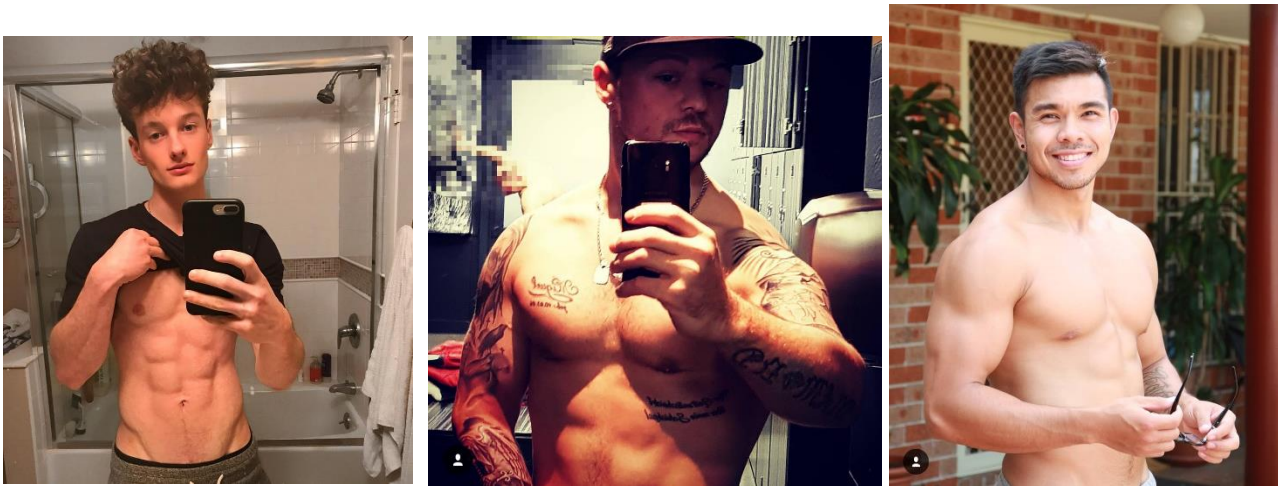
As noted in the paragraph ‘Results’, we found that the majority of the men in the pictures appeared full-body (see appendix A), thus not specifically focusing on a body part (though poses may enhance

the focus on a specific body part), however, a research by Carrotte et al. (2017) found that media representations of men tend to focus on their faces rather than their bodies in contrast to women who they found focus more on the body (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017). This particular phenomenon which has been termed face-ism was coined by D. Archer which generally states that popular media emphasize the faces of men and the bodies of women which he "argue that the difference goes beyond a sexist desire to see figure-revealing pictures of women. Rather, the difference may be a manifestation of deeply rooted cultural myths of men, pictorially represented by their faces, as intellect and women, pictorially represented by their bodies, as heart or emotion (Copeland 1989)." However, our sample data did not suggest a tendency supporting these claims as seen from the examples below:



(From left to right) appendix B (154), appendix C (172), appendix D (210).

Thus, our findings seem to counter and contradict previous conclusions from both the face-ism theory which was originally based on mass media and the findings of Carrotte et al. (2017) who conducted their research on social media. Furthermore, the second most frequent body ratio we found was 'upper body', thus from the torso to the head, we still found did not focus on the faces even though lesser body parts were in the frame of the picture such as the three examples below.



(Left to right) appendix E (2), appendix F (102), appendix G (209).

Furthermore, our sample data results showed that 18.5% did not show their face at all, or it was not clear or blocked by a phone etc., thus again pointing to a suggestion that the body is often in focus in male #fitspo pictures on Instagram although the majority had their faces visible and recognizable in the pictures, many did still not focus on the face as in the examples above. Our sample data results further found that many users exposed either one or more body parts, meaning in this context that the body part was not covered up by clothes etc. To this, Carrotte et al. (2017) states:

> "Although men had their faces in images more often than women, posts depicting men (presumably aimed at male social media users) depicted subjects that were highly muscular—significantly more muscular than female subjects. Images of men focused on stomachs at a similar frequency to women, but unlike women, men's stomachs nearly always had visible abdominal muscles (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017)."

A similar notion is suggested by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016): "most commonly a focus on a particular body part (e.g. abdominal muscles or legs), rather than the whole individual. This was the case for both photos of women and men (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 7)." In relation to this, visible muscles are further suggested by our sample data as being a prominent feature in many of the pictures which thus point to the ideals and norms of some of the themes in hegemonic masculinity. As stated in the paragraph 'Hegemonic Masculinity', the display of muscularity shows a link between that and great psychical formidability, thus demonstrating a high probability of leadership and high social status which is also argued to be a masculine value. Similarly, Carrotte et al. (2017) stated that being fit and healthy were important to fit in with the current sociocultural norms of masculinity and

masculine appearance (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017). Supporting this, we similarly found that the vast majority showed some degree of muscularity both when body parts were exposed and when the men were wearing tight clothes. We found three categories of muscularity; lean, muscular, and hyper muscular, though we did not explicitly code this as some were more clear to determine than others – such as those fully-clothed – however, those that exposed their abdominal muscles were most clear, thus the following examples have been taken from the 'abdominal muscles' code.

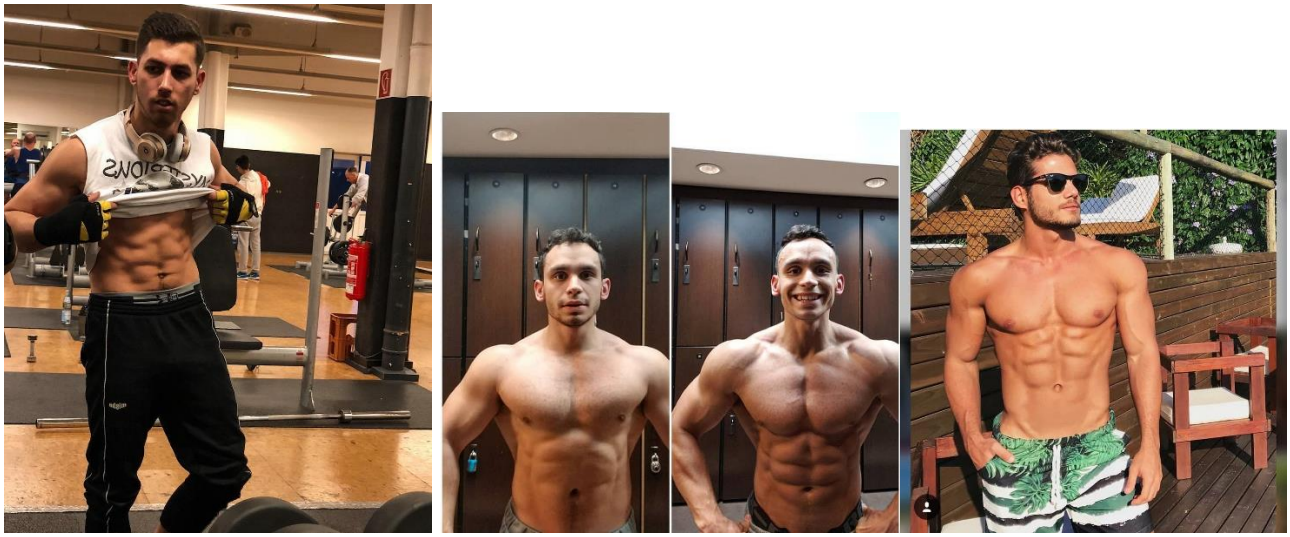
6.1.1. Lean

The first category is the least muscular of the three overarching types, as we recognize these as having less defined muscles relative to the other two but still, however, having some degree of muscle mass. Below are some examples of lean men from our sample data;

(Left to right) appendix H (143), appendix I (39), appendix J (77).

As is visible from the above screenshots, the poses assumed by the men, and the focal point of the images initially seem very different; appendix H for example seems to take on something that resembles a relaxed model pose, appendix I flexes his biceps and appendix J is engaging in a physical activity (boxing). However, the upper bodies are in focus (both the abdominal muscles and the biceps) even though they all reveal their faces. Thus, it can be suggested that even though the men had clear faces and a full-body picture, the body in one way or another is in focus. As such, even in the case of the relatively lesser muscular men, showing off their body was a central theme in the showcase of their masculinity.

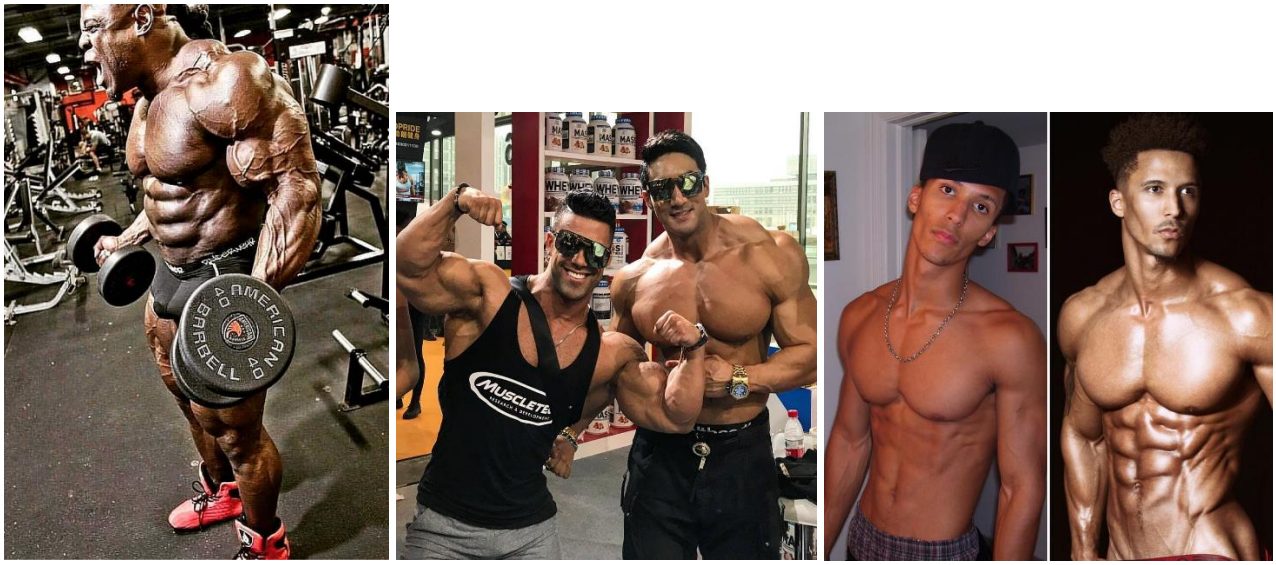
6.1.2. Muscular



(Left to right) appendix K (123), appendix L (156), appendix M (202).

The themes here are very similar to appendix H, I and J; appendix K, though not engaging in physical activity in the picture itself, is in a gym. Appendix L is flexing muscles (though not only the biceps), and appendix M is engaging in a relaxed model pose. Thus, it can be suggested that the degree of muscularity does not matter in the case of showing off their body and thus their state of masculinity, as most men, regardless of relative muscularity, engage in the same type of poses and focuses on many of the same body parts as the more muscular men, thereby suggesting a homogenous idea of masculinity.

6.1.3. Hyper muscular



(Left to right) appendix N (255), appendix O (45), appendix P (163).

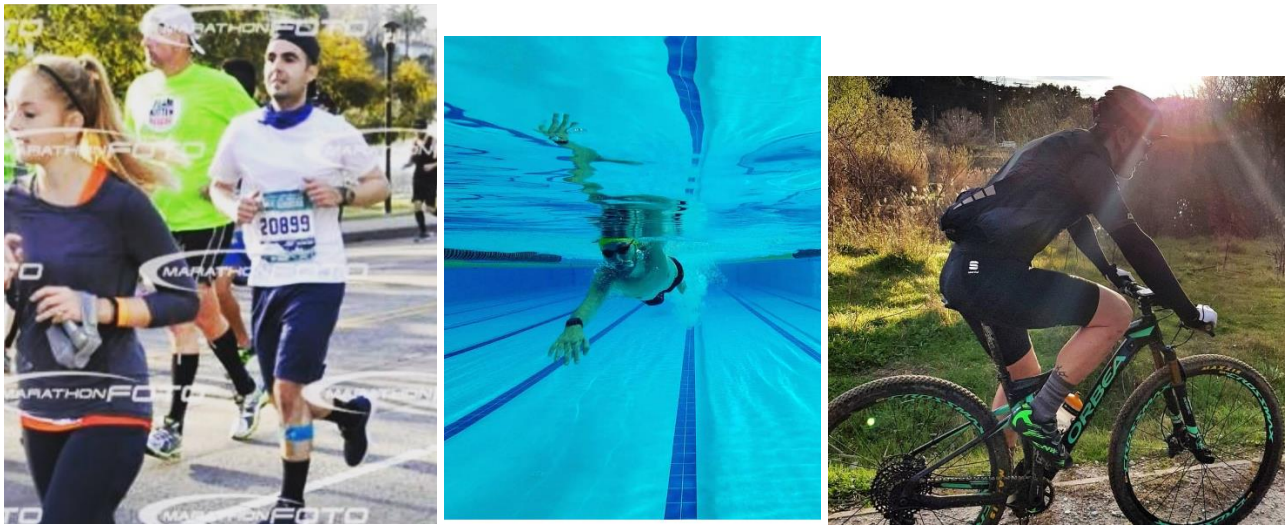
Moving to the hyper muscular screenshots, the same themes as the above can be noticed which furthermore indicate a pattern in the themes and ideas of masculinity throughout every level of muscularity. It is to be noted that each example has been collected at random through the found screenshots of each category, thus further suggesting the that the themes are recurrent. However, one difference between the screenshots in the three categories is that the majority to a large extent follow the hegemonic masculinity ideal which Ridgeway (2009) describes as being dominant; white and able-bodied (Ridgeway 2009, 159). Though appendix N, O, and P do not fit into the white category, they are in every other aspect the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in that they display toughness, aggressiveness, and control. Thus, it is suggested that even though different representations of masculinities are being portrayed in the #fitspo screenshots, the same themes and body ideals fitting with the concept of hegemonic masculinity seem to reoccur throughout every degree of muscularity and race.

6.1.4. Body Functionality

Following this, we can similarly suggest that the #fitspo phenomenon is being represented in many parts of the world. 126 out of the 260 screenshots stated their location; 31 different countries/locations were registered with the four most common being USA with 40 entries, Germany with 15, the UK with 12, and Turkey with 7 entries (see appendix A). Thus, although the hegemonic masculinity ideal in Lease et al.'s (2013) words is traditionally based in a western perspective (Lease, et al. 2013, 85),

multiple countries and ethnicities seem to be represented in the #fitspo content. However, it seems from the screenshot examples analyzed so far that the same themes and ideas of masculinity are recurrent both in terms of different ethnicities and muscle category.

The screenshot examples taken so far have been showing one kind of masculinity by showcasing their muscles, however, a minority exhibited a different sort of masculinity by doing other forms of activities outside a gym;



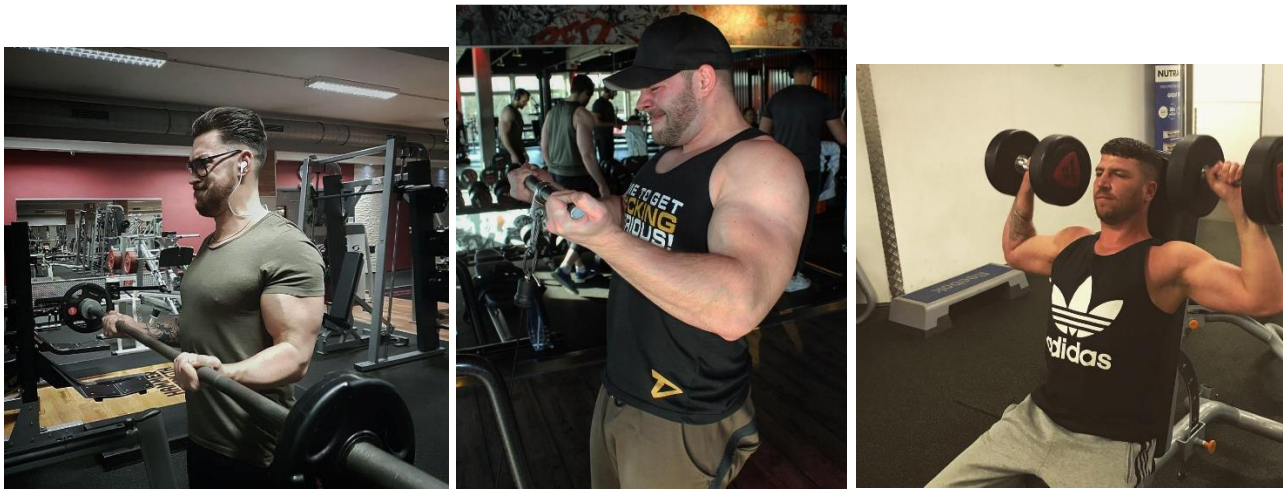
(Left to right) appendix Q (181), appendix R (212), appendix S (230).

The examples above showcase 3 different physical activities; running, swimming, and biking. It is noticeable that all users that have been recorded running and biking are all wearing workout clothes with minimal exposure of skin and seem to be on the smaller side of the muscle scale (although they do not showcase their muscles, thus this is just suggested by their overall body build). Furthermore, the majority of the pictures depicting any of these athletic activities are showcasing what Carrotte et al. (2017) calls body functionality (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017) which Prichard et al. (2017) furthermore suggest may reduce "the potentially objectifying nature of the situation (Prichard, et al. 2017)". Thus, by doing some sort of physical activity one displays two other forms of hegemonic masculinities; competitiveness and athletic prowess. As such, even though the men in these examples seemingly showcase another kind of masculinity in the #fitspo content, they still fall under the concept of hegemonic masculinity as the others. The greatest difference being physically active versus passively posing or flexing or in other words; functional versus non-functional (Prichard, et al. 2017). In terms of determining body functionality, it should be noted that we understand it in the

same way as for example (Mulgrew and Hennes 2015, Mulgrew and Tiggemann 2016, Prichard, et al. 2017) and which entails exercise and being active in general. As noted in the results section, only 18.5% (48/260) of the overall pictures were engaging in physical activities and perhaps even more noticeable was that 30.4% (48/158) of those actually wearing workout clothes were active. Similar results were found by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) who found that even though most #fitspiration pictures on Instagram were fitness related, only a quarter were engaging in physical activity (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 7), while Carrotte et al. (2017) found a greater amount of people actively exercising, with half of their sample doing physical activity (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017). Thus, there in general seems to be a higher focus on physical appearance than that of body functionality.

6.1.5. Objectification

Besides active athletes, the majority of the individuals actively working out in our sample screenshots appear to be located within a gym. The majority of these have at least their biceps exposed as they appear to be actively lifting weights such as the examples below:



(From left to right) appendix T (35), appendix U (229), appendix V (203).

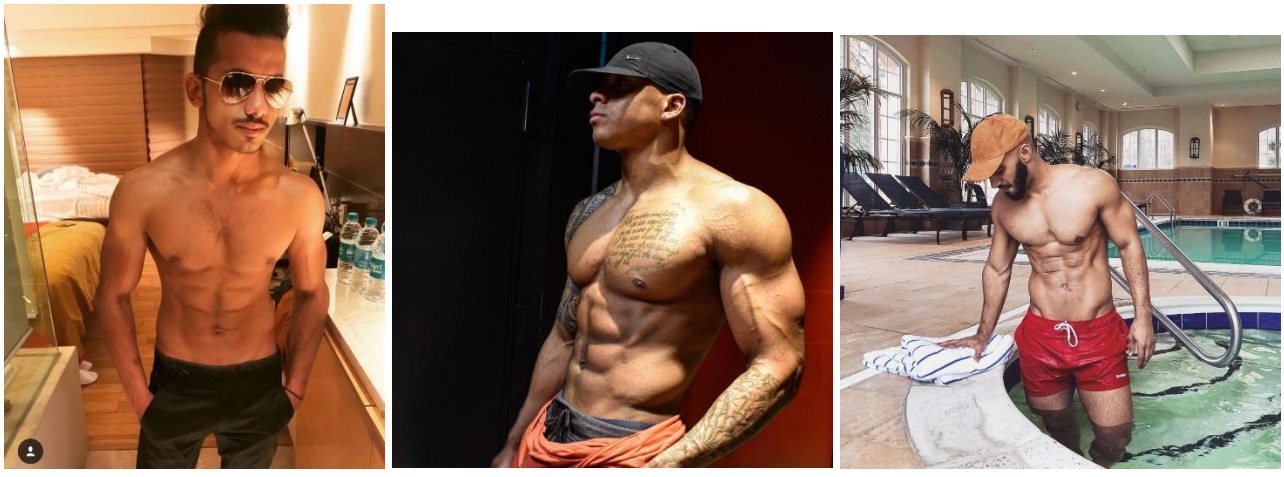
In this case the men are both displaying their physical appearance and their physical endurance (thus both body appearance and body functionality), which may reduce the possibilities of objectification as Wiseman and Moradi (2010), as aforementioned, states that body surveillance and body shame often arise when one is only focusing on the appearance part of the body instead of its functions (Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155). However, though these men partake in physical activities and showcase their body functionality, they still in many ways display their body – or as can be suggested

from the above analysis – their ideal masculine body which adheres to the cultural standards of attractiveness. According to Clark (2017), this can be problematic as "Repeated exposure to these idolized physiques leads us to believe that lean, toned bodies are normal, attainable, expected and central to attractiveness (Clark 2017, 67)" with the addition of the perspective of the tripartite model which also emphasize that peer pressure of the cultural ideal may lead to eating disorders (Moradi 2010, 139). Thus, it can be suggested that even those that engage in physical activities may still be objectified and objectify themselves when they focus and draw attention to a particular exposed body part which Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) also suggest as being an objectifying trait along with particular poses (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 2).

6.1.6. Poses

Following what Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) suggested above, particular poses may enhance the chances of objectification. Though it is not stated specifically which kind of poses they deem as potentially objectifying, we have identified three overarching poses which focuses on particular body parts or "a collection of sexually appealing body parts (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017)"; 'regular/model poses', 'biceps flexing poses', and 'traditional bodybuilder poses'.

6.1.6.1. Regular/model pose

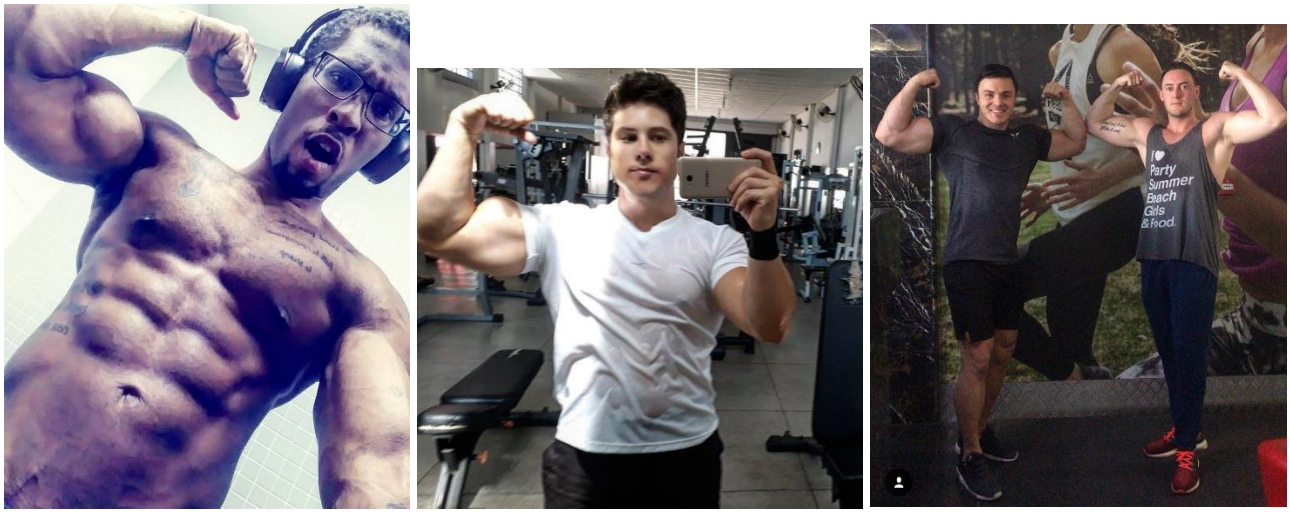


(From left to right) appendix W (132), appendix X (136), appendix Y (218).

In the examples above, the men neither explicitly flex their muscles or engage in physical activities, they are in all simplicity posed to look attractive. Furthermore, a contrast between these and the previous examples is that parts of their faces, predominantly the eyes, are hidden away by either a

cap or sunglasses, combined with their faces turned away from the camera. Referencing Deighton-Smith and Bell (2017), models on social media are "often dismembered (i.e., depicted with removed or obscured faces), sexual, or physical object that can be acquired for the use and pleasure of others (Deighton-Smith and Bell 2017, 5)", thus suggesting that these men promote the objectification of the male body, moreover harboring the same ideals of hegemonic masculinity by focusing on the upper body (Sell, Cosmides, et al. 2009, 581). Furthermore, as stated in the paragraph 'Results', 18.5% of our data samples (see appendix A) did not reveal their face, thus again suggesting some tendencies to self-objectification.

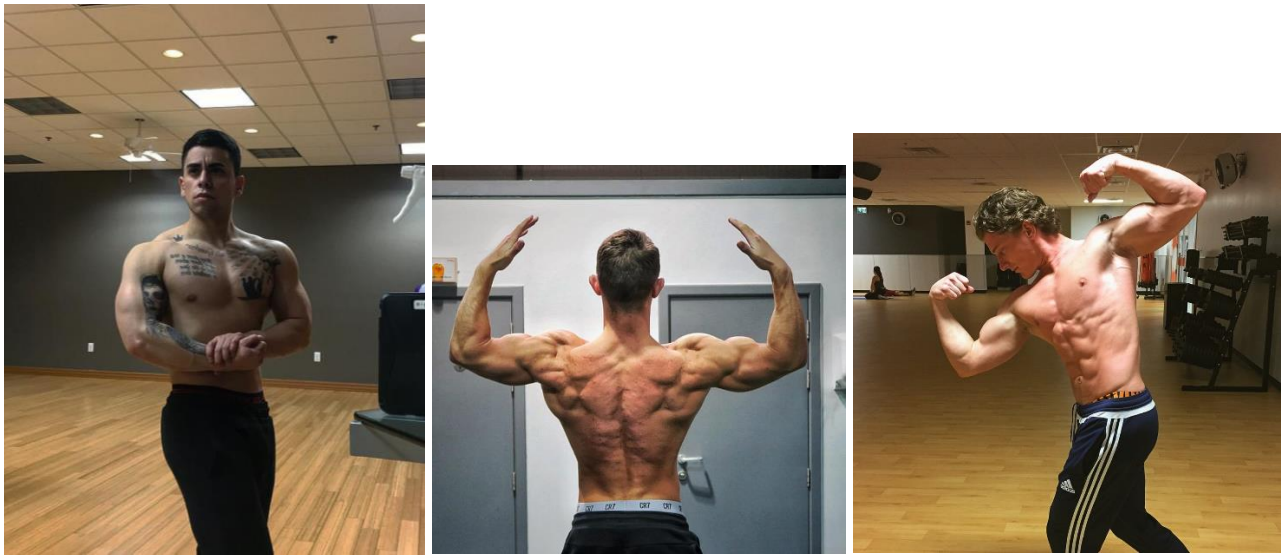
6.1.6.2. Biceps flexing pose



(From left to right) appendix Z (244), appendix AA (251), appendix BB (252).

The above examples contrast the model poses in various ways, as they specifically try to enhance and draw attention to a specific body part – perhaps their most muscular body part – thus objectify themselves by portraying their body parts as being them, by furthermore focusing on the appearance of their body and not its functionality. This particular pose once again enhances the upper body, giving them a V-shaped torso which entails broad shoulders tapering to a narrow waist (Sidhu), thus furthermore suggesting the hegemonic masculine body as being the ideal. Though the men in these examples reveal their faces contrary to the examples above, the focus is, however, still on their bodies.

6.1.6.3. Bodybuilder pose



(From left to right) appendix CC (14), appendix DD (184) appendix EE (48).

These poses are somewhat a combination of the two above, as bodybuilder poses mostly focus on the whole body, like the model poses, more specifically poses that promote the person the best way possible to make all muscles visible (Topic of the week 2007), and the biceps flexing poses as they enhance the appearance of the muscles. Furthermore, bodybuilding poses specifically focus on the appearance of the muscles and not its function, thus the objective of using/copying bodybuilder poses can in itself be argued to be objectifying oneself. Appendix CC is using a side chest pose which, like most other bodybuilding poses, can be tweaked to fit the person, but are mostly used to enhance the biceps, pectoral muscles, and maybe legs (Posing Guides 2008). Appendix DD is doing a rear double biceps pose, which mostly focuses on back muscles and biceps, and appendix EE is doing a front double biceps (or the famous Arnold Schwarzenegger pose). All these poses are thus meant to enhance the appearance one or more parts of the body, and furthermore focusing on the wide shoulders and the narrow hips to showcase their masculinity. Moreover, we found that 51.5% of the individuals in our sample data did some variation of a pose (see appendix A) while for example Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) found that only 10% of the males in their sample did a sexy pose (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 5), thus either suggesting an increase in objectifying male poses or alternatively a different coding categorization of what a sexy pose is, as some of the individuals in our sample may be more implicitly objectifying.

6.1.7. Before and after

(From left to right) appendix FF (146), appendix GG (189), appendix HH (234).

Lastly, a small percentage of the individuals of our sample data promoted before and after tranformations (coded fitness progress) which, unlike women, did not focus so much on the weightloss aspect but rather on the gain of muscle definition which Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) states the fitspiration movement promotes; “the added prescription to be toned, in addition to thin, may well make the ideal even less attainable for most women (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 6)”. Thus, though this particular quote is about women, it can be suggested that our findings promote the same potentially unrealistic and unattainable body ideal for men, as it is not enough to simply lose weight, one also has to gain muscle, such as pictured in appendix GG, in order to be attractive in accordance with the cultural standards.

To sum up our findings, many different nationalities and ethnicities actively post #fitspo content on Instagram together with different categories of muscularity levels, however, they all seem to share one or more similarities with the ideas of hegemonic masculinity, thus suggesting a somewhat homogenous male body ideal around the globe. Furthermore, though some did engage in physical activities, the majority still focused on the body appearance over body functionality, and even those who do engage in physical activities can be argued to still promote their physical appearance or promote self-objectification. With regards to the ideal masculine body, the upper body can be suggested to be the most commonly exposed and highlighted part of the male body throughout every pose, every muscular level and every nationality, which emphasizes the masculine traits of wide shoulders and narrow waist as is stated by hegemonic masculinity.

6.2. Hashtags

The following paragraph will seek to answer research question 2:

RQ2: What other hashtags do males use in their #fitspo posts and do they show any connection with the overall message of fitspiration and/or negative body image outcome?

To visualize our data sample, we created a word cloud of the hashtags used in the #fitspo posts, though some has been omitted such as the 'fitspo' hashtag itself as well as 'fitness', and some unrelatable hashtags such as follow4follow. 'Fitspo' and 'fitness' hashtags were omitted as the former is a hashtag there was on every post as it was our search criteria, and fitness we deemed it a generic hashtag that already made sense to be there. Below is the created wordcloud (see figure 2 below):

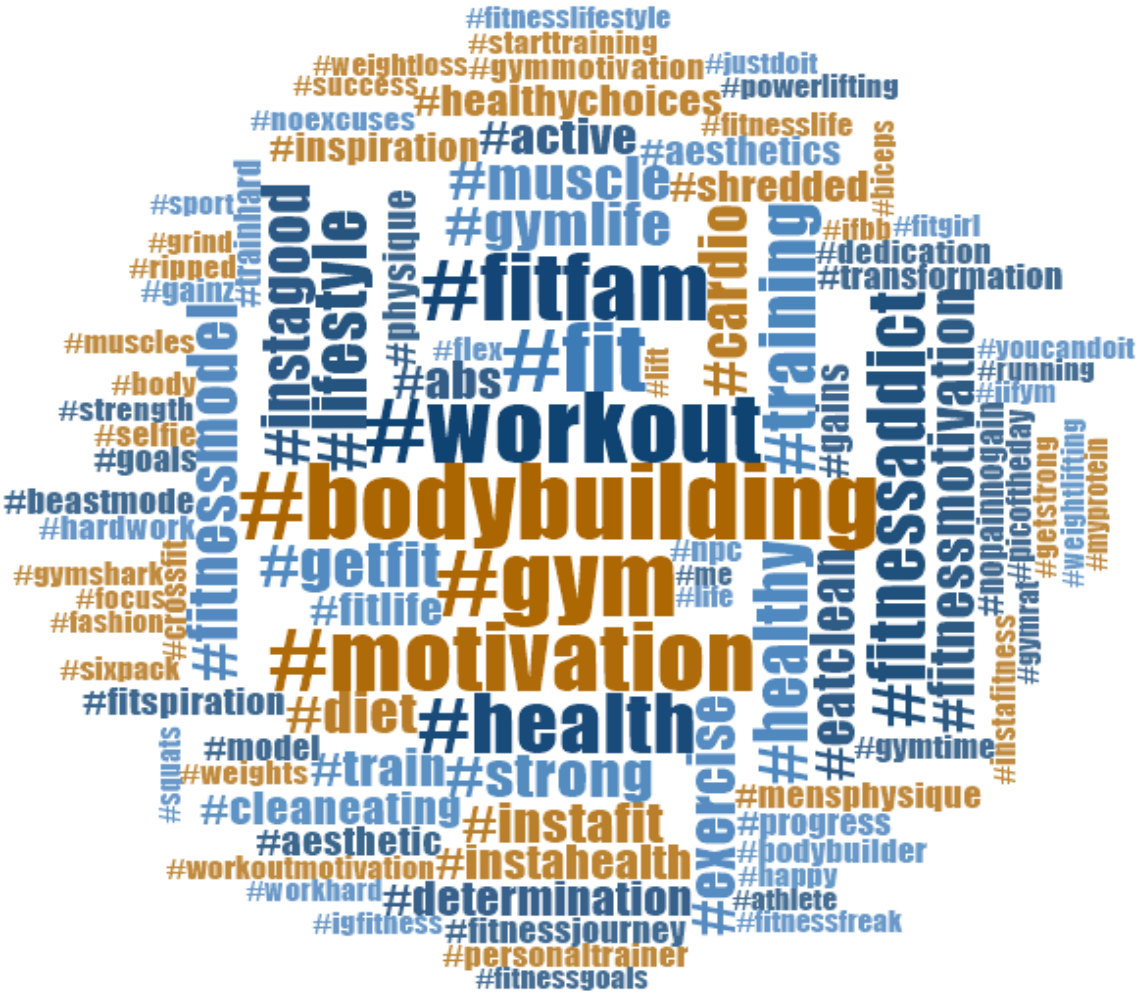


Figure 2

Besides the wordcloud, we similarly created a list of the top 100 most recurring hashtags used in the screenshotted #fitspo posts (see appendix II). In relation to this, we created 7 overarching categories which represent some of the themes throughout these hashtags. These themes are health, fitness, appearance, body functionality, community, guilt inducing, and motivation. We will take a closer look at some of these hashtag in each theme to further find answers to our research question.

6.2.1. Health

In the top 100 hashtags we found only eight that had something to do with being healthy, which have overall been used 487 times. These were; #health was used 123 times, #healthy was used 92 times, #diet and #eatclean were both used 68 times, #instahealth was used 46 times, #cleaneating was used 44 times, #healthychoices was used 38 times, and #myprotein was used 8 times. One of the most noticable features in the majority of these hashtags, is that they promote a vague notion of what being healthy really involves. Such as the first two; #health and #healthy, what exactly is healthy? What does it involve? What are these #healthychoices? Though #diet can be debateable to even belong in the 'health' category as discussed in the paragraph 'Fitness media and its impacts' may indicate and promote restrictive eating and lead to eating disorders (Clark 2017, 66, Chasler 2016, 12). However, we argue that in this case, the hashtag is presumably used in a positive context as users who shared their diet plans and tips on the #fitspo posts did it in a inspirational and motivational context (which will be further discussed in the 'Caption' paragraph). However, the hashtah #cleaneating and #eatclean may give some indication as to what is deemed healthy. According to Fitnessmagazine.com; "At its simplest, clean eating is about eating whole foods, or "real" foods — those that are un- or minimally processed, refined, and handled, making them as close to their natural form as possible (Voo)", the term however has been contested. For example, McCartney (2016) notes that;

> "The command to eat cleanly implies that everyone else is filthy, being careless with their bodies and lives. It comes with promises of energy boosts, glowing skin, spirituality, purity, and possibly immortality. But this nonsense is all based on a loose interpretation of facts and a desire to make the pursuit of wellbeing an obsessive, full time occupation (McCartney 2016)."

As such, the encouraging of 'eating clean' and thereby implicitly equating health with unscientific claims of what constitutes healthy choices and can thus have negative implications for both the users who upload these #fitspo messages and its audience, as users, according to social cognitive theory,

are more likely to follow these diet plans and health behaviors if it is presented as socially desirable and acknowledged by peers (in this case fellow Instagram users). Furthermore, as stated in the paragraph 'Fitspiration and fitspo', many #fitspo users on Instagram are not professional nutrition experts etc. (Clark 2017, 67), and may thus spread misinformation and unsafe health practices. The same can be said about the #myprotein hashtag, as it too can be argued to promote the presumed health benefits of protein supplements. However, as noted by Hartmann and Siegrist (2016):

> "Scientific evidence for the physiological effects of protein supplements is unclear, and various studies suggest that depending on factors such as age, training status, type of physical activity, body composition, time, and volume of consumption, only a small subgroup benefits from protein supplementation (Hartmann and Siegrist 2016, 230)".

As such, it can be suggested that the 'health' hashtags may not be as healthy as may be presumed by the users, and that the more general hashtags such as #healthy does not give any precise information about what it entails. Thus, both misinformation and vague health choices are being promoted.

6.2.2. Fitness

In this category we found 27 hashtags correlating to fitness, which overall have been used 1362 times, with some of these being; #bodybuilding which was used 165 times (the most used hashtag of them all), #gym which was used 158 times (the second most overall used hashtag), #fit which was used 146 times, #fitnessaddict which was used 105 times, and #training which was used 102 times. First of all, it is noticeable that #bodybuilding is the most used hashtag in all the #fitspo posts as this entails a focus on the muscular appearance rather than the functionality and the health of the body. As noted by Aranyosi (2017):

> "What is judged in a competition is the general appearance of your body as far as your skeletal muscular system is concerned. This complex quality is thought to emerge from three component qualities of your muscular system: mass, proportion, and definition and vascularity. (…) What is ultimately evaluated in the competition is not an activity or skillful excellence; you are judged not by what you do and how well you do it, but by what you are or have to show (Aranyosi 2017, 403)."

This thus suggests that the frequent use of the #bodybuilding hashtag promotes that the #fitspo content highly prioritizes and promotes the appearance over functionality and health, which is also evident in the comparatively small percentage of #health related hashtags. Moreover, the third most

used fitness hashtag #fit, may further suggest that "only a certain body type can be fit and healthy, whereas in fact a diverse range of body types can enjoy fitness and health (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 6)" when bodybuilding bodies can be suggested to be the most prominent fit ideal. Lastly, what is noticeable with the #fitnessaddict hashtag is that the word 'addict' in itself carries a negative association. According to Dictionary.com, addiction is defined as; "to habituate or abandon (oneself) to something compulsively or obsessively (Dictionary)", however, it is suggested that in the context of #fitspo content, it is used in a positive manner, such as seen by the wellness and lifestyle blogger Jordan Younger, who wrote the blog post titled 'Why being a fitness addict is the best thing that's ever happened to me' (Younger 2016). She gives various reasons for why specifically being an 'addict' is a good thing. As such, she writes: "And it's so TBB of me to call myself an "addict" rather than an enthusiast or a passionate person or simply *interested* (ew, boring word)… But I am an addict and I am proud of it. I think it's okay to be wholeheartedly addicted to something that aids in keeping you mentally and physically healthy (Younger 2016)". Similarly, an article from the Times UK, shares a story of a woman who states that:

> "However, I am an exercise addict in that if a day passes when I can't run or swim or, ideally, do a session of muddy, sweaty circuit training in my local park, I'm unhappy. Indeed, I'm grumpy, argumentative, restless, see the world in catastrophic terms. I can best describe this desire to set my body free as like having an itch inside my blood (Turner 2016)."

It is thus suggested that in the case of the #fitnessaddict hashtag used in the male #fitspo content on Instagram, male users are using this in a similarly positive manner. As aforementioned, glamorizing such an extreme word which promotes extreme and compulsive attitudes towards exercise can thus be argued to be problematic as scholars like Holland and Tiggemann (2016) state that such behaviors "often coexists with dietary restriction, purging, and other unhealthy weight loss behaviors (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76-77)".

6.2.3. Appearance

We found 21 hashtags relating to appearance which overall have been used 564 times. Some of the most used are for example #fitnessmodel which has been used 85 times, #muscle which has been used 72 times, #abs which has been used 53 times, #shredded which has been used 37 times, and two variations of #aesthetic(s) which in combination have been used 62 times. Overall, this thus suggest

a preliminary finding that appearance is somewhat more focused on in terms of the #fitspo posts than health simply with the number of used hashtags relating to these. Moreover, though fitness-related hashtags have been used more than both health and appearance related ones, the heavy use of the #bodybuilding hashtag further suggest a high tendency to focus more on the appearance related content than on health even though most definitions of fitspiration and fitspo is focus on motivating people to pursue a healthier and active lifestyle (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 62). This is similar to the findings of female fitspirational content by for example Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) who found that "many of fitspiration's attempts to inspire women towards health and fitness focus on the appearance-related benefits of such a lifestyle (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 62)". (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017, Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76) had similar findings. In this relation, it can be suggested that the male #fitspo content does not differ from female centered #fitspo content. Furthermore, hashtags such as #fitnessmodel and #aesthetics do not in any way entail the appreciation of body functionality and health but instead focuses solely on the appearance and beauty of an object (Cambridge Dictionary), in this case the (male) human body. Thus, it can be suggested that the overrepresentation of the hashtags promoting appearance related benefits of fitness rather than the health benefits can be problematic in that it may promote to the male #fitspo users that appearance and the strive for muscularity is the epitome of attractiveness and the #fitspo message overall.

6.2.4. Body functionality

Relating to body functionality, we found 10 different hashtags used a total of 368 times. Some of these were for example #workout which has been used 152 times, #strong which has been used 77 times, #active which has been used 51 times, and three hashtags which essentially carry the same meaning; #weights, #powerlifting, and #weightlifting combined have been used 38 times. So far, body functionality-related hashtags have been the least used type of hashtag, which furthermore suggest a tendency to focus more on the appearance of the male body than on body functionality. Furthermore, the use of the body functionality-related hashtags surpasses that of images with the individuals working out, thus suggesting that some of the individuals using those hashtags may not actually actively be working out on their posted image, but instead possibly taking a mirror selfie or otherwise pose in a gym instead. According to Prichard et al. (2017) simply being in a gym or alternatively outdoors wearing workout clothes is not enough to have a positive effect; "For fitness images to have a positive effect on body image, it is possible that the focus on body competence and

functionality must be more holistic in nature (Prichard, et al. 2017)". Moreover, they further state that #fitspo images taken by the users themselves in the mirror (may be termed a mirror selfie) can be argued to generally be "viewed as narcissistic and although popular on social media, may be more likely to attract a negative reaction and hence may have been less inspiring than a non-selfie photograph (Prichard, et al. 2017)". It can thus be suggested that even though body functionality-related hashtags have been used over 300 times, it cannot be said with certainty that the message is received by the male audience in a positive manner, as all the users of these hashtags may not partake in physical activities.

6.2.5. Community

We found 6 different hashtags relating to community which were used a total of 275 times. Some of the most used were for example #fitfam which was used 142 times and #lifestyle which was used 93 times. Firstly, the term fitfam can be suggested to be widely used in the fitness community overall, for example, the fitness blogger Susan Potok Harrison writes about the definition of fitfam being about family;

> "There is something special to be said about the bonds one builds while sweating together - working towards not only individual but also team goals, overcoming our weaknesses and fears, being vulnerable and laying egos aside, setting personal bests, all in the name of fitness. You become indeed, like family (Harrison 2016)".

Similarly, the sense of community can be suggested to be overall important as stated by Healy and McDonagh (2013) "Community is important to many fans and there is a shared sense of emotional ownership (Healy and McDonagh 2013, 1529)" and McMillan and Chavis (1986) who propose that community involves membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection (McMillan and Chavis 1986, 9-14). Thus, it can be suggested that the overall message of the community-related hashtags have mostly positive outcomes in terms of possible motivation to both follow and invest in the #fitspo content on Instagram. Furthermore, the shared emotional connection of male #fitspo users can be argued to be more inclined to receive the #fitspo message as positive as according to social cognitive theory which suggest that male Instagram users may be more likely to imitate behaviors, attitudes, and body ideals if it is socially desirable by the community and rewarded with validation (Simpson and Mazzeo 2016, 561, Borzekowski, et al. 2010, 1526).

6.2.6. Guilt Inducing

9 hashtags have been found containing guilt inducing messages which were used a total of 122 times. some of these include #nopainnogain which has been used 22 times, #trainhard which has been used 20 times, #hardwork which has been used 18 times, and #noexcuses which has been used 14 times. Though hashtags like #trainhard and #hardwork does not explicitly convey a guilt inducing message, hashtags like #nopainnogain and #noexcuses imply that one has to work and train hard and that one has no excuses not to do so. Similarly, Slater et al. (2017) found that "fitspiration images and hashtags often reference or imply the need for self-control and discomfort to achieve goals, and can therefore contain guilt-inducing messages (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, 93)". The need for self-control described by Slater et al. (2017) may thus be argued to be connected with the concept of hegemonic masculinity which similarly suggest that men may enact masculinity through the display of attributes such as toughness, self-reliance, and control. Being in control may further suggest a desire to be a man "*in* power, a man *with* power, and a man of *power* (Kimmel 1994, 124-125)*".* Moreover, #nopainnogain and #noexcuses further may encourage males to potentially engage in excessive exercise and health risk behaviors which may lead to compulsive exercise (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76-77), as the hashtags suggest that males do first of all not have any excuses not to exercise if they are to be perceived as a 'real man' according to the views of hegemonic masculinity, and secondly that pain is a part of health and fitness. The professional fitness trainer David A. Williams further discusses the misconception of the 'no pain no gain' motto: "There's a difference between discomfort and pain. And often times, pain is a symptom of more than a hard workout—it indicates an injury (Cooper Aerobics)", and injury is one of the potential outcomes of compulsive exercise (NEDA).

Thus, it can be suggested that hashtags like these may be intended to motivate men to exercise more, however, the potential for negative outcomes in terms of compulsive exercise and other health risk behaviors may be cause for concern.

6.2.7. Motivation

We found 14 hashtags relating to motivation which were used a total of 552 times. Some of these include hashtags such as #motivation itself which has been used 146 times, #determination which has been used 45 times, #inspiration which has been used 31 times, and other hashtags containing the word 'motivation' such as #fitnessmotivation, #gymmotivation, and #workoutmotivation which have

been used a total of 104 times. Initially, as aforementioned, the whole message of fitspiration and fitspo is to inspire and motivate people to exercise and live healthy (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 66), thus, the use of motivational hashtags are in themselves positive regarding the message of fitspo. Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) concluded that the motivational aspect of fitspiration images on Instagram were overall positive in its outcomes and messages (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 66), however, they further state that being motivated because of appearance related reasons may lead to potential negative outcomes such as the above mentioned excessive and compulsive exercise and restricted eating in order to obtain the ideal cultural standards of the masculine body (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 66). This can further be suggested by the fact that appearance-related hashtags have been used more times than motivational, and both (i.e. appearance and motivation hashtags) have been used more than health-related ones. Thus, it may be argued that even though motivation is part of the overall fitspo message, the relative and comparative dominance of appearance-related hashtags contrary to health-related (which is also part of the overall fitspo message) suggest that a part of the motivational hashtags may not convey the message of being healthy but instead a message which emphasizes the importance of adhering to a sociocultural ideal of attractive appearance.

In sum, the following preliminary conclusions can thus be made on the basis of the above analysis of the most frequently used #fitspo hashtags featured in our data; Firstly, it can be suggested that the general category of 'health' hashtags, though potentially and ostensibly intended to convey a positive message to male Instagram users regarding health, may not be as healthy as may be presumed by the users, and that the more general, subjective hashtags such as #healthy does not give any precise information about what "health" and "being healthy" actually entails. Thus, we argue that the use, promotion, and normalization of these hashtags may potentially both spread misinformation regarding what constitutes healthy exercise and dietary habits, as well as vague health choices among male Instagram users. Secondly, it can be suggested that in the case of the #fitnessaddict hashtag used in the #fitspo content on Instagram it is used in a positive and glamorizing manner by using 'addict', which promote extreme and compulsive attitudes towards exercise, can thus be argued to be problematic as scholars like Holland and Tiggemann (2016) states that such behaviors "often coexists with dietary restriction, purging, and other unhealthy weight loss behaviors (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76-77)". Third, it can be suggested that the overrepresentation of the hashtags promoting appearance-related benefits of fitness rather than the health benefits can be problematic in that it may promote to the male #fitspo users that appearance and the strive for muscularity is the epitome of

attractiveness, switching the overall message of #fitspo away from health. Fourth, we argue that even though body functionality-related hashtags have been used over 300 times, yet our image analysis (see paragraph 'Pictures') showed that only 48 out of the total 260 pictures were of the depicted men actively exercising, it cannot be said with certainty that the message is received by the male audience in a positive manner, as all the users of these hashtags may not partake in physical activities. Fifth, the shared emotional connection promoted by the community-related hashtags of male #fitspo users may facilitate a more positive connection with the overall fitspo messages and behaviors as positive, as messages promising social reward are, according to social cognitive theory, more likely to be imitated if it is socially desirable by the community. Sixth, hashtags potentially containing guilt inducing messages may be intended to motivate men to exercise more, however, the potential for negative outcomes in terms of compulsive exercise and other health risk behaviors may be cause for concern. Seventh, it may be argued that even though motivation is part of the overall fitspo message, the relative and comparative dominance of appearance related hashtags contrary to health related (which is also part of the overall fitspo message) suggests that a part of the motivational hashtags may not convey the message of being healthy but instead a message which emphasizes the importance of adhering to a sociocultural ideal of attractive appearance.

In short, though both health and motivational hashtags etc. which directly connotes a positive message and fit in accordance to the message of fitspo and fitspiration, some of the hashtags used may be implicitly implying and promoting potentially adverse behaviors towards exercise, health, and body views to male Instagram users who may want to fit the ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

6.3. Captions

The following paragraph seeks to analyze the captions of the male Instagram users from our data sample which, like the paragraphs above, have been divided into categories relating to either one code or multiple codes (or overarching codes and its sub codes) to further shed light upon answers to our research question;

RQ3: What are the general themes in the captions of the male #fitspo posts and what behaviors for achieving body image ideals are encouraged.

The categories we found include; 'anecdotes', 'appearance and drive for muscularity', 'body functionality', 'exercise-, and diet tips and fitness progress', 'guilt inducing and stigmatizing'.

6.3.1. Anecdotes

Under the overarching category of ‘anecdotes’, we found two subcode categories each consisting of themes relating to that subcode; fitness related anecdotes and other (see appendix A). Some of the fitness-related anecdotes either describe a pre- or post-workout session or goal such as one who wrote “Post workout selfie after some chest yesterday (see appendix JJ (13.1.1))” and another one with a pre-workout goal; “Then I'll finish out the week tomorrow with some ab work, light cardio, and active stretching (see appendix KK (69.1))”, thus suggesting some kind of pride or goal for oneself when explicitly stating one’s devotion to the ‘grind’ (i.e. “to work hard. Usually working out. Be fully dedicated. To have no limits, pushing yourself; leading yourself to triumphs (The Online Slang Dictionary 2014)”). The term ‘grind’ is for example used in the following quote; “Now that the self destruct button has been deactivated mans feelin fine n bk on the grind (see appendix LL (203.1))”, and another user writes: “Overall I'm happy though I feel I could've done better. I know...JP, you are never satisfied. Lol. But that's the competitor in me. There's always room for improvement. So once I heal up, I'm going back on the grind. The Beautiful Struggle continues (see appendix MM (119.1.1)”. In the second quote about grind, he is using the term as a sort of compensation and self-improvement statement for not living up to his own desired expectations, while the first quote uses the term as a way of amends for being sick and probably not working out for a period of time (i.e. the self destruct button has been deactivated implies that the sickness is over). More users can be seen to not being satisfied with either their fitness performance or their fitness progress, for example one user writes: “Today's chest and biceps was great. Next time, I can go further (see appendix NN (101.1))” and another one who writes about his fitness progress goals; “I wanted to be at 155 before I go on vacation next month, but it seems I'm on pace to be around 153 (see appendix OO (185.1))”. Thus, it can be suggested that when the men are not completely satisfied with their progress or performance, they may feel obligated to ‘get back on the grind’, thus in some way promote that being fit is not enough, perhaps never enough; for example, the user from appendix MM (119.1.1) is a professional athlete, so one may assume that user has changed his goals as he won more competitions etc. However, the constant strive for more, for getting better, ‘for being in control’ according to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, may further promote the notion of a homogenous masculine ideal which, according to (Cheng 1999, 298, Willer, et al. 2013, 1013), is a trait in hegemonic masculinity as men want to be validated and prove that he is in control and capable. Though it is to be noted that the fact that the men share their feelings of dissatisfaction may indicate that they are not ashamed of their body in general, but simply is not satisfied enough (Heath, et al. 2015, 299).

Similarly, some users highlight their fitness goals as ‘getting ready for summer’ such as one user who writes; “I will be challenging myself everyday for the next 16 weeks, to transform my body & bring a whole new level of shedz for this summer (see appendix PP (15.1))”, thus further stating a degree of dissatisfaction with his current body state which he feels he has to improve ‘for summer’. Firstly, this suggests a tendency to self-objectify and body surveillance which Wiseman and Moradi (2010) states “is manifested as body surveillance or persistent monitoring of how the body looks (as an object) rather than attending to how it feels or functions (Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155)”. Furthermore, the process of ‘shredding’ which the user describes, usually entails a three part workout and diet plan; “Indeed, men who desire a muscular physique frequently alternate between phases of high-caloric and low-caloric food intake (Klimek, et al. 2018, 352-353)”, which thus entails both gaining muscle mass and later reduce the body fat percentage to define the muscles more clearly (Sci-Mx 2014) (called ‘shredding’). This wish to become ‘shredded’ is also prominent in the following quote from another user; “Gotta trim some of the body fat with spring & summer right around the corner (see appendix QQ (93.1))”, this particular user also mentions that the process of getting more fit is for summer as did appendix PP (15.1), thus further suggesting self-objectification as they imply that the users have internalized the ‘shredded’ body ideal which (Tylka 2011, Cahill and Mussap 2007, Edwards, et al. 2016, Jones 2004) suggest that there is a “positive association between internalization of appearance ideals and body dissatisfaction, drive for muscularity, and eating disorder symptoms among adult and adolescent males (Klimek, et al. 2018, 353)”. Furthermore, appendix OO (185.1), appendix RR (66.2), appendix SS (65.1), and appendix QQ (93.1) also mentions restrictive eating tendencies with appendix OO (185.1) stating that “Training has been going pretty well, but so has the diet (see appendix OO (185.1))”, thus indicating the need to restrict and control one’s diet in order to achieve the ideal body. Thus, in terms of ways to achieve the ideal body are, in the sense of males, both include “dieting to gain weight (for muscularity), and/or dieting to lose weight (for thinness or low body fat) (Klimek, et al. 2018, 352)”, thus, it can be suggested that the males use #fitspo content and messages to promote and encourage diet restrictive behaviors as normalized behaviors for achieving body image ideals, at the same time they endorse a constant strive for a homogenous ‘shredded’ body ideal and dissatisfaction of one’s current body. This thus aligns with the female centered findings of Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) who found that “one body shape was overwhelmingly represented. As predicted, this was a thin and toned body, in accord with current sociocultural ideals (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 5)”, thus suggesting that the difference

between male and female #fitspo messages may not be that different, though the specifics of the desired body ideals differ.

6.3.2. Appearance

The following paragraph will be split in six minor categories; 'body dissatisfaction', 'drive for muscularity', 'sacrifice', 'aesthetics', 'appearance as self-objectification'.

6.3.2.1. Body dissatisfaction

As can be suggested by the above analysis of 'fitness anecdotes' in male #fitspo content, that the findings of Cohane and Pope (2001) who note that "recent years have witnessed a striking increase in body image concerns among men (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373)". A similar tendency can be noted in #fitspo content, when for example one user writes; "I realized that my energy levels had dropped & I wasn't happy with the way I looked (see appendix TT (143.2.1))". Here, the user both focuses on the apparent feeling of not being healthy (thus body functionality), and the way his body looked (thus appearance), which suggest a tendency to make a connection between health and physical appearance. Supporting this, Carrotte et al. (2017) found that #fitspo content (both male and female) often equated fitness and health with beauty, thus essentially being depicted as the same concept (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017). Following this, several other users expressed dissatisfaction with the physical appearance of one or more of their body parts, as such, one user writes "Trying to thicken these chicken legs out! (see appendix UU (11.1))", further expressing a desire to comply with the physical muscularity status of hegemonic masculinity, which, as noted by (Knauss, Paxton and Alsaker 2007, 353, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, Botta 2003, 390), typically places emphasis on men's need to become more muscular, rather than thinner, as is the ideal for women. Moreover, by expressing his own body part as 'chicken', he is demeaning not only himself, but also that of being skinny or less muscular than the apparent ideal.

6.3.2.2. Drive for muscularity

Following the above discussion and analysis, several other male users similarly portray a desire to be muscular (or more muscular). As such, one user writes the following about his body transformation; "Can definitely see the difference in the back, shoulders and arms. Legs are still tiny, but slightly improved - especially the quads and hamstrings. Still work to do, but moving in the right direction.- (see appendix VV (94.1))". It is thus noteworthy that this user, similar to the user in appendix UU

(11.1), also comments on the size of his legs as being too skinny (or tiny), thus suggesting a tendency which has also been noted from appendix MM (119.1.1) above, which is that one can always get more fit, get bigger muscles etc. Thus, it can be argued that 'too muscular' does not exist in male #fitspo content. A similar notion can be found in appendix WW (97.1.1) and appendix XX (133.1) with the former stating "10Ibs up and still trying to maintain the cuts" and the latter noting "4 weeks until a cut and still have more size to gain". 'Cutting' essentially entails being "foccused on reducing body fat, while retaining muscle size (Sci-Mx 2014)", this phase usually comes after a 'bulking' period in which the male has to intake a large number of calories daily to gain muscle size (Sci-Mx 2014). Essentially, we again see another form of endorsing diet and restrictive eating, though again focusing on muscles instead of thinness.

6.3.2.3. Sacrifice

Another theme to emerge is that of sacrifice in to obtain the ideal body and muscle mass. For example, one user states "I believe everyone can spare the time to do the things that can build your dream body, all you need to do is be more structured with your time and effort! (see appendix YY (31.1)". This statement correlates to our findings regarding the guilt inducing hashtags such as #noexcuses and #nopainnogain, which similarly stresses the need for physical pain and discomfort in order to obtain the physically ideal body ('your dream body'). This message also carries strong hegemonic masculinity-signifying undertones such as being in control, capable, and reliable (Kimmel 1994, 124-125). In addition, another user states "I like how you could transform your body just from a vision and Hard Work (see appendix ZZ (36.1))", thus further underlining that a man must work hard to obtain that ideal body. In this relation, one user even states "Flat,hungry,no pump..but good lighting (see appendix AAA (242.1.1))", thus portraying his sacrifices (such as being hungry and tired) as being positive as long as he physically looks good.

6.3.2.4. Aesthetics

Continuing this theme, several other users explicitly express the desire and/or gratitude for his physical appearance, such as one user who writes "Post legs and I am very happy with the size of my legs from the side absolutely love my quad sweep can't wait to see it when I peel the fat off (see appendix BBB (153.1))". This user does not state how his legs actually function or feel, but rather that it is the 'size', thus the look, of his legs that he appreciates. Moreover, another aforementioned theme can be argued to be seen when he talks about 'peeling' off the fat, thus further emphasizing

that it is the desire for bigger and more defined muscles and not thinness that the males in the #fitspo content strive for, thus supporting the ideals typically attributed to hegemonic masculinity. Another user writes: “In addition, we have integrated specific accessory exercises to ensure your body stays healthy and aesthetic (see appendix CCC (187.1))”. In this case, the user also focuses on the health aspect of #fitspo alongside that of appearance (or being aesthetic), however, as noted in a previous paragraph, Carrotte et al. (2017) suggests that fitspirational messages seem to depict fitness and beauty as being the same concept (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017), which may also be suggested to be the case in the above user quote. The focus on the aesthetics of the physical body appearance can also be seen in the captions of appendix DDD (86.1) and appendix EEE (90.1.1).

6.3.2.5. Appearance as self-objectification

From the discussions above, it can be suggested that some of the men posting #fitspo content on Instagram may exhibit signs of self-objectification and body surveillance which Wiseman and Moradi (2010) state “is manifested as body surveillance or persistent monitoring of how the body looks (as an object) rather than attending to how it feels or functions (Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155)”. For example, this can be seen in appendix BBB (153.1) where the user explicitly comments on his own appearance, thus suggesting that the audience should do the same. In relation to this, Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) further notes “such an emphasis on appearance is inherent to a photo-based platform like Instagram, where users post photos, often of themselves, explicitly for viewing by others (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 7)”. Moreover, the same tendency may be suggested in the case of those users mentioning getting ready for summer such as appendix PP (15.1), as the underlying message seems to be that one has to get the ideal muscular body in order to be attractive on the beach. Messages such as these turn the initial focus on the #fitspo message away from health and body functionality and over to the physical appearance of the body. As these men seem to care about their appearance for occasions such as summer, they can be argued to self-objectify in the sense that they see their own body from an onlooker’s perspective, and monitor their own body (body surveillance) in order to achieve that body.

6.3.3. Body Functionality

The overarching code of ‘body functionality’ has been split up in reoccurring identified sub-categories; ‘Not satisfied’, ‘sacrifice and pain’, and ‘workout to improve overall body functionality’.

6.3.3.1. Not satisfied

Some of the users show a dedication for improving their body functionality if they are not completely satisfied with how their body functions, the same way as discussed above just with appearance in mind. For example, an earlier mentioned user (see appendix PP (15.1)), further states: “I got multiple weak points I'm really going to focus on to bring up my overall physique”. As such, the user is here not satisfied with his current progress, but in this case the focus is on the functions and feelings of the body rather than the appearance. Another user expresses his dissatisfaction in a different manner as he writes “A good coach encourages adherence to training, progressively overloads movement patterns specific to the individual, developing a persons strength, mobility, and addressing dysfunctions, building a better body to LAST! (see appendix FFF (44.1))”. It can be suggested that this user implicitly is dissatisfied with the training methods generally promoted by some coaches, stressing instead how the coaches must focus on ‘building a better body to last’ and take each individual’s strengths and weaknesses into consideration when creating exercise plans.

6.3.3.2. Sacrifice and pain

Some of the users further express the need for sacrifice and pain to get a stronger body, for example, one user writes: “Your muscles tighten up and this feeling is like my fix. When you get into that zone you don't even hear the words of the music playing. It becomes background noise. Your focus gets locked in on your workout. Your body conditions itself to push through pain, this is why I always superset as well (see appendix GGG (129.1.1))”. Thus, the user is expressing that he enjoys working through the pain of his body during workout, using the word ‘fix’ to describe his positive feelings towards the process. This may be correlated to the previous analysis of the use of the #fitnessaddict hashtag, in that they both promote the use of predominately negative words in association with something they depict as being a positive feeling. In this case, the user promotes the fitness workout ‘superset’ as being the perfect workout to ‘push through the pain’. To superset means to perform “multiple exercises in a row with minimal rest (Fitness Wiki)”, which can be argued to, in the long run, cause injuries because of overexertion. Three other users similarly write about some sort of sustained injury, though neither explicitly state that the injury is workout-related. As such, the first user states: “Its out, the injury last year was a torn muscle (Muskelfaserris). Therefore, the muscular nature has hardened. Now I have to rest for the next 2 weeks and need to stretch the chest muscles several times a day (see appendix HHH (147.1.1))”, while another state: “Muscle spasm, Shortness of breath, asthma, near syncope, no vomiting, bruising and 10 out of 10 pain on feet. Through it all,

the body can always achieve what the mind believe. If you think you will finish and accomplish something that is the end of the story, despite any other opposing idea (see appendix III (181.1.1))". The last user similarly states: "Currently have bad tendinitis in my knee. Going to have to stop squatting for a while which isn't great because I was just starting to get stronger. Well bounce back better though (see appendix JJJ (80.1.1))." Thus, it can be suggested that even some of the men that promote body functionality simultaneously promote a connection of pain and injury with fitness and health. This is signs of excessive exercise which correlates with the findings of Holland and Tiggemann (2016) who suggest that fitspiration images are promoting extreme and compulsive attitudes towards exercise (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76-77).

6.3.3.3. Workout to improve overall body functionality

Though it can be suggested from the above analysis that the desire to achieve a healthy and strong body may be accompanied by possible negative outcomes and behaviors towards exercising, several of the users simply talk about the need for exercise as a means of improving their overall body functionality. For example, one user writes: "take good care of your body, its the only place you'll have to live forever! (see appendix KKK (3.1.1))", while another user writes about the body: "But you also need to keep it healthy to live a long life! Stay fit, stay healthy and love long (see appendix DDD (86.1))". Both users in this case focus heavily on the health benefits of staying fit as a way of achieving a long life, contrary to an appearance-related focus. Similarly, another user writes: "Work those backs to gain stability ! (see appendix LLL (37.1))", thus further suggesting the physical payoff of working out and strengthening the back muscles, rather than the appearance of, in the current context, larger and more defined back muscles. In a similar vein, another user states: "Chest activation during cable flies and much of flat Hammerstrength press was massively improved! Managed to put some decent loading on the chest and despite being pretty deflated prior to triceps, ended up getting the best contractions in them for a while! So very glad I didn't spit the dummy out! ! (see appendix MMM (211.1.1)", thus moreover focusing on the aspect of feeling stronger and being able to improve one's physical endurance during a workout. On a similar note, one user makes the connection between working out and being fit with doing what's best for your body: "Make everyday count , every workout , every set , every rep is an investment on your best self (see appendix NNN (60.1.1))". It can thus be argued that some of the males uploading #fitspo content sees the functional benefits of working out, getting fit, and being healthy as an investment in their life and in themselves to feel good and live long.

6.3.4. Exercise-, and diet tips and fitness progress

The following paragraphs seeks to analyze the codes ‘diet tips’, ‘exercise tips’, and ‘fitness progress’.

6.3.4.1. Diet tips

As can be suggested by some of the earlier analyzed #fitspo content (such as the health-related hashtags and the referencing to ‘shredding’ and ‘cutting’ one’s body), nutrition and diet plays an important role in male #fitspo content. Some users either explicitly or implicitly gives out dieting tips and advice as to how to manage their meals, such as one user who writes: “MEAL PREP: If you're not fortunate enough to get regular breaks to cook / make food, find time the day before or in the week to at least prepare half your meals in advance (see appendix YY (31.1))” and another user who writes: “a lot of things can be found in the food, no need to empty your wallet for this kind of supplements You just have to document yourself starts with vegetables and fruit which are rich in vitamins and minerals (see appendix OOO (142.2.1))”. These users state how they propose other users either plan their diet or what to eat on their diet, which corresponds with Tiggemann and Zaccardo’s (2016) statement about fitspiration’s overall message; “As a whole, fitspiration promotes health and well-being through the promotion of healthy eating, exercise and self-care, and the overall philosophy is one which emphasizes strength and empowerment (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 2)”. Furthermore, diet tips can be argued to motivate other users further by emphasizing the benefits of eating healthy, and in the case of the following quote, that being healthy does not necessarily entail being boring; “First rule of a healthy lifestyle: you can't out train a poor diet. Good nutrition doesn't have to be boring or bland! (see appendix PPP (22.1))”. However, one user comments upon the concept of ’cheat meals’: “when you look forward to the weked of the cheatmeal (see appendix QQQ (250.1.1))”, which Murray et al. (2016) states is characterized by “the consumption of an objectively large amount of food in a short amount of time, the loss or ‘letting go’ of control, and subsequent attempts to compensate via restrictive dietary practices (Murray, et al. 2016, 19)”. In combination with the dietary patterns promoted in previous examples (such as bulking, cutting, and shredding) each with their specific body type goal, Pila et al. (2016) further suggest that “the cheat meal phenomenon may overlap with eating disorder pathology (Pila, et al. 2016, 699)”, thus suggesting a possible negative connection between the promotion and glamorization of ridged diet plans.

6.3.4.2. Exercise tips

Following the diet tips above, several users also gives exercise tips, for example, one of the users mentioned in the above paragraph also noted: “PLAN THE WEEK AHEAD: Look at everything you have to do for the week in terms of work, studying, socialising etc, and find the suitable gaps of free time where you can pencil in a gym session. PRIORITISE YOUR GYM WORKOUTS: Dedicate a portion of your regular free time to complete all your workouts, instead of binge-watching Netflix like there's no tomorrow (see appendix YY (31.1))”, thus giving both diet and exercise tips specifically for users with a busy lifestyle, and to encourage a prioritization of workout instead of ‘binge watching netflix’ which may be interpreted as being lazy. However, another user states that taking things slow and taking a break is as important as the workout itself: “Trained really hard and really heavy this week. Taking a much needed recovery day today. The body needs time to recover and grow. These recovery days are equally as important to weight training days (see appendix KK (69.1))”. This statement is supported by the website ‘Greatist’, which specializes in fitness and health advise;

> “Whether they’re in it for health, happiness, or an upcoming vacation, many gym-goers want to look and feel a certain way—and fast. But in the process of strengthening the legs, chest, or any other muscle group, rest is just as important as reps. And for many individuals, not taking an occasional rest day could lead to overtraining, which can mean decreased performance, elevated blood pressure, decreased immunity, disturbed sleep, and more (White 2015).”

Thus, this advice may, contrary to several earlier mentioned user statements, encourage users to not engage in excessive compulsive exercise behaviors, thus having a more relaxed attitude towards fitness. Another user also writes: “Let's go train, then we can switch off (see appendix RRR (41.1))”, thus further recommending people to also relax. In this case, it can also be suggested that the user insinuates that one can only relax as a kind of reward for working out, which may suggest an excessive attitude towards exercise even though resting and relaxing is also evident. A similar attitude towards excessive exercise can be seen in the aforementioned appendix GGG (129.1.1): “When performing a set and it starts to hurt, your body naturally wants to stop. You say to yourself ok I got about 4 reps left in me, but then you end up doing 12 more. You get in to a zone where you don't feel pain, you just keep going till failure.” Here the user is recommending other users to just keep going through the pain when exercising, and ‘keep going till failure’ which may mean until the body collapses which

another user is suggesting is a potentially damaging attitude: “This is a surefire way to injury, fatigue, plateaus and decrease in long term performance (see appendix FFF (44.1))”. It can thus be suggested that there does not seem to be a homogenous agreement towards the perfect exercise, though many seem to agree that exercising can be used as a means to get rewarded later.

6.3.4.3. Fitness progress

One of the first themes noticed in the fitness progress-related posts was that of losing weight. One user for example states:

> “#TransformationTuesday January 21st(191Ib)-March 16th(1701b). Tbh, today was my first time looking back when I started this prep. Since I look at myself every day I don't notice the difference day by day. I didn't realize how "fluffy" I actually was! I was short on time and knew I had to do WORK. I never skipped a cardio, workout or meal. All meals measured oz by oz and gram by gram. I did everything to the T. This was the first time EVER that I stuck to a strict diet and cardio regimen. - YOU can make the change for the better If you really put your mind to it (see appendix SSS (156.1))”.

Firstly, the user states that his motivation for exercising was because he felt he looked ‘fluffy’ (may be interpreted as chubby) thus wanting to lose weight. Secondly, he expresses signs of excessive exercise and restrictive eating behaviors as he specifically notes, with signs of pride, that he deliberately measures ‘gram by gram’ what he eats and sticks to that diet, and call his regulated diet plan a ‘regimen’ which entails that he believes his diet plan is healthy. Third, a slight hint of guilt inducement can be suggested in the last sentence when he, directed at his audience, says that ‘YOU can make the change for the better,’ which insinuates that everyone can live by a strict workout and diet plan, thus further indicating that people who fail to live by a diet plan etc. lack determination. A similar attitude can be detected from another user who states:

> “6 month transformation.. People dm me saying they can't make results for the life of them. I don't expect your average Joe to put themselves through what I put my body through. When I workout I put my body through absolute agony. I pick two muscle groups and I completely destroy them, leaving them sore the next day no matter what and I never neglect any muscle (see appendix TTT (75.1))”.

Here, the user terms the people with (what he insinuates is) lacking determination as ‘average Joe’ thus both degrade others while simultaneously praising and building up himself for having the

determination he feels the ‘average’ person lacks. Furthermore, this user once again glamorizes and promote excessive exercise behaviors as being something one has to go through to achieve the body one wants. To go back to the theme of weight loss, another user writes: “HD-45 Rapid Fatloss Programme Update: Just look at the transformation @jonny_g1984 has undergone in 10 short weeks. What's more amazing is that in this latest pic he's actually in a surplus of calories to build muscle not lose fat. That's more food and less fat to go with it (see appendix UUU (168.1.1))”. However, this user not only focuses on the progress of fat loss, but also on muscle building, which correlates to our findings in the before and after screenshots in the paragraph ‘Pictures’, where we argued that men did not only want to lose body fat, but also simultaneously gaining muscle mass. In a similar notion, another user writes: “Little update. Up to 147-1481bs. That's up about 101bs from a few months ago when I had dropped to about 137-1381bs. Can definitely see the difference in the back, shoulders and arms. Legs are still tiny, but slightly improved - especially the quads and hamstrings. Still work to do, but moving in the right direction (see appendix VV (94.1))”, thus focusing on actually gaining weight in order to build muscle and can be suggested to view being skinny as a negative trait which further correlates with the body ideals attributed to hegemonic masculinity. The desire for gaining weight and getting bigger muscles can for example also be seen in appendix WW (97.1.1) and appendix OO (185.1).

6.3.5. Guilt inducing and stigmatizing

The following paragraph seeks to analyze the guilt inducing and stigmatizing messages within the #fitspo captions. As can be noted from many of the above discussions, several captions may be argued to carry guilt inducing undertones, such as one user who writes: “Many people claim they haven't got the time to train or eat properly across the week.. but I call BULLSHIT. I believe everyone can spare the time to do the things that can build your dream body, all you need to do is be more structured with your time and effort! Let's see what you can do (see appendix YY (31.1))”. Here he portrays a similar notion as has been discussed above; that there are no excuses not to exercise, thus suggesting that these kinds of people are either lazy or lack determination, as it is ‘bullshit’ to make excuses for not working out. Furthermore, this also carries the implication that following a diet and workout plan is something everyone can do, and that it is ‘all you need to do’ thus suggesting that it is an easy feat. However, Slater et al. (2017) argue that “the ideal body upheld in ‘fitspiration’ shares many features with the ‘traditional’ thin-ideal body (tall and extremely thin), but adds the further dimensions of

fitness and (moderate) muscularity. As such, it is likely to be just as unattainable for most women (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, 88)", thus suggesting that, for men too, obtaining the ideal body is indeed not an easy process. It can further be argued to be potentially harming as Instagram in general is perceived to be a place for the 'general public' thus encouraging a greater amount of social comparison between users as they may see each other as peers (Boepple, Ata, et al. 2016, 2), and may thus be more inclined to feel pressured to strive towards the ideals and attitudes promoted by each other.

Another user who can be argued to carry a guilt inducing message states: "To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift (see appendix VVV (34.1.1))", thus again suggesting that any person who cannot achieve the ideal muscular appearance, or at least try their hardest to do so, 'sacrifices' a part of their important gifts in life, meaning presumably that they do not live to their fullest potential. However, it can be argued that 'accepting the gift' may come with a sacrifice of its own. As such, one user proclaims: "I also don't drink soda or any sugary bullshit. I don't drink. I don't party. I don't smoke cigs. I have no interest in participating in any of the shenanigans (see appendix TTT (75.1))". This thus begs the question; which 'gift' do you want to sacrifice? The users above can be argued to see having an attractive physique as the number one priority, moreover, the latter does not seem to see his sacrifices as a negative thing. This further suggest that these users stigmatize other users who, from their point of view, do not make enough sacrifices and work hard in order to achieve the perfect body, which for example has been discussed earlier as being essential for summer as seen in appendix QQ (93.1).

6.3.6. Inspirational quotes

The inspirational quotes found in the captions can be seen to either be very general in their message or more specifically directed at fitness inspiration. Among the more general inspirational quote, is a user who states: "Its not choosing the right path that matters. Its knowing what fuels your passion. Once you figured out what brings you joy, you don't have to worry about finding the right path. Any path will take you there (see appendix WWW (253.1.1))". This can be argued to refer to any passion in life, which the user is suggesting one should pursue, however, it can be said that his passion in life is fitness and health, thus making him happy and find joy in life. Another user can be seen to use his passion for fitness to try and inspire others; "I think some people need motivation need awareness of what is a healthy life that's why I love this lifestyle (see appendix XXX (193.1))". This user is also

suggesting that sharing the knowledge of what is healthy can motivate people to get easier access to the world of #fitspo. Several other users can be seen to invoke the concept of willpower and inner strength to inspire other users to keep pushing through. For example, one user states: “You are a lot stronger than you think (see appendix GGG (129.1.1))”, while another user writes: “You don't find WILLPOWER you create it (see appendix YYY (206.1.1))”. (see for example also appendix ZZZ (91.1) and appendix SSS (156.1)).

6.3.6.1. Metaphor

Most of the times the users have used metaphors to inspire other users it seems that, like with the use of inspirational quotes, it is used in a more general manner than directly about fitness and health. For example, one user writes: “Opportunities present themselves daily and when they come knocking don't shut the door (see appendix AAAA (1.1))”, and another user who writes: “The mind controls our outcome, no matter how many times we fail or get knocked down. Do not let life shake you. Our circumstances, set-backs and road blocks simply make us stronger if we use them to grow (see appendix BBBB (55.1))”. Thus, it can be suggested that even though metaphors and inspirational quotes are used in a #fitspo context, they can be used to relate and inspire life in general as well as in #fitspo related content.

6.3.6.2. Motivation

Initially, the motivation that the users express does not seem to focus on either the appearance aspect or the body functionality of #fitspo, but more about having a great time and living the life they enjoy, and look inwards for happiness. For example, one user expresses what fitness means for him: “For me, fitness is not just about hitting the gym; it is also about an inner happiness and an overall well-being (see appendix HHH (147.1.1))”. Another user further offers advice for one’s attitude towards exercising as a motivator, as such he states: “If you want to do something at your full potential, stay completely focused on doing one task at a time. Give your full attention to what you are doing without thinking about the outcome in advance. Try it and observe how the quality of your doing exponentially increases (see appendix CCCC (124.1))”. Thus, he advices not just to think about the appearance one may achieve by exercising but rather on the inner feelings of contentment one may experience by participating in such a lifestyle. Furthermore, some users state that the community and friendship aspect of the fitness lifestyle can be a great motivator to keep going, for example, one user writes: “Good back and biceps session with my bro @liam_tuite always good training with different

people pushing each other and making one another work harder (see appendix DDDD (252.1.1))" (see also appendix EEEE (27.1.1). This emphasis on the importance of community can thus be tied to the findings of the use of community-related hashtags (see paragraph 'Hashtags') which suggest that male Instagram users may be more inclined to imitate and positively receive #fitspo messages if it is validated by other users (or in the case of the above quote, real life friends). Thus, it can be argued that both the community of the Instagram users using the #fitspo hashtag is important for motivation, as well as real life community and support. For example, this also correlates with the attitude that 'if I can do it, so can you', which is also evident in one user who states: "ITS ALL A MENTAL ISSUE If YOU WANT (see appendix FFFF (25.1.1))".

6.3.6.3. Pride

Initially, one can notice that the users express pride in their own fitness accomplishments, such as one user who writes: "Good leg workout, that's when its hard to get in your pants, and that's what I felt today (see appendix GGGG (10.2))", (see for example also appendix BBB (153.1)). This user is further implying that getting a 'good' workout equals some sort of discomfort (i.e. sore muscles), thus expressing pride in his own ability to accomplish such a workout session. This sort of pride can also be seen when another user states: "Doing weighted pull-ups is like saying; "I'm too strong for my own body" (see appendix HHHH (14.1.1))", thus suggesting that accomplishing this kind of workout equals a very physically strong body, thus further suggesting a feeling of pride in physically taxing activities. Furthermore, both can be argued to imply that being able to do these kinds of workouts, one must already have some sort of physical endurance and strength, thus suggesting that it is not something everyone can accomplish, thereby implying that it is something to be proud of. Similarly, one user states: "If it were easy, everyone would do it! (see appendix IIII (50.1.1))". These comments can thus be linked to attributes associated with the concept of hegemonic masculinity in that these users express both control, power, toughness etc.

6.3.6.4. Self-care

Several of the comments relating to self-care have been discussed in earlier paragraphs such as 'body functionality', 'exercise tips', and 'inspirational quotes', see for example appendix PP (15.1), appendix LLL (37.1), appendix FFF (44.1), appendix KKK (3.1.1), and appendix NNN (60.1.1). Thus, it can be suggested that the focus relates more to one's body functionality and health rather than one's appearance in order to take good care of oneself. In this relation, one user states: "Time

and Health are two precious assets that we don't recognize and appreciate until they have been depleted (see appendix JJJJ (221.1.1))". In a similar vein, findings by (Prichard, et al. 2017) suggest that most inspirational and motivational quotes, in the context of fitspiration, is designed to focus on health and fitness, thus body functionality. Furthermore, Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016) argue that fitspiration captions "were largely positive, encouraging and sometimes wise. It is possible that they are the primary source of the inspiration people feel (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 7)".

6.4. Summarization of theoretical findings

The following paragraph seeks to give a summarization of some of our findings based on the three theoretical frameworks of the hegemonic masculinity theory, the objectification theory, and the social cognitive theory.

6.4.1. Hegemonic Masculinity

Overall, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been recurring throughout our findings of both pictures, hashtags, and captions. Firstly, it can be suggested that the idea and portraying of being capable, reliable, and in control is evident no matter the level of muscularity the users showcase and the ethnicity of the user as the majority still showed some level of muscularity, thus suggesting that they want to showcase their idea of being masculine and being capable and able to work out. Furthermore, the majority of the users can be argued to focus on many of the same body parts (both the ones with clothes and the ones with exposed skin), especially the upper body which is also a trait connected with the ideas of a masculine body according to hegemonic masculinity, and engage in the same type of poses and postures to showcase what they presumably assume to be a great body in terms of the sociocultural standards, as it can be argued that some sort of pride of their own bodies has to exist for the users to display their bodies publicly in the first place. This is further supported by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2016), who note that an emphasis on appearance may be inherent to a photo-based platform such as Instagram, "where users post photos, often of themselves, explicitly for viewing by others (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 7)". Furthermore, though some of the users engage in physical activities thus portraying ideas such as competitiveness and athletic prowess (thus different categories of masculinity), they still fall under the same overall concept of hegemonic masculinity. However, this contradicts with a statement by Slater et al. (2017) who states: "One potentially positive feature of social media is that its user-generated nature allows for the possibility of a wider variety of images and content than has been customarily transmitted via traditional media

channels (Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017)", thus meaning that the potential for a more heterogeneous content of masculinities. However, it seems that the majority of the users of the #fitspo hashtag on Instagram are more homogeneous in nature when it comes to the concept of the representation of masculinity, though the pictures initially seem vary in terms of content such as where and how the picture is taken and what the user is doing in it.

In terms of body dissatisfaction, some studies of women in fitspirational content have similarly been argued to contain poses that emphasize particular parts of the body (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 2) while also only featuring and promoting a limited range of body types (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, 5) which earlier studies have linked with the occurrence of poor body image, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behaviors among women (Prichard, et al. 2017, Holland and Tiggemann 2016, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, Tiggemann, Churches, et al. 2018, Brown and Tiggemann 2016, Robinson, et al. 2017, Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, Sumter, Cingel and Antonis 2018, Santarossa, et al. 2016, Tiggemann and Miller, The Internet and Adolescent Girls' Weight Satisfaction and Drive for Thinness 2010). Seeing as how the same themes are present in male #fitspo content and other studies also have suggested a growing tendency for men to be dissatisfied with their bodies (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373), it can thus be argued that the male promotion of #fitspo may have some of the same effects as it has been suggested to have on women. This is especially possible, as (Peat, et al. 2011, 198) further notes that age may play an important role in the experience of male body dissatisfaction as young men may have a higher chance of experiencing body dissatisfaction, which correlates with our findings that the users who officially announce their age are mostly in the age range of 21 to 25, and the rest can be suggested to be around the same age group.

Furthermore, the use of hashtags such as #fitnessaddict, #muscle, #aesthetic(s), #nopainnogain, all can be suggested to promote the appearance related aspects of obtaining the hegemonic masculinity ideal, moreover promoting that to obtain this kind of ideal body one has to have an excessive and compulsive attitude towards training, thereby increasing the chance of poor body image, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating behaviors etc. for those that do not have the ideal masculine body in accordance with hegemonic masculinity standards.

The aspects of being in control, have power, etc. can further be noticed in the captions of the #fitspo pictures as there seem to be a tendency to strive for bigger and more defined muscles and promoting both restrictive eating behaviors and excessive exercise, while a number also expresses dissatisfaction

of their current bodies while also both explicitly and implicitly shaming those who do not engage in such diets and workout routines.

6.4.2. Objectification

Within the pictures analyzed, we found that the majority focused on the appearance of the user rather than his body functionality (i.e. how it feels and what it can do). As could also be seen from our results of the coding process, only 18.5% of the 260 screenshots featured males engaging in physical activities, it could already there be suggested that a majority focused on appearance and objectifying poses. However, during our analysis, we found that several of the users who did engage in a physical activity could still be argued to exhibit objectification of certain body parts (especially the arms were exposed), thus suggesting a general tendency to self-objectification of the body. Self-objectification could especially be suggested to be present in the users who used body builder poses as they are specifically designed to enhance and define one or more muscle groups (Topic of the week 2007), thus the purpose of these poses is to present and exhibit the physical appearance of the muscles rather than their function. Furthermore, as stated by Daniel and Bridges (2009) and Moradi (2010), self-objectification often leads to body surveillance (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 33, Moradi 2010, 33) which often leads to a sense of body shame when one feels one does not meet the cultural standards of the ideal body (or general attractiveness (Wiseman and Moradi 2010, 155)) which can lead to various eating disorders such as restrictive eating, and other symptoms such as low self-esteem and depressed mood (Daniel and Bridges 2009, 33).

Furthermore, the comparatively heavy use of appearance-related hashtags rather than health-related may also suggest that the overall focus of male #fitspo posts are more likely to emphasize the benefits of looking good in accordance with the sociocultural norm of male attractiveness. Moreover, it can be suggested that the motivation-related hashtags may also promote the benefits of appearance rather than health, thus shifting the initial focus of the fitspiration message.

Furthermore, several users can be argued to express a sense of self-objectification and body surveillance as, for example, they feel it necessary to improve their physical body appearance for events like summer, thus suggesting that one cannot confidently enjoy the sun and the beach without the ‘perfect body’ to showcase to others, thus they can also be suggested to look at their own body from other’s point of view.

6.4.3. Social cognitive theory

It can be suggested from our analysis that it is generally the same body type and significations of hegemonic masculinity that are promoted via the #fitspo pictures and content in general, while furthermore emphasizing the material benefits of adhering to the sociocultural standards of male attractiveness. It can thus be suggested from several of the empirical pictures that one has success and surplus of mental resources such as portraying a muscular body on vacation, with friends, at competitions, and being 'in control' of themselves by going to the gym etc. Thus, it can be argued that portraying some sort of positive benefit of having the ideal muscular body may encourage other users to engage in excessive exercise and regulated eating behaviors in order to obtain these benefits for themselves as some sort of 'moral obligation' (Carrotte, Prichard and Cheng Lim 2017). However, as discussed earlier, the user and other users may not necessarily be dissatisfied with their current body, but the initial promise of a richer and more successful life may encourage them to go further than they have done up until that point (Guðnadóttir and Garðarsdóttir 2014, 156).

Furthermore, if the benefits of #fitspo are perceived as socially desirable on for example the Instagram platform, it is more likely for other users to want to participate and receive the messages of the benefits as positive. It can thus furthermore be argued that any traits portrayed and presented as negative by some male users, such has having 'chicken legs', may promote a notion of thin-stigmatization, and further normalize and perpetuate the muscle ideal as being the most preferable and socially desirable for males.

7. Conclusion

The present thesis set out to answer the following problem formulation:

How can male centered #fitspo content be interpreted as potentially increasing body dissatisfaction and health risk behaviors of male Instagram users?

To guide the research, three research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What themes/ideas of masculinity and male body image standards can be recognized in the #fitspo pictures on Instagram?

RQ2: What other hashtags do males use in their #fitspo posts and do they show any connection with the overall message of fitspiration and/or negative body image outcome?

RQ3: What are the general themes in the captions of the male #fitspo posts and what behaviors for achieving body image ideals are encouraged.

With regards to male #fitspo images, we found a high tendency to focus on the appearance of the body rather than its physical functions, as for example only a small percentage were engaging in physical activities, and even those who were active could be argued to still promote an objectifying focus on the specific body parts, especially abs, arms, and legs. Furthermore, the large majority of men featured in #fitspo images adhered to a highly homogenous, sociocultural sanctioned body ideal, which displays physical attributes such as broad shoulders, narrow waist, a muscular torso, and defined biceps. Moreover, these attributes could be recognized regardless of country of origin, age, and race of the male user. Furthermore, though the majority had visible faces within the images, some can be argued to still focus on their body or body parts by for example posing or flexing in specific ways that enhance a specific body part or otherwise draws focus away from the face. These findings can be suggested to correlate with some of the existing findings on female-centered fitspirational literature by scholars such as (Prichard, et al. 2017, Holland and Tiggemann 2016, Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2016, Tiggemann, Churches, et al. 2018, Brown and Tiggemann 2016, Robinson, et al. 2017, Slater, Varsani and Diedrichs 2017, Sumter, Cingel and Antonis 2018, Santarossa, et al. 2016). However, one noticeable difference between the findings of the female #fitspiration users and the male #fitspo users is that most female users were found to adhere to a thin and lean body ideal, while the male users were found to focus more specifically on the muscular ideal (with a higher degree of muscle mass being portrayed than did the women), while the thin aspect did not seem to be present as much as the focus on building more muscle mass and actually gaining muscle weight.

These findings can thus be interpreted as potentially increasing body dissatisfaction and health risk behaviors among male Instagram users, as (Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, De Jesus, et al. 2015, 140, Daniel and Bridges 2009, 36, Peat, et al. 2011, 198, Arbour, A. and Ginis 2006, 159) have found evidence that even a very brief exposure to images of idealized male bodies increase male's body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, (Cohane and Pope, Jr. 2001, 373, Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2004, 352, Galioto and Crowther 2013, 566, Botta 2003, 389) associate body image disturbances and repeated exposures to images of unrealistically muscular ideal bodies among men with impaired self-esteem, body insecurity, chronic thoughts about weight loss and weight gain, disturbed eating habits, symptoms of mood, anxiety, excessive exercise, dysmorphic disorders (especially muscle dysmorphia) etc. Thus, as social media has become readily available to a large part of the global

population, these male #fitspo images can thus be suggested to potentially increase body dissatisfaction worldwide by promoting a homogenous and objectifying ideal.

The accompanying hashtags can further be noted to show a connection with the overall themes of the messages such as a high focus on appearance-related hashtags. Furthermore, the use of the body functionality-related hashtags can be argued to be used in contexts where the user in the picture is not actively exercising (due to the high usage of these hashtags contrary to the actual amount of active users depicted in the images), thus making it uncertain whether the users will receive the message in a positive manner as Prichard et al. (2017) notes that; "For fitness images to have a positive effect on body image, it is possible that the focus on body competence and functionality must be more holistic in nature (Prichard, et al. 2017)", thus suggesting that using body functionality-related hashtags and wearing workout clothes is not enough to make sure the message is perceived in a positive manner by other users. Furthermore, guilt inducing hashtags can be suggested to affect other users in a negative manner as they may promote extreme health risk measures, such as compulsive exercise and restrictive eating behaviors, in order to achieve the ideal body which is promoted to be achievable. However, it can be suggested that the community-related hashtags will generally be received in a positive manner as working together as a collective, a team, as friends etc. may in itself work as moral support for users both already into fitness and those considering joining the #fitfam. However, it is uncertain whether the motivation-related hashtags are related to the original messages of #fitspo as the relative and comparative dominance of appearance-related hashtags contrary to health-related suggest a tendency to focus on appearance rather than health and body functionality, which the findings of the images further suggest.

Our caption-related findings further support some of the above suggestions such as a high focus on appearance as a general focus and motivator to workout, and to achieve a homogenous ideal of a 'shredded' body. Furthermore, behaviors for achieving body image ideals include that of excessive exercise, restrictive eating, and possible pain and injuries as a part of the fitness journey, thus portrayed as positive and essential. This further correlated with the findings of Holland and Tiggemann (2016) who found that fitspiration images are promoting extreme and compulsive attitudes towards exercise (Holland and Tiggemann 2016, 76-77). This further suggest that the negative impacts on body dissatisfaction and health risk behaviors recorded in female centered fitspirational literature may also be a concern for male users of social media platforms such as Instagram.

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