(In)visible bodies, Images, Instagram:
Exploring the possibilities of becoming through the fitspo assemblage

Lauren Rose Milor

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Abstract

The last five years has seen a rise in the sharing of 'fitspo' content – a portmanteau of the words 'fitness' and 'inspiration' – on social media. While initially touted as a means to encourage the take-up of exercise and 'healthy' eating, more recently claims have been leveraged at fitspo content as being harmful and damaging – particularly for young women. This thesis looks to make an intervention into these claims that position fitspo content as always already detrimental for young women, and as the cause of numerous negative effects such as eating disorders and poor self-esteem. Drawing on data produced through a photo-taking exercise, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and media go-alongs with 30 women aged 19-29, I explore young women's production, circulation and consumption of fitspo imagery on Instagram. Taking the lead from feminist scholars such as Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose who have utilised concepts such as affect, becoming and assemblage vis-à-vis the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their research, this thesis considers what the relations between bodies, images, Instagram and its affordances can do for how young women come to know and understand their bodies, and the bodies of others. Through a consideration of *the fitspo assemblage,* I argue that rather than a break with the bodily surveillance that feminist scholars have long highlighted women face, the fitspo assemblage produces an intensified form of surveillance that stretches beyond (only) the physicality of the body, through the various elements that constitute it. Importantly, rather than arguing that *all* women face and experience the fitspo assemblage equally, I highlight how its affects vary across and between the women, illustrating the importance of a nuanced and contextual study of fitspo images *and* the platform they circulate on and through.

Acknowledgements

I am writing this acknowledgement section a week shy of exactly three years since I officially began my PhD, which makes this feel like a very 'full circle' moment. Throughout these years, I thought extensively about this piece of writing, as it signified perhaps the very last bit of writing I would do for my thesis prior to submission, and in doing so wrapping the whole thing up. Now that this moment is here, I am (for once!) at a loss for words, and it is difficult to put into words how this feels. It feels very surreal to have gotten to this point, particularly as I write this following a last minute move back home to Newcastle upon Tyne from Leeds; after some pretty harrowing physical health issues; and, of course, whilst during a pandemic. While the rest of my emotions are still somewhat up in the air, I know that I am grateful to be able to try and articulate my acknowledgements and thanks to the people that held me up and supported me over the last three years.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Situating fitspo, reframing fitspo

> Why 'fitspo' is the next social media trend we need to put a stop to (Leach, 2020).
> Instagram's 'fitspo' may be resurrection of Tumblr's 'thinspo[1]' (Qobrtay, 2019).
> The scary reason #fitspo isn't as healthy as you think (Naftulin, 2017).
> Why 'fitspo' should come with a warning label (Adams, 2014).
> Why the 'fitspo' movement is damaging to women (Holland, 2016).

A portmanteau of 'fitness' and 'inspiration', fitspiration or fitspo has grown over the last five years on social media, and is defined as "an online trend designed to inspire viewers towards a healthier lifestyle by promoting exercise and healthy food" (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015, p.61). It is particularly popular on visual-based social media such as Instagram, Pinterest and Tumblr, with a search for fitspo on these platforms likely to return images of toned, slim white women exercising and/or posing, motivational quotes, exercise ideas and 'healthy' food choices such as salads or protein shakes. Instagram in particular has become a space for women to share their everyday practices as they work towards their health and fitness goals, however defined, linking up with others through following one another, and using hashtags such as #fitspo and #UKfitfam (fit family). At the time of writing[2], a search on Instagram for #UKfitfam returned 1.6 million posts, while #fitspo returned almost 70 million posts. Initially, fitspo content was lauded as a healthier version of 'thinspo', or thinspiration content, through a perceived reclamation of the strong, 'healthy' body over the skinny, 'unhealthy' body (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2018). For example, rather than an explicit focus on weight-loss, it is more common for fitspo content to articulate the benefits of weight-training and building muscle. Such notions tap into the optimistic (though tentative and critical) claims that resistance training, a typically coded masculine activity, could hold benefits for women through community building and challenging normative associations of passivity and weakness with femininity (Bunsell, 2013; Heywood, 1998).

However, more recently fitspo has been met with a range of critiques due to its perceived damaging, restrictive and obsessive elements, echoed in the newspaper articles and blogs that open this thesis. Notably, these claims are resonant with the arguments that surrounded slender fashion models in the late twentieth century (Chapter 2), and the perceived increase of sexualisation of young people in the early 2000s by popular media and government reports (Smith and Attwood, 2011),

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[1] Thinspo content is associated with images that promote images of thin bodies, often linked to pro-ana (anorexia) or pro-ED (eating disorder) social media communities.

[2] In March 2020.

in how they propagate moral panics surrounding the negative effects that such images are perceived to have on young women's seemingly passive bodies. From the outset, I aim to make clear that this thesis sits as an intervention into such sensationalised and dualist perspectives regarding fitspo imagery. Instead, this thesis considers how young women are engaging with producing, circulating and viewing fitspo content on Instagram. In doing so, I explore not what is represented *in* particular images, but rather what particular fitspo images can do when shared on Instagram. In thinking about what images do, I conceptualise images as active social agents that are productive through their relations with other bodies (broadly defined); be they other images, human bodies, Instagram comments and so on. Through this, I am specifically concerned with how Instagram and its various features may work; what do such images do when they are shared on the feed of a popular influencer, as a disappearing 24 hour Instagram Story, or depending on the comments such images receive? For the purposes of this thesis, I use the word 'fitspo' to encapsulate a range of content that coalesces around imagery that broadly relates to their health and fitness goals[3], reflective of the way the women I spoke too referred to both their own content and other people's content, in addition to wider scholarship and media articles[4].

In 9*Honey,* an online women's lifestyle publication in Australia, Maddison Leach describes her engagement with fitspo as "a terrifying trend that's kept me glued to the treadmill and counting my calories" (Leach, 2020). Highlighting the prominence of "trim waists, toned stomachs and strong legs", Leach positions fitspo images as damaging through their perpetuation of new, though still unrealistic, body ideals, said to be made all the more insidious by social media:

> I know that I am not Cindy Crawford; I don't have her money or her fame and I'm not in magazines. But I *could* in my mind be like girls on Instagram, because I'm like them, and have an Instagram account too (Leach, 2020).

Quoting a young women who had once also engaged regularly with fitspo images, Leach positions fitspo body ideals as *more* damaging than the normative body standards of the Twiggy and 'heroin-chic' eras due to the intimate access women have to fitspo users, and their perceived relatability. Certainly, there is something in this argument - it is important to acknowledge what may be different about experiences of bodily surveillance as a result of social media applications, and this is something I engage with throughout this thesis. However, Leach's argument that "young women can be particularly vulnerable to online information" retains a focus on positioning women as innately at risk from the content they consume, where it is something intrinsic to the images themselves that causes this risk. For Leach, one

[3] Though as I show in Chapter 8, there were exceptions to exclusively sharing fitness imagery.

[4] Though, to be sure, I am not suggesting that fitspo exists neatly as one community, nor am I suggesting that what fitspo content 'is' can be understood homogenously.

possible solution could be an eschewing of fitspo content, to enable young women to be able to "escape it entirely".

Similarly, in *The Huffington Post,* journalist Rebecca Adams highlights the extent of "uber thin underwear-clad" (Adams, 2014) women in fitspo images to encourage women to stick to their goals, whether dieting or exercise related. Adams concedes that while encouraging physical activity can in many cases be positive, she suggests the way such messages are associated with the visuals of toned and lithe women means that "people can easily veer off-track into dangerous territory". While using the gender-neutral 'people', in reading the rest of the article it becomes clear to see that the 'people' positioned as most at risk by Adams are young women. This is attested to by the use of images of and discussions with women who had previously consumed fitspo content in ways positioned by Adams and such women as unhealthy and obsessive.

Adams' article concludes by encouraging women to delete the social media accounts they use to access fitspo content, evidencing women who had taken up physical activity classes in lieu of scrolling through social media applications. In doing so, Adams suggests that women in exercise studios can replace:

> the online images of "perfect" bodies with a room full of living,
> breathing women without the veneer of perfection many people take
> on in their Internet personas (Adams, 2014).

From these articles, we learn (at least) four different things about fitspo content and its relationship to young women. First, we learn that women are positioned as victims, damaged by their consumption of fitspo images due to their perceived intrinsic, harmful effects. Second, in contrast to the consumption of 'traditional' media, we learn that fitspo images are *particularly* damaging due to the intimate relationship between prominent fitspo users on social media, and 'everyday' individuals. Third, we learn that women are positioned as walking an incredibly fine line between being healthy through their 'responsible' consumption of fitspo images and being 'obsessive', where women are only ever one like or image away from developing disordered eating and exercise behaviours, or body image issues. This has the added implication that such obsessive practices are understood as an individual and pathologized issue, eluding a sustained political critique. Fourth, we learn the way to challenge the 'effects' of fitspo images are as simple as turning one's device off, closing any social media accounts that can access these images, and turning instead towards 'real world' fitness activities with 'real women'. This suggests that such preoccupations with weight, exercise, or dieting do not exist outside of fitspo communities; that the women in fitspo images, or that develop popular fitspo accounts, are not 'real', perpetuating a distinction between online and offline; and that disordered eating and exercise behaviours, or body image issues, can be 'switched off' just as quickly as they were 'switched on'.

Similar kinds of arguments resonate within much (though not all) scholarly research about fitspo content, that has linked the consumption of fitspo imagery with body

dissatisfaction, the development of disordered eating and exercise behaviours, poor self-esteem and self-objectification amongst women. Such arguments are commonly derived from experimental measurement studies and content analysis of fitspo images, indicating a lack of sustained, considered and qualitative engagement with women who actively participate in consuming, *and* producing, *and* sharing fitspo images. I explore these ideas in more detail in the following chapter, for now looking to draw attention to the 'media-effects' analyses such arguments have tended to take, as with the media articles above. Such ideas have also been echoed in my encounters with others when discussing what my PhD research is about; and indeed, in initial conversations with some of the women who participated. Similar to the responses Sarah Projansky (2014) received for her research about portrayals of girlhood in media, the conversations I had with others often worked upon the idea that I was looking to expose the 'damaging' effects fitspo images cause for the women who consume them. This concern with fitspo's perceived negative effects was also matched by a concern (from those with whom I discussed this research, and as I show in Chapter 5 and 7, some of the women involved) relating to the vanity and 'excessively' sexualised nature of those who participate in sharing these images. Thus far, as passive absorbers of the media they consume or share, women are overwhelmingly positioned in binary terms that sees them as either empowered by, but more often *damaged* by, the images they come into contact with.

As noted above, I look to make an intervention into these claims that position fitspo content as something always already damaging, and that should be disengaged with. I do so through engaging with data produced through an image-taking exercise, interviews and media go-alongs with 30 women aged 19-29 (Chapter 4), and in conversation with feminist scholars who have sought to trouble this one-directional, binary thinking that more often than not positions women as victims of the imagery they consume (Renold and Ringrose, 2008, 2011, 2017; Coleman, 2009; Kyrölä, 2014; Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Dobson, 2015; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015; Riley and Evans, 2018; Kanai, 2019; Riley et al., 2019b; Ringrose et al., 2019). In doing so, I argue that linear arguments produced through notions of cause and effect cannot account for the complex relations that exist between bodies, images (Coleman, 2009; Kyrölä, 2014; Perloff, 2014) and Instagram. I am not suggesting that the prominence of survey based and experimental studies about social media and fitspo images (and media images more broadly) should be overlooked (Chapter 2). Instead, I am suggesting that they risk simplifying a complex issue, and in doing so may fail to acknowledge the varied and contradictory ways in which bodies, images and social media come together: and indeed, the varied ways this may happen for different women.

To stake my analysis and arguments about fitspo imagery differently, then, this thesis begins from two key premises, which I handle here in turn. First, that women are media *producers,* not only media consumers, and thus their relations to fitspo images, the practices of taking these images and the processes of sharing these

through the architecture of social media platforms must be studied with this in mind. Second, images, Instagram and women's bodies must be understood through a flat ontology rather than through a hierarchy of being, and relatedly, as *affective,* rather than *effecting.* These two principals have shaped the mapping I trace of the literature in Chapters 2 and 3, the research methods I have utilised, and the processes of data analysis. The shift from consumers to producers *and* consumers is a nod to the decades of feminist scholarship that has sought to explore, understand and conceptualise women's relationships to their bodies and through their consumption of media images of other women's bodies. That is, I acknowledge that in taking fitspo imagery as one element of concern, this thesis necessarily sits alongside research pertaining to the *social* prevalence of women's preoccupation with body weight, and their relation to gendered and restrictive normative body standards. However, my interest lies more specifically in what Instagram, and the practices of taking and sharing images, can do in terms of these relations; how do practices of producing and sharing fitspo images within a given social media platform shape how practices of surveillance are enacted and felt? Because of this, while I devote space to feminist scholarship on dieting, exercise and bodily surveillance in Chapter 2, I direct my attention more specifically to literature relating to fitspo imagery and social media. In so doing, this has enabled this thesis to move towards a more explicit consideration of social media, and what the production and sharing of fitspo images can do.

These questions regarding what Instagram and the production, sharing and viewing of fitspo images can do in relation to bodily surveillance leads me to my second premise. Such questions necessitate moving beyond asking how images and social media have 'effects' on women's bodies, and foregrounding only *human* bodies as lively and active. Broadly speaking, the onto-epistemological[5] approach I take in this thesis can be categorised as a feminist new materialist perspective, where elements of new materialism are infused with a consideration of gendered inequalities. More specifically, the stance I take in this thesis is most heavily embedded within the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and in particular, scholars such as Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose that have expanded upon and advanced their work within an explicitly feminist framework. While I offer a more thorough overview in Chapter 3, I use the space that follows to sketch out some of the key assumptions and conceptual tools that such a philosophy affords, in addition to highlighting some of the key thinkers that have enabled the analyses that proceed this chapter.

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[5] Like Karen Barad (2007), I use this to encapsulate the way my ontology and epistemology are interwoven with one another, rather than separate. That is, the kinds of ontological positions I hold on images, social media and bodies (Chapter 2, 3) inform and shape the kinds of methodological approaches I have used within this research (Chapter 4), and in turn go on to shape the social around us in different ways (Barad, 2007).

1.2 Beyond representation: what can fitspo images and Instagram do?

As a blanket term, new materialism denotes a range of approaches that foreground the acknowledgement of matter[6], whereby materiality is reconceptualised from being inert, static and fixed to a consideration of "excess, force, vitality, relationality or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable" (Coole and Frost, 2010, p.9). Importantly for this thesis, doing so requires a shift towards a flat, or immanent (Chapter 3) ontology that asserts that "[t]hings, bodies, selves and discourses are seen as having no fixed or essential ontological status, but become meaningful – or materialize - only in relation to other[s]" (Chadwick, 2018, p.11). Such a perspective enables this thesis to move away from positioning bodies, images and Instagram as separate, fixed entities that have effects on one another in fixed linear ways, towards a consideration of how these elements *become* through one another, foregrounding a relational analysis and necessitating methodological approaches that stretch across these entities (Coleman, 2009; Chapter 4). Consequently, such an ontology is fruitful in terms of my desire to make an intervention into the claims made in the media articles above, and the literature discussed in the following chapter. That is, these ideas enable me to stake my argument throughout this thesis regarding the importance of challenging considerations of cause and effect in relation to images and media, through recognizing "that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces[,] and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency(Coole and Frost, 2010, p.9; see also, Coleman, 2009; Ringrose, 2013; Kyrölä, 2014; Fox and Alldred, 2016). Capacities for agency, then, can be produced through a range of *different* bodies, where here bodies are not considered as stable and always in human form, but are more broadly considered (though always acknowledging their relational, processual nature) (Coleman, 2009). Bodies can be human bodies, but so too can they be images (Coleman, 2009); and, in this thesis, mobile phones, Instagram, comments from other users, and so on.

The concept of assemblage is important within this thesis to understand the productive relationality that *produces* and *connects* bodies. Drawn more specifically from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical oeuvre, such work is often taken up to consider assemblages in relation to "their micropolitical consequences for bodies and for social formations" (Fox and Alldred, 2016, p.18). To consider an assemblage is to consider the coming together of different bodies, immaterial values, affects, practices and so on, that are embedded within and made possible through specific sociohistorical contexts (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Chapter 3).

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[6] While this has been commonly discussed as a 'turn to matter' (see, for example, (Fox and Alldred, 2016), I follow Clare Hemmings (2011) in avoiding phrasing this as a 'turn to' due to risk of overlooking feminist and postcolonial literature that has addressed matter previously.

Assemblages are composed of productive and relational encounters between bodies that at times may stabilize, but so too may fall apart; thus, while the notion of bodies that 'come together' may denote a sense of randomness, assemblages are both structuring in what they produce, and structured through their conditions of possibility (Buchanan, 2017). As Ringrose argues, foregrounding considerations of how and why particular assemblages come together, how they may stabilise, and what they can do, is to take an explicitly ethico-political stance as "[a]ssemblages never simply operate as a free flow of energy or desire, but are cut through with relations of power" (Ringrose, 2013, p.81). Drawing on this, then, this thesis advocates for the consideration of *the fitspo assemblage,* asking what this assemblage can do for women's bodies as they are plugged in and connected to other bodies (such as dieting practices, cameras, algorithms and Instagram) through this assemblage. In particular, I consider what the fitspo assemblage does to practices of surveillance, pointing towards the intensified nature of these through different encounters.

The perspective I follow in this thesis therefore affords the ability to assert that:

> it is not what a body 'is' that matters, but what it is capable of, and in what ways its relations with other bodies diminish or enhance those capacities (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2006, p.3).

Importantly, it is through the notion of *affect* that it becomes possible to trace these varied capacities that Anna Hickey-Moody and Peta Malins articulate and, for this thesis, to ask what fitspo images and Instagram can do through their varied and non-linear relations with women's bodies. Here, affect is understood as a concept that is attentive to movement, process and change, where through affect I am concerned with what Instagram, it's various features and images can do *with* bodies, rather than what they do *to* bodies. While entrenching this within the work of Deleuze and Guattari, I take the lead primarily here from Coleman (2009; 2015) who's work is instrumental in articulating the importance of affect in relation to images, arguing that "*it is the relations of affect that produce a body's capacities*" (2009, p.43, emphasis in original). Linking this to this thesis, it is affect that enables a consideration of what the fitspo assemblage can do to limit or enable a body's capacity to act, through the encounters in which bodies, images, and Instagram's features relate to one another. Such a perspective therefore enables this thesis to ruminate upon: *how* fitspo images and Instagram are affective (how they limit or enhance a body's capacity to act) through paying attention to the specific encounters the women in this study articulate; how these affects vary between women; and what this means for how these women are able to understand their bodies, and the bodies of others, within the context of a digital community that enacts and advocates for the surveillance and scrutiny of women's bodies.

This is important as, in shifting away from understanding social media as an object to be used by humans (Kember and Zylinksa, 2012), and that can have negative effects on their users, this theoretical approach enables this thesis to position social media as able to sustain and transmit affect "in ways that may lead to the

cultivation of subsequent feelings, emotions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors" (Papacharissi, 2014, p.22). Through acknowledging the centrality of dieting, appearance management and bodily surveillance within the fitspo assemblage, I am instead asking "what *new habits* are being engendered through our everyday engagement with the visual affectivities" (Pedwell, 2017, p.171) without reducing this to a conceiving "of causation in singular, linear, and unidirectional terms" (Frost, 2011, p.78). Instead, this flat ontology, and concepts such as affect, assemblage and becoming enables this thesis to highlight the "on-going transfigurations, the serendipitous, surprising and sometimes anomalous developments that emerge through the[se] interactions" (Frost, 2011, p.78) - that is, how do these surveillance practices change, and/or become more intense, when embedded within the fitspo assemblage, rather than other media forms.

Thus, while the starting point of this thesis may not be new in itself (a concern with women's publicly enacted surveillance of their bodies and other women's bodies, and their dietary and exercise regimes), what *is* novel in this thesis is fourfold. First, following Coleman (2009; 2015), I am concerned with focusing on what fitspo images may *do* when they are produced, circulated and consumed through Instagram, acknowledging women as producers, and not only consumers, of media. In particular, focusing on what images and Instagram may *do* here, or to consider their affects, is to attend to the different understandings and experiences of bodies that may be possible through being attentive to, for example, questions of race and class, and how such images become used as means to gaze upon others, and be gazed upon. Second, I am concerned with asking these questions in a creative, multi-method manner that can acknowledge what human *and* non-human bodies can do (including but not limited to, algorithms, images and Instagram Stories), considering their affects as they occur rather than assuming what they can do in advance (Chapter 4).

Third, I am concerned with considering women's bodies, fitspo images and Instagram not as analytically distinct entities that have effects on one another, but as elements that can become through their relations (Coleman, 2009; Ringrose, 2011; Renold and Ringrose, 2017; Chapter 3). This is to move away from a cause and effect analysis of fitspo imagery and social media, and towards the consideration of the fitspo assemblage, as discussed above. Importantly, in exploring the fitspo assemblage I am not positioning this as fixed nor stable. Instead, I am exploring how the various elements of the assemblage (such as Instagram's features, images, women's bodies, sociocultural discourses, and so on) come together within specific encounters, and in doing so "how it works to produce something" (Feely, 2020, p.179). My consideration of what women's bodies can become through the fitspo assemblage is to retain a focus on what the affects of the various components of this assemblage can do, at different times, in different encounters, and in different ways.

Fourth, I am specifically concerned with how the fitspo assemblage, and Instagram specifically, may shape, enable or constrain the surveillance practices that feminist

scholars have highlighted that women enact (Chapter 2), through *producing, sharing and viewing fitspo images on Instagram*. Through this, in this thesis I am interested in considering what is at stake for the surveillance of women's bodies, and how they come to recognize their own and others' bodies within this, when this surveillance becomes entangled with affective digital elements, bodies and various fitspo practices. In particular, I trace how the fitspo assemblage enables a more intense form of surveillance through the kinds of disparate elements that come together, which I argue and demonstrate in varied ways through the analysis chapters that follow. This requires acknowledging the important work of feminist scholars that have approached dieting, exercise and surveillance, but *supplementing* this with the research, arguments and conceptual tools that are mapped throughout the following chapters. Before turning to address the research questions and outline of this thesis, I next offer a definition of social media and more explicitly detail some of the key features of Instagram.

1.3 Defining social media

Social media has been defined by danah boyd and Nicole Ellison (2008) as:

> web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (2008, p.211).

A fundamental element of Web 2.0 (though retaining their importance since then), social media have been marked as different to their chatrooms and multi-user domain predecessors[7] due to their emphasis on sharing to constitute participation (John, 2013; Kennedy, 2013; Baym, 2015), the prevalence of prosumption (content produced *and* consumed by users) (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), and through a shift away from anonymity to user-constructed profiles to publically present the self (Thumim, 2010; Poletti and Rak, 2013; Beer and Burrows, 2013). Throughout the 2010s, considerations of social media shifted from acknowledging social networking sites (for example, as accessed through websites like Bebo) to social media applications, with the growth in smartphone ownership and mobile Internet making the use of social media 'on the go' significantly easier and habitual (Prøitz et al., 2018; Pink and Hjorth, 2012). This growing use of social media for José van Dijck can be understood as part of a "new infrastructure for online sociality" (2013, p.4), offering a changed means to engage with others. While some scholars framed this infrastructure through a hopeful, though cautious, optimism (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006), others offered a more critical appraisal, particularly in the context of surveillance and commodification (Dean, 2009; Fuchs, 2011; Marwick, 2012; Gerlitz and Helmond, 2013; Bauman et al., 2014; van Dijck, 2014; Couldry, 2015; Romele et al., 2017). In addition to these competing (though at times overlapping)

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[7] See, for example, Sherry Turkle (1996) and Howard Rheingold (2000).

theorisations of social media infrastructure, other work has focused more specifically on particular platforms. Evidently, of key interest for this thesis is researchers who have turned their attention towards Instagram. Following a discussion of what Instagram is below, I outline the themes within such research more fully in the following chapter.

1.3.1 Instagram

Instagram is an image-based social networking site that was launched as an application in 2010, founded by Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom. The app enables users to share photos and videos on their profiles, which can be edited with a range of filters. As of 2018, Instagram had over 1 billion monthly users globally (Statista, 2018b), and in the UK, women under the age of 25 are the most common users (Statista, 2018a). Like Twitter, Instagram offers users the ability to have a public or private profile, using a follower model rather than Facebook's 'friend' model. If public, users can use hashtags to make their posts more visible to others (for example, #fitness, #food or #dogs), serving to socially organize users (Leaver and Highfield, 2018). Alongside the broader boom of social media influencers in areas such as fashion, lifestyle, and family influencers (Abidin, 2014; 2016; 2017; 2018; Chapter 2), there are a number of users who have been able to monetize the health and fitness content they share on social media through amassing millions of followers, in the form of exercise guides, workout clothing, or other sponsored content through brand collaborations (sometimes unrelated to health and fitness). In contrast to other platforms, one of Instagram's key features is the image stream, where both the user's profile (composed of their own images) and the user's feed (composed of the images the user's followers have shared) take on a particular temporal condition of seemingly endless scrolling through swiping the screen (Fallon, 2014). This has led Lev Manovich and Alise Tifentale to suggest that "[w]e can think of Instagram as an archive in the process of becoming… [as an] unfinished, live and living archive" (2015, p.117).

Over the last decade, the affordances of Instagram have changed considerably. In relation to social media research, affordances have been "broadly described as possibilities for action" (Evans et al., 2016, p.36), and are useful to understand the *dynamic* and *relational* nature of social media use (Evans et al. 2016; Bucher and Helmond, 2018). Importantly, affordances do not *determine* how social media is used, but rather map out the "constraints and possibilities of mediated architecture" (boyd, 2010, p.55). Examples of affordances, then, could be the ability to like and comment on images, the visual-based nature of a platform, and the algorithms that shape what can be seen. As noted, these affordances have changed since Instagram's inception. In 2015, users were able to share images outside of the original square 1:1 ratio (which Systrom (2018) attributed to the images he had taken on a Holga camera on his study abroad year, in keeping with the vintage theme) in portrait and landscape modes (Instagram, 2015b). 2015 also saw the introduction of the 'Explore' tab, where users were shown images from

people they were not following but could be searched for via the use of specific hashtags, or based on other images users had liked (Instagram, 2015a; Chapter 7). Akin to Snapchat, in 2016 Instagram 'Stories' were introduced (Instagram, 2016a; Chapter 8). Stories are posts that disappear after 24 hours (unless they are saved into a Story highlight on a user's profile), and are positioned by Instagram as a way to not worry about 'overposting', sharing the seemingly mundane aspects of everyday life, in addition to those users want to store permanently on their feed. A further change in 2016 saw that users' feeds changed to become driven by algorithmic personalization as opposed to chronology (Instagram, 2016b; Chapter 7), with a direct messaging service introduced in 2017 (Instagram, 2017). Likely due to its visual nature and social aspects, Instagram has become a popular platform for fitspo content, driving the selection of Instagram for this thesis.

1.4 Moving forward: mapping the thesis

In studying the content women share online, Amy Dobson (2015) suggests it is crucial to *slow down* when discussing images of women's bodies that are affectively *heated up,* as signalled through the vociferous debate they engender. For Dobson, to slow down around these images that are sites of emotional and regulatory discussion is to evaluate them in ways that do not reproduce simplistic dichotomies; empowered or victimised, motivated or damaged, and so on. It should be clear by now that this thesis is following Dobson's heed to *slow down*, as rather than looking to 'expose' the negative effects that fitspo images have 'on' women, this thesis takes a closer look at what Instagram can do with and alongside women's bodies in the context of the production, circulation and viewing of fitspo images. While this will involve exploring the continuations that exist regarding women's bodily regulation and surveillance (from both their selves and others) that feminist scholars have charted (Chapter 2), one of the overarching aims this thesis seeks to demonstrate is how this regulation and surveillance may become *intensified* through the relations between images, other bodies, and the Instagram platform within the fitspo assemblage, through charting the kinds of becomings that are possible. Notably, this will also involve highlighting and exploring where this surveillance and regulation goes *beyond* diet and exercise.

Moreover, in looking to slow down, this is not to downplay the potentially limiting and constrained ways in which bodies can become through the fitspo assemblage – and indeed, this is something I cover extensively in Chapter 6 and 7. However, through directly engaging with and speaking to women who participate in fitspo communities, and paying attention to what women do in these, this thesis considers what *else* we can learn about fitspo images and communities on Instagram. What this thesis demonstrates is that fitspo content is not *only* about body recomposition, exercise and dieting, highlighting the importance of framing the research topic in ways that are attentive to complexity, and using research methods to more mindfully consider the fitspo assemblage in action. Thus, while drawing on abstract theoretical perspectives, I look to make this thesis useful

through developing new ways of thinking about women's bodies, Instagram and images. I aim to do so through acknowledging women's bodies as elements that desire and gravitate towards other bodies, whilst still being cognizant of the broader cultural, technological and historical conditions in which they are situated, offering a nuanced, empirically-guided consideration of what fitspo images and Instagram can do.

It is through this that I consider the *other* forms of surveillance and becomings the fitspo assemblage engenders. Rather than the cause of various enactments of surveillance, I argue that the specific coming together of women's bodies, images, Instagram's affordances and the sociocultural context in which fitspo communities have bloomed *intensifies* the surveillance that women are under, from both themselves and others. Consequently, in this thesis I acknowledge not *only* dieting, weight and bodily norms (Chapter 5, 6), but also the Instagram platform (Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8), the regulation of gender more broadly (Chapter 5, 7), notions of authenticity (Chapter 8), and what women look to *do* with their images that go beyond their health and fitness endeavours (Chapter 7, 8), as the women navigate an image-centric platform dominated by desires to be seen (Abidin, 2014).

Consequently, this thesis looks to make an original contribution through taking a multi-disciplinary, theoretically informed approach to think more critically about what Instagram does in relation to how women can understand their bodies through the fitspo images they share. Thus, this thesis argues that bodies, images and Instagram are not separate, but must be understood through one another (Coleman, 2009), to consider what affective investments may constrain or enable particular possibilities for bodies. In doing so, I add to a growing body of scholarship that attends to *social media platforms* themselves not as inert objects but lively, affective and intertwined with our embodied ways of acting, challenging ideas of a binary existing between images and bodies, and social media and 'face-to-face reality' (Chapter 4, 5). Moreover, I add to scholarship that addresses women's bodies and their processes of body management by considering what continuations it is possible to see within producing and sharing fitspo images, but also what *differences* it is possible to see. That is, I explore how these practices of bodily surveillance are shaped by desires to be visible, Instagram's algorithms, the ability to take, share and archive multiple photos of the same body part, the instant feedback offered by others through likes and comments, and the near-infinite access we have to images of other bodies of people who are (perceived as) 'just like us'. Through this, while I acknowledge that fitspo images are a particular subset of digital images that not everyone is aware of, nor has an interest in, this thesis contributes to feminist and media scholarship more broadly through exploring what this specific coming together of bodies, images and technology can tell us about gender, social media, and bodily surveillance.

A second contribution this thesis looks to make is in relation to its methodology, and way of studying Instagram and fitspo images. In finding dissatisfaction with many of the methods used to study fitspo images on Instagram through focusing

on an analyses of individual images, and/or experimental measurement surveys abstracted from the context of living and acting *with* Instagram (Chapter 2), I offer an alternative approach to consider the lively relations that exist across, between and through bodies, images and Instagram (Chapter 4). In bringing together different research methods including: an image-taking exercise to explore the actual *doings* of taking images, and how bodies are involved within this; detailed interviews following exercising with the women to gain an understanding of the context of their health and fitness endeavours; and a media go-along to explore Instagram *in situ,* this thesis contributes to articulating ways of studying images and social media in ways that do not diametrically oppose these elements from one another, but instead considers these *alongside* each other to think about what images, and Instagram, can do.

Finally, in bringing together different bodies of literature, different methodological approaches, and illuminating this thesis with a creative ontology, I do not look to position this account of women's engagement with fitspo images as any more 'true' than other approaches (Chapter 4). Rather, in doing so I have sought to follow feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti's assertion to stay *with* the complexity, in order to produce a consideration of fitspo images, women's bodies and Instagram that is "worthy of the present" (2013, p.52).

1.5 Research questions and chapter summaries

The research questions guiding this thesis are as follows:

1) How, and in what ways, do the affordances of Instagram shape surveillance practices?
2) In what ways are bodies able to become through the fitspo assemblage?
   a) How are the capacities of bodies enhanced?
   b) How are the capacities of bodies limited?
3) What does this mean in relation to how the young women in this study are able to understand their own bodies, and the bodies of others?

Chapter 2 offers an overview of some of the key literature important to this thesis. I begin by discussing in detail how fitspo content has previously been researched, finding some dissatisfaction with the most common arguments and research methods used to conceptualise these images. Consequently, I move on to address two other broad literatures: feminist scholarship about women's bodies, dieting and exercise, and empirical studies about social media (and in particular, Instagram). By addressing important arguments within feminist scholarship, in addition to key empirical studies about social media, research about selfies, and the commodification of and in social media platforms, I offer an alternative way to study and conceptualise the study of fitspo images on Instagram. Importantly, I use this chapter to begin to set out my argument that it is crucial that we go beyond (only) analysing the content of the images and their effects, and consider the

affordances of given platforms in our research, in order to ruminate on other possibilities for what fitspo images may be *doing* in their production, circulation and consumption.

In Chapter 3, I foreground the ontological position of this thesis by building on my discussion above to articulate the key concepts that will illuminate the chapters to follow. Through a mix of primary, secondary and empirical literature, I discuss the utility of reframing how we think about bodies, in addition to the concepts of becoming, affect and assemblages. I pay specific attention to empirical work that has fruitfully used these concepts to study images and social media, demonstrating how these concepts and this theoretical position enable new ways of approaching and understanding bodies, images and social media more broadly.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology of this thesis. In addition to highlighting the specifics of sampling and recruitment, I also outline specific research methods used to produce data for this thesis. I discuss the motivations behind joining the women to train at their gym, the image-taking exercise, the interview itself and the media go-alongs. I also offer a reflection on my analytical process, the theoretical understanding underpinning my desire for a creative, multi-modal and digital/non-digital approach, and highlight the ethical concerns that I faced prior, during and after the research.

Chapter 5 is the first substantive analysis chapter of this thesis. In *Becoming luminous: transformations, postfeminism and (social) surveillance,* I explore the bodily and subjective transformations the women had achieved, were desiring and/or were working towards. I argue that in sharing images of these transformations, and the labour involved in pursuing them, particular bodies and body parts become invested in as *luminous* (McRobbie, 2009), as sites of affective investment for both themselves and their audience. In this chapter I begin to map out two of the key arguments that can be traced throughout the remainder of the thesis: first, that the affordances of Instagram through sharing fitspo images (here, images of exercise, body parts and before-and-after images) *intensify* experiences of surveillance; and second, that it is crucial to acknowledge the (real or imagined) audience as *affective* in how they constrain or enable particular ways of acting, with particular reference to the postfeminist gaze (Chapter 2).

In Chapter 6, *Becoming stuck: personal histories, prominent whiteness and fearing fat,* I explore what happens when the women are *not* able to recognize themselves as luminous through the images that they share on Instagram. Arguably closest to the themes involved in the majority of research about fitspo, this chapter considers the more constraining affects produced through the fitspo assemblage. However, rather than arguing that the images the women consume *effect* these women, I instead demonstrate that the images women consume *and* produce do two things. First, they contribute to a broader, shared fear of fat that circulates through the platform (and the social more broadly). Second, I show how the affects of some images 'stick' to women of colour's bodies more in how they are felt in relation to

the prominence of white bodies on the platform, and stereotypes about racialized bodies. In doing this, I argue that it is crucial to highlight that images do not have homogenous 'effects' on their viewer and/or producer, but images have different *intensities,* and therefore enable varied becomings, depending on the embodied histories of who engages with them. Here, the women's gaze upon their own bodies and the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience directed towards their images intersects with, embodied histories, cultural 'knowledges' of fat and experiences of racialized bodies.

In Chapter 7, *Becoming visible: algorithms, bodies and moral boundaries*, I explore the 'economy of visibility' (Banet-Weiser, 2018) in the fitspo assemblage. Rather than focusing on the ways algorithms determine the content that the women see and share, I instead explore their ideas *about* the algorithm, in addition to exploring their desires to be seen and the regulatory norms that shape the *right* way to be seen. In doing so, I argue this contributes to the elevation of what I term 'picture-perfect' aesthetics in the fitspo assemblage, producing a range of moral boundaries for the women to navigate as they consider what both they, and what they believe their audience, finds 'appropriate' to share of their bodies. I argue this is evidence of the intensified surveillance produced through the fitspo assemblage, as such images demarcate 'acceptable' body visibility from the 'Other' girl who is excessively sexual. In addition, I highlight that a further element of surveillance women must undergo, and a boundary they must navigate, is concerns over receiving unsolicited sexual and/or vitriolic messages from men. I continue to outline that (real or imagined) audiences are affective in how they enable or constrain particular becomings, here most closely linked to the regulation of class, gender and sexuality, whilst mediated by Instagram's visibility algorithms and desires to become visible.

Chapter 8, *Becoming real: authenticity, disruptive realness and positivity,* considers the other kinds of content popular within the fitspo assemblage. I argue that what images do here is enable the women and their audiences to understand the women *as* authentic, through the doing of authenticity in particular ways. Through highlighting how Instagram Stories are used, in addition to the boundaries drawn around what should *not* be shown, I demonstrate a further way in which the women experience intensified forms of surveillance. Finally, I explore what I term 'disruptive realness', defined as such due to how the women positioned these images as able to disrupt the (perceived) artifice of Instagram through materialising the women's 'real life'. Addressing both Instagram vs reality images (or images of 'real' bodies), and the images shared by women of colour to 'take up space', I reflect upon how the 'platform vernaculars' (Gibbs et al., 2015) and the fitspo assemblage's 'economy of visibility' enable *some* content and bodies to be more readily known as authentic than others. I show that the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience here is most felt in relation to desires to be seen as 'real', where women look to capitalize on the gaze of others to become visible, though in

different ways to Chapter 8 as here this visibility is desired in relation to the women's varied political aims.

Finally, in Chapter 9, I tie together the analysis chapters and explore the key arguments, and consequently contributions, of this thesis. In addition to reflecting on the limitations that arose from this research and recommended directions for future inquiries, I explore what has been gleaned through moving away from cause and effect analyses towards a considerations of affects and assemblages through foregrounding the active and desiring body. In addition, I connect this to feminist scholarship on surveillance and women's bodies, through highlighting how the fitspo assemblage has enabled an *intensification* of surveillance, addressing the role of images and the (real or imaged) audience. To conclude this thesis, finally I discuss the implications these arguments have, in relation to evidencing the *patterned* nature of affect and this can mean for 'interventions' into fitspo imagery.

Chapter 2 Mapping the literature: bodily surveillance, fitspo and social media

2.1 Introduction

In the Introduction I argued that reframing the study of fitspo images requires a move away from focusing *only* on dieting and exercise, or on their 'negative effects'. This requires four different moves to do so; a more nuanced consideration of social media, and the specific affordances of Instagram; an acknowledgement of feminist scholarship about dieting, exercise and bodily surveillance; and an ontological politics that goes beyond representation towards asking what images and Instagram can do, and how they do this. This chapter focuses most specifically on these first three moves, handling the final move in Chapter 3.

In what follows, I begin by considering research about fitspo content. I recognise this may be unusual, as it is more common to move from general to more specific literatures. However, in starting with fitspo research, I look to illuminate the spaces through which alternative perspectives (be they feminist work or social media research discussed here, or the affirmative ontology considered in the next chapter) can be put into conversation with one another to offer new ways of thinking about this area of concern. Following this, I address some of the significant arguments that have been made within feminist work about bodily surveillance. Next, I explore research about social media, particularly focusing on how different people use social media, selfies, and influencers. In combining this research, I lay the groundwork to enable this thesis to explore what technology and images can do when entangled with women's bodily surveillance practices, stressing the importance of considering: the different users and uses of social media; exploring the sociotechnical affordances of platforms; and taking seriously the accounts individuals offer of their social media use, whilst situating these in broader sociological concerns.

While I am keen to give an overview of as much relevant work as possible (within the confines of this chapter), I acknowledge that the purpose of this writing is to set the scene for my arguments that follow. Consequently, there is a risk of glossing over particular ideas to more effectively make these arguments, and omitting some writings to include others. Following the cautions that Clare Hemmings (2011) sets out in her analysis of how narratives are made about feminist scholarship in *Stories that Matter*, I recognise that the way I tell stories in this chapter about different literatures are inevitably partial. Subsequently, this chapter should not be taken as *the* interpretation on work in these areas. Instead, it should be taken as a way for me to acknowledge the importance of such works to produce an alternative, rich and varied analyses of fitspo images and social media.

2.2 Fitspiration

2.2.1 Researching fitspo: cause and effect

Likely due to the logistical ease of analysing photos, fitspo imagery has often been researched in relation to the kinds of images that are commonly shared on different platforms. In addition to sharing its etymology with thinspo, some researchers have argued that they also share a range of negative effects, including negatively impacting women's[1] body image and satisfaction, self-esteem, and increasing their propensity to develop disordered eating habits due to the types of images that are shared. For example, psychologist Leah Boepple and colleagues' (2016) analysis of 84 fitspiration websites found that 97% of the images depicted thin women's bodies, with 92% of text posts encouraging exercising for appearance goals (such as looking slimmer). Similarly, Carrotte and colleagues (2017) and Nova Deighton-Smith and Beth Bell (2018) produced a content analysis of fitspo images across different platforms, collected through the #fitspo and #fitspiration hashtag. They found that images largely displayed specific body parts like abdominals, and demonstrated a preoccupation with appearance and idealized bodies. Catherine Talbot and colleagues (2017) have illustrated that almost one-third of the 734 fitspo images they analysed across different platforms focused on abdominal muscles. Further research has established that before-and-after images are common to fitspo communities, where users demonstrate weight loss through imposing two images side-by-side (Boepple et al., 2016; St.James and Lacoursiere, 2016; Carrotte et al., 2017; Riley and Evans, 2018). Collectively, these studies point towards the appearance focused nature of fitspo imagery, particularly in relation to normative aesthetic ideals.

Scholars have also conducted analyses of fitspo images on Instagram. Sara Santarrosa and colleagues (2019) collected 150 images through the #fitspo hashtag, arguing most of these images were posed shots that focused on specific body parts. Santarossa et al. argue the hashtags associated with these images are commonly related to feeling positive, and appearance-focused. Similarly, psychologists Marika Tiggeman and Mia Zaccardo (2018) analysed 600 images through the #fitspiration hashtag. They found the majority of images contained one person, with 20% containing images of food (of which over 90% were 'healthy' foods such as protein shakes). As with the studies above, the images commonly depicted bodies that were thin, with visible muscles, and of the images that contained women, 67% of these were posed shots. Over half the images contained at least one objectifying feature, which Tiggeman and Ziccardo define as a "focus

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[1] While some studies have explored men and fitspo content (Palmer, 2015; DiBisceglie and Arigo, 2019; Fatt et al., 2019), research predominantly focuses on women.

on a specific body part, a sexually suggestive pose and an absence of a clearly visible head and/or face" (2018, p.1005).

While this work is useful in demonstrating commonalities in fitspo images, and are similarly conducted through a methodology that uses content analysis, such research shares concluding arguments relating to the effects of the *consumption* of fitspo images, where such images "are endowed with the ability to poison their consumers" (Bray, 1996, p.415). For example, while Tiggeman and Ziccardo (2018) are cautious to not emphatically argue that viewing these fitspo images *will* have a certain effect, they still (tentatively) suggest that the prevalence of thin, toned women in fitspo images "may lead people to engage in dysfunctional behaviours surrounding diet or exercise in order to achieve the ideal figure" (2018, p.1009). Consequently, women are positioned as "a threat to other women… [, as] both at risk and the risk itself" (Cobb, 2020, p.1), with these arguments retaining an element of the hypodermic model of media influence that assume a passive audience that will be homogenously affected by the images they consume (Coleman, 2009). Through this, such research remains limited in its explanatory power, unable to consider how and why these images are produced and shared, or how women articulate experiences of engaging with them. As I show below, users engage with social media in multiple, complex ways that cannot be assumed in advance, that require alternative methods that can explore these through engaging with users (Chapter 4).

Experimental measurement and survey studies have also been used to explore fitspo images. Tiggeman and Zaccardo (2015) conducted a study with 130 women undergraduates split into two groups, with each shown either fitspo or travel images. Before and after viewing the image, the women were asked to respond to a measurement survey to measure how they perceived their, for example, body satisfaction and self-esteem. Following analysis of the responses, Tiggeman and Zaccardo suggest viewing fitspiration images led to higher instances of body dissatisfaction and negative self-esteem than travel images. Jasmine Fardouly and colleagues' (2018) study with 276 young American and Australian women found similar findings, where women were asked about the content they consumed, how they perceived their appearance, and to measure their body satisfaction. Fardouly et al. argue that women who engaged with fitspiration images were more likely to measure high for body dissatisfaction, and have a "greater drive for thinness" (2018, p.1390).

A study by Ivanka Prichard and colleagues (2018) randomly assigned fitspo images to 152 young Australian women. The images were split into four groups, including women posing in a functional or a non-functional way, and with or without accompanying text about their appearance (such as "'no if's and/or jiggly buts'" (2018, p.792)). As with the studies above, participants were issued a survey before and after viewing the images. Prichard et al. suggest that, irrespective of the pose or text associated with the image, "[w]omen showed decreased satisfaction with their body and increased negative mood following exposure to the fitspiration

material" (2018, p.795). Significantly, they suggest women who noted feeling more concerned with their appearance experienced lower levels of body satisfaction following "viewing functional images presented with appearance-focused text" (2018, p.795). Similarly, Sindy Sumter and colleagues (2018) highlight the 'vulnerability factors' that may increase the 'effects' of fitspo images. They argue that "women are drawn to content that is in line with their personality" (2018, p.1173), with women who are inclined towards thin bodies more likely to engage with higher levels of weight loss social media content. While my ontological position varies, these are important findings as they demonstrate how contextual factors may shape women's engagement with images, rather than attributing fault to images.

Finally, Amy Slater and colleagues (2017) conducted an experimental study with 160 young women undergraduates in England and Wales. Slater et al. created four Instagram accounts, sourcing images from public Instagram accounts, and categorized these as interior design (appearance neutral), fitspo, self-compassion and a blended account that used images from the fitspo and self-compassion account. Each woman was given one account to look at without time constraints. Akin to the studies above, the women were issued measurement surveys pre- and post-image exposure. Slater et al. found no relationship between viewing fitspo images and having a poorer body image and negative mood. However, they suggest that viewing self-compassion images was linked to women reporting higher levels of self-compassion, and an improved mood. This study is useful as it attempts to address fitspo images as they would appear on Instagram, though participants were not addressed as media producers, and nor was the sociality of Instagram acknowledged. Slater et al. (2017) conclude these inconsistent findings require more research to be done in this area, and while I agree, I vary from Slater and colleagues to suggest that additional research should: offer an alternative ontological perspective on images and bodies (Chapter 3); utilise methods that can account for the complexities in viewing images (Chapter 4); position women as social media producers; and acknowledge Instagram's affordances.

While the above studies are useful for their sample size and broad analyses, their methods and arguments remain limited in a number of ways. As the majority of these studies remove these images from Instagram, or fail to capture the user experience, they are unable to acknowledge how Instagram's affordances may shape (and be shaped by) users' practices. In addition, such studies risk scapegoating fitspo images as the cause of complex experiences such as body dissatisfaction, which in turn roots advice about 'challenging' these effects in terms of, for example, posting alternative images (Tiggemann and Zinoviev, 2019), or adding warning messages to them (Alberga et al., 2018). Consequently, in focusing on the content of the image, such studies risk neglecting a wide-range of issues that may contribute to these experiences (Chapter 5, 6), and as with some of the literature below, they position the 'effects' such fitspo images have on women as a consequence of how they have read them (Bray, 1996). Ultimately, this focus on

effects positions images as fixed, representational objects that are separate from bodies, meaning the affective nature of such images is overlooked (Coleman, 2009). These arguments pass over the ability to consider how varied, complex relations are constitutive of images *and* bodies, which cannot be known in advance (Coleman, 2009; Kyrölä, 2014); here, through measurement studies that assume what will be 'effected' preceding the encounter itself. I return to these arguments in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.2.2 Researching fitspo: moving away from cause and effect

Other studies have been more fruitful in moving away from cause and effect analyses of fitspo images. In analysing Tumblr, Yannik St. James and Sarah-Jade Lacoursiere (2016) have highlighted that before-and-after images were the most popular images shared, arguing that the motivations behind this may be due to their likelihood to receive increased engagement from others in contrast to, for example, images of food. Moreover, in researching 155 Instagram posts tagged with hashtags such as #BBG and #bbggirls[2], Kim Toffoletti and Holly Thorpe have considered the affective nature of particular images. Similarly highlighting the prominence of before-and-after images, Toffoletti and Thorpe suggest these images work to produce "a sense of pleasure and pride" (2020, p.8) amongst the women who share and engage with them, indicated by the use of "affirming hashtags like #selflove and #healthyandhappy" (2020, p.8). These kinds of analyses are important as they begin to offer a more nuanced consideration of how platform architectures may encourage particular kinds of images to be shared, and the feelings that may underlie them.

Further qualitative research has also explored fitspo content on Instagram. Stephanie Baker and Michael Walsh explored 144 of the top posts tagged with #cleaneating[3] and #eatclean. They argue such images demonstrate how gender and 'clean' eating are "intimately connected" (2018, p.4), due to images commonly portraying normatively gendered bodies that directs viewers towards the *results* of clean eating. They highlight many images depicted women through aestheticized presentations of gender, such as wearing feminine, revealing active wear and posing suggestively. Through this, Baker and Walsh suggest that health in fitspo communities is a "staged performance, configured around social expectations and platform interfaces" (2018, p.12). Notably, while observing the majority of images contained one person, users drew on hashtags such as #fitfam to signify the communal elements of their 'healthy' lifestyle. Taking a different focus, Cathryn Lucas and Matthew Hodler (2018) have analysed the potential of fitspo memes to

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[2] These tags are related to Australian fitspo influencer Kayla Itsines, who has produced exercise and dieting manuals and gained popularity through social media, standing for 'Bikini Body Guide'.

[3] A diet that eschews 'processed' food for 'whole' foods such as lean meats, fruit and vegetables.

challenge the normative images discussed so far. Analysing the #takebackfitspo hashtag, they argue these images critique excessive exercise and restrictive dieting, using humour to encourage users to reflect on their relationship to exercise and food. Lucas and Hodler argue that in using platform features to their advantage, such as using popular hashtags like #fitspo, these images demonstrate how fitspo content can "overtly confront narrow gender ideologies and harmful body ideals" (2018, p.248)[4].

Research by Josie Reade (2020) has explored 21 young Australian women who use Instagram to engage with fitspo content, considering ideas of 'rawness' and authenticity. Through interviews and observing participants' posts, Reade argues that ideas around 'rawness' are cultivated through affects that "move between women's bodies, social media influencers, feelings of relatability and platform functionalities" (Reade, 2020, p.5). Reade highlights that 'raw' content included producing unedited content to seem more 'real' (Chapter 8), Instagram Stories (Chapter 8), and images of women without make-up on. Through this, Reade points to the prevalence of the 'raw' body, "which reveals something authentic about a person, despite the fact that staging such content is a typical practice" (Reade, 2020, p.10). This research is incisive in demonstrating the utility of engaging directly with women who participate in fitspo communities, as their accounts can provide a richer and varied consideration of what such images can *do* in their circulation (Chapter 3). Building on this, this thesis follows from Reade through prioritising qualitative methods such as interviews, *in addition* to supplementing this with a consideration of the practices of taking images, and how Instagram is used (Chapter 3).

These latter studies are important as they begin to consider young women as producers of fitspo content, rather than only consumers. They also highlight the utility of studying fitspo in relation to platform affordances, considering how platforms enable particular ways of engaging with and producing content. However, what remains limited is that these most often rely on an analyses of fitspo images without a sustained engagement with those who produce and consume these images; that is, how can we understand the sentiments, desires or motivations that may (consciously or unconsciously) drive the sharing of particular images without asking those who share them? Where I look to build on this research is to take forward their more nuanced analytical approach through combining this with how women articulate *their* experiences of engaging with fitspo content. Next, I consider alternatives bodies of literature that can aid this thesis in doing so; namely, feminist scholarship on bodily surveillance, and research about social media.

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[4] Less optimistic claims have also been made about hashtags such as #curvyfit (Webb et al., 2019).

2.3 Dieting, exercise and surveillance

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, much feminist critique was directed towards the pervasiveness of thin body ideals in the media, particularly within popular culture and the fashion industry. For example, Kim Chernin (1994) has pointed to the 'tyranny of slenderness' that exists in Western cultures, with Naomi Wolf (1991) arguing that 'the beauty myth' has meant that "[t]he weight-loss cult recruits women from an early age" (1991, p.181). Many authors at this time argued that the simultaneous demonization of fat alongside the valorization of thinness resulted in a strict regulatory framework that praises women only with regards to their compliance with these norms, with the effect of keeping women's minds first and foremost on the surveillance of their bodies (Székely, 1988; Orbach, 1998; McKinley, 1999; Germov and Williams, 1999). Others have demonstrated that, rather than a focus only on slenderness, media images instead have promoted the ideal of the feminine body as "firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin" (Markula, 1995, p.237), illustrating the popularity of this ideal outside of fitspo communities (Lloyd, 1996; Sassatelli, 1999; 2003; Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 2003; Dworkin and Wachs, 2009).

The media in particular has been positioned as the central site for the dissemination of these ideals. For example, for Susan Bordo (2003), the effects of the "everyday deployment of mass cultural representations of masculinity, femininity, beauty and success" (2003, p.24) has led to a culture in which the norm is unwaveringly that of a thin, toned and tight feminine body. Similarly, Sandra Bartky has argued that "the media images of perfect female beauty that bombard us daily leave no doubt in the minds of most women that they fail to measure up" (1997, p.33). This 'bombardment' of images for Bartky contributes to a distinctly feminine 'docile body' (Foucault, 1995), where practices such as dieting and exercise reinscribe the body as a site of control and restriction, under the guise of 'working on' the body by eschewing wobbly flesh for something more contained.

Through these arguments it becomes possible to see a focus on the disciplinary nature of bodily surveillance, and consideration of how bodies are produced through these relations. However, drawing on Abigail Bray, what such arguments also do is contribute to the pathologization of women:

> For, if all women are perceived to be preoccupied with their weight, primarily because of their consumption of mass-produced images of idealized thin femininity, then the female audience is framed as neurotically vulnerable to late twentieth-century media representations (Bray, 1996, p.421).

Through Bray, it becomes possible to see that these arguments retain a focus on women's bodies as inert and as a site of discipline, irrevocably damaged through their engagement with media images. Through this, bodies are configured through notions of passivity and docility, rather than, as this thesis looks to do, that which is lively, becoming and active (Chapter 3). Here, the idea of culture having a

homogenous 'effect' *on* women's bodies in relation to the consumption of particular images finds purchase in some feminist scholarship, mirroring the common perspectives on fitspo images raised in the Introduction and above. Ultimately, it is the consumption of media images that is positioned as problematic in these literatures; as Bray (1996) incisively argues, women are perceived as having *reading* disorders, in addition to eating disorders.

Concerns regarding women's bodily surveillance have also found home within analyses of what has been termed a 'postfeminist media culture'. This is media culture is defined as a *sensibility*, encompassing a number of themes such as:

> the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis on consumerism and the commodification of difference (Gill, 2007b, p.147).

In this context, scholars argue that the degrees to which women are encouraged to work on their appearance stretches beyond dieting and bodily transformations into a continued, sustained labour in working on the body to *always* become improved, for example, in relation to body shape, cosmetics and clothing (Gill, 2007b; Roberts, 2007; Tasker and Negra, 2007; Elias and Gill, 2017; McRobbie, 2009, 2015; Elias et al., 2017; Lazar, 2011, 2017; Riley et al., 2019b). This has also been related to working on and improving psychological well-being and emotional states towards becoming happier, confident and more resilient (Gill, 2008a, 2017; Gill and Elias, 2014; Banet-Weiser, 2015, 2018; Gill and Orgad, 2015, 2018; Elias et al., 2017; Gill and Kanai, 2018). Such research argues that women's bodies are on display, and moreover, *expected* to be on display, more than ever before – albeit within specific, narrow parameters (Gill, 2007b, 2017; Projansky, 2014; Riley and Evans, 2018). In particular, Ana Elias and Rosalind Gill (2017) argue that this increased surveillance of women's bodies in a postfeminist culture can be understood as different in how it is both intensified and extended. Through this, they argue that the intensification of surveillance has become "ever finer, more detailed and more forensic" (2017, p.74), with extensive surveillance that which spreads out, becoming "more diffuse[,] and leaving no areas unsurveilled" (2017, p.74).

As part of this, in a postfeminist culture women's bodies are positioned as "a source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling" (Gill, 2007, p.132). Through this, women's bodies can *only* be understood as a source of power if they are in alignment with heterosexual attractiveness, requiring the finer grained and extended form of surveillance that Elias and Gill (2017) attest to. For example, analyses of reality television makeover shows demonstrate that women who participate are encouraged to find happiness and empowerment through their bodily appearance, cultivated through consumption and more invasive means of working on their bodies (Roberts, 2007;

Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). Such shows follow a narrative arc through which the women seemingly come to "freely choose a new, postfeminist image *for themselves*" (Roberts, 2007, p.241, emphasis in original). These arguments point towards questions of 'choice', acknowledging (though retaining a critical focus on) the desire and pleasure women gain from body surveillance, as opposed to only being driven by disciplinary practices. This gives ground to explore the motivations underlying women's participation in a digital community directed towards bodily transformations, in ways that avoid positioning women as cultural dupes. However, as with the perspectives raised above, some scholars have noted the lack of *difference* in some analyses of postfeminist media culture, in many cases situating the white, Western woman's body at the centre of this surveillance, rather than acknowledging the ways, for example, women of colour may engage with postfeminist values about the body (Butler, 2013; Dosekun, 2015; Toffoletti et al., 2018). In addition, while such arguments highlight the contradictions and tensions with women's engagement with media, much of this literature retains a focus on media *consumption*.

Given I am concerned with Instagram, it is significant for this thesis to acknowledge arguments that highlight that the surveillance women direct towards their own bodies under is *also* matched by an increase in surveillance *amongst* women (McRobbie, 2009; Winch, 2013; Riley et al., 2016). For example, Alison Winch (2013) argues that celebrity culture and 'girlfriend media' (such as the film *Mean Girls*) are exemplary of what she terms 'lateral surveillance'. She suggests that tabloid magazines that highlight women's 'failed' bodies due to their blemished skin or weight encourage a process of judging other women for their (lack of) investment in their bodies, in doing so inducing "pleasure and belonging, while also enacting surveillance and cruelty" (Winch, 2013, p.9). Similarly, Angela McRobbie (2009) demonstrates the prevalence of women looking at women within the context of fashion photography. Such images are positioned as sites for women to gaze upon and identify with, where this looking is only rendered knowable in relation to desiring to be *like* the women in the image, or own the goods she is advertising. However, such research on celebrity culture and traditional media overlooks the role that social media may have in encouraging surveillance amongst women through neglecting the growth of women sharing images of themselves to be looked at (Nurka, 2014; Elias et al., 2017). Moreover, these analyses continue to address women *consuming* media, rather than women as media producers (Dobson, 2015; Kanai, 2019).

Where this feminist literature about surveillance takes a particularly insightful turn is amongst scholars who have directed attention towards a more active, relational process of looking, centred in an analyses of women's talk (Coleman, 2009; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013b; Riley et al., 2016). Specifically addressing postfeminism, Sarah Riley, Adrienne Evans and Alison Mackiewicz (2016) offer the concept of the postfeminist gaze to consider the looks shared amongst women. Drawing on interviews with 44 British women, Riley et al. argue this gaze varied

from being validating to judgemental, though enabled the women to develop "an understanding of themselves" (2016, p.104). Despite these variances, Riley et al. argue that this gaze serves to fold "participants back into a regulatory framework in which they were valued through their appearance" (2016, p.106). Drawing on the postfeminist sensibilities discussed above, they suggest these looks were oriented around the appearance of the body, such as clothes, body size and make-up, where the knowledge of this gaze meant that their participants expressed a high level of bodywork to navigate this looking.

Consequently, Riley et al. highlight four key features of a postfeminist gaze as follows:

- Women are foregrounded as the viewers of other women within heteronormative sensemaking

- Femininity becomes understood as a practice that is bodily and consumer-oriented

- Femininity is evaluated through judgemental looks shared between women, meaning that there are both risks to not achieving 'appropriate' femininity, and appearance becomes the key to validation

- These features allow women to be visible in public in ways that affirm, rather than challenge, gender power (Riley et al., 2016, p.107-8).

I include this argument to contrast it with the scholarship above, as it moves away from arguments regarding pathology and bodily surveillance, instead illustrating the active process of looking shared amongst women in relation to how they monitor and appraise their own bodies, and the bodies of others, through dialogic interview data. However, akin to McRobbie and Winch, Riley et al. do not offer any arguments relating to how women may disengage from or challenge the postfeminist gaze (which Riley and colleagues acknowledge as something absent from their data, so are unable to speculate on). Consequently, while this research offers a notable intervention in considering how bodily surveillance is engaged with and enacted, I am interested in how this gaze may undergo a process of metamorphoses, or be deflected, as it is channelled and produced through Instagram.

Notably, Riley and Evans (2018) have analysed 'fitblr' blogs (fitness blogs on Tumblr) through this notion of the postfeminist gaze. Following a thematic analysis of posts hashtagged #fitspo, #fitblr and #fitspiration, they argue the focus on willing and active body transformations within fitblr posts means that women can avoid being positioned as obsessed with one's body image, or being overly restrictive. Instead, they argue that such posts enable users to "experience oneself as empowered and valued through work on the body" (2018, p.211). Riley and Evans position these images as evidence of the commonality of images that relate to the theme of 'change yourself', portraying the body as malleable through

before-and-after images, and displaying the journey towards becoming fitter. Significantly, they draw upon their earlier work to suggest that the postfeminist gaze is greater enabled through Tumblr through enabling women to look at and judge one another based upon their ability to meet specific, community-shaped appearance criteria – namely, weight loss and muscle gain. For example, they argue through the capability to easily share images, Tumblr's social functions (liking and reposting others' posts, and following accounts), and the popularity of before-and-after images enables this postfeminist gaze to flourish. For example, they suggest that enacting the imperative to transform one's body that is inherent to postfeminist and consumer culture is enabled through the ability to share before-and-after weight loss images, or slender, toned figures.

Crucially, Riley and Evans argue it is in the production and sharing of images that *heightens* this postfeminist gaze, as women are not only monitoring the bodies of other women through consuming images, but offering *themselves* to be gazed upon through the images they share. For example, through sharing these images women receive likes and reblogs that evidence these images are being seen by others, and issue validation for sharing them. Rather than positioning these features as *causing* this to happen, Riley and Evans argue they enable gazing at others, and being gazed upon, to become significantly easier and *desired* (to receive increased engagement)*.* Consequently, the direction Riley and Evans' work takes is important because it demonstrates how the features of platforms become utilised to direct a heightened gaze upon women's own bodies, and the bodies of others. Moreover, it offers suggestions for the positive narratives women attach to practices of body management, aiding understandings of *why* such practices may be taken up.

The work discussed here has been crucial in considering how practices of surveillance and normative body standards have been theorised by others, particularly given the prominence of such themes within fitspo content, meaning this thesis inevitably contributes to such literatures. Consequently, while the starting point of this thesis may not be new itself (that is, dieting, exercise and gendered bodily surveillance), what is novel are the interventions I make into this literature through focusing more specifically on what Instagram and images can do to women's practices of bodily surveillance, in line with the affirmative ontology this thesis takes.

2.4 Engaging with social media producers and users: different users, different uses

Formative empirical work around the turn of the 2010s laid the groundwork for multi-modal and (at least partially) ethnographically-driven methods to study social media (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2013; boyd, 2014). For example, danah boyd (2014) has conducted extensive ethnographic observation and interviews with teenagers, parents, teachers and librarians to explore how teens used social media, and

adults' reactions to this. boyd's work demonstrates teens' take-up of social media not as a radical break from the past, but a partial continuation of their previous social habits, although altered due to technology. Like Nancy Baym (2015), boyd sought to buffer the anxieties that accompany young people's social media use, to acknowledge the "opportunities and challenges, [and] changes and continuity" (2014, p.16) that exist for and amongst young people who use social media. For example, boyd highlights the language of addiction that frames some discussions of teens' social media use. While boyd concedes that some do develop an 'unhealthy relationship' with social media, she suggests that addiction narratives overstate technology use, suggesting "that mere participation leads to pathology" (2014, p.78) in ways that interestingly echo some of the arguments about fitspo images in the introduction.

boyd's work is crucial in indicating the importance of *context,* rather than scapegoating technologies, demonstrating that "what happens through mediation is interwoven, rather than juxtaposed, with everything else" (Baym, 2015, p.111). Through digital and face-to-face methods, others have also positioned the co-constitutive nature of social media and the social. For example, Alice Marwick's (2013) study of the US west-coast technology scene in the early to mid-2000s analyses users' Twitter content, *and* what they say about it. She highlights the pervasive myth of meritocracy in Silicon Valley is echoed in how her informants described their approach to building their social media persona, and the posts they shared, where those who succeed give weight to this narrative to encourage others. Marwick's work points to the utility of combining methods to understand digital and face-to-face spaces as mutually shaped, rather than having one-way 'effects' on one another – Twitter 'causing' an individualistic approach to success, for example. Equally, Theresa Senft's (2008) research about camgirls[5] demonstrates that whilst they are often dismissed as narcissistic or pornographic, camgirls describe a *range* of motivations underlying their online content. While some of these may be sexual, others include forging social connections, and to develop an artistic portfolio. Rather than extrapolating diagnoses or anxieties from people's behaviour (particularly with young women, as is often the case), Senft instead advocates that "the best way to initiate dialogue with any group about their behavior is to ask them what it is they think they're doing, and then listen when they respond" (2008, p.12). Following this, in this thesis I acknowledge the insights offered by scholars that have studied fitspo images by *supplementing* these with accounts of how fitspo users articulate what they are doing.

2.4.1 Social media and postfeminism

While the majority of research about postfeminist media culture has largely addressed 'traditional' media, there has been a growing shift in this scholarship towards addressing social media (Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Banet-Weiser, 2012,

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[5] Camgirls are "women who broadcast themselves over the Web for the general public, while trying to cultivate a measure of celebrity" (Senft, 2008, p.1)

2018; Dobson, 2015; Maguire, 2015; Sobande, 2017; Sobande et al., 2019; Mainardi, 2018; Riley and Evans, 2018; Dobson and Kanai, 2019; Kanai, 2019). In particular, I want to focus on Akane Kanai's (2019) *Gender and Relatability in Digital Culture* and Amy Dobson's (2015) *Postfeminist Digital Cultures.* I have chosen to detail this work as they explore platform affordances and user practices, whilst still accounting for the cultural climate that social media use is located within, incisively arguing that social media is not representative of reality, but *constitutive* of the social. For example, Kanai conceptualises Tumblr blogs such as What-Shall-We-Call-Me (WSWCM)[6] as digital social terrains where "fantasies and investments" (2019, p.6) in particular femininities are circulated. Through interviews and blog analyses, Kanai explores not only the content of posts, but how 'spectorial girlfriendship' is *produced* through posts, which Kanai defines as "the expectation of shared knowledge of feminine popular cultures, rules, conduct and sociality upon which feelings of relatability depend" (2019, p.9). Drawing on Margaret Wetherell's (2012) concept of affective practice, Kanai highlights how the affective relatability produced through this spectorial girlfriendship requires work, as bloggers undertake significant labour to produce their content as relatable to others.

For example, Kanai argues WSWCM utilises humorous GIFs to identify with, though maintain a distance from, negative feelings such as 'failing' to diet. She suggests that posts highlighting these 'failures' serve to "make use of unattractive feelings" (2019, p.42) by using them to foster a relatable relationship between the reader and blogger – for example, through sharing memes describing 'ruining' one's diet (by eating sugary snacks). Kanai's work is instrumental in demonstrating that fostering this relatable femininity, with its specific, culturally-informed values and knowledges, requires "an active form of digital participation and digital formation" (2019, p.61). This is important, as Kanai demonstrates that postfeminist values were implemented by bloggers to seem *relatable* – and in so doing, to garner increased engagement. Where I look to build on this is to focus on how images that women have taken *of themselves* may become utilised in ways that may negotiate, challenge or reaffirm particular values and ways of knowing bodies within Instagram's fitspo communities.

Exploring media content that has typically been framed as 'problematic', such as women's images on MySpace to 'Am I Pretty or Ugly' videos, Dobson argues that scholars must avoid positioning "girls as cultural dupes, or victims of negative media influence and effects" (2015, p.4). Instead, Dobson argues it is crucial to explore what young women's media practices tell us about "the requirements of contemporary postfeminist femininity" (2015, p.51), including how this is negotiated. Considering sexual image displays on MySpace, Dobson points to the growth of what she terms 'heterosexiness' as something women embody on MySpace, defined as "an aesthetic derivative of both traditional femininity…and

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[6] WSWCM is a GIF-based meme blog.

mainstream heterosexual pornography" (2015, p.40). Rather than viewing women who share these images as vain, or having low self-esteem, Dobson argues these images can be understood as ways for women to express their interest in sex *through the cultural tools they have available*; here, 'heterosexy' visuals. Like Kanai, Dobson highlights the labour involved in *doing* gender through social media, vis-a-vis the visual and textual work required to "construct normative, legible, and cool femininity" (2015, p.75). Like Kanai's work, Dobson's arguments are important as they direct attention to the processes involved in producing content on social media, in ways that are guided by platform affordances, and a given cultural context.

This empirical work illustrates the value of using research methods that engage with social media users to explore how and why platforms are being used, enabling analysis grounded in the practices of users *and* their social contexts. In particular, the latter two studies highlight the importance of researching social media with consideration of how producing and engaging with content must navigate the "affective conditions [that] are already put in place" (Kanai, 2019, p.15) – here, in the context of postfeminism. Importantly, such work also raises questions about who is best able to *do* social media labour to be visible 'appropriately', which is something I take up below and throughout the analyses chapters. Continuing with Dobson's focus on images taken of oneself, next I explore how selfies have been studied within the context of social media.

2.5 Selfies

While in the 1830s the invention of the camera enabled self-portraits to become a status marker (Sarvas and Frohlich, 2011), the advent of smartphones facilitated individuals to take self-portraits (or selfies) with significantly less cost and greater ease (Bruno et al., 2014). Defined as a photograph that one has taken of oneself (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013), and named the word of the year by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013, the term has generated frequent, and sometimes vociferous, discussion. Selfies have commonly been tied to expressions of narcissism (Sorokowski et al., 2015; Weiser, 2015; Halpern et al., 2016; McCain et al., 2016; Moon et al., 2016; Barry et al., 2017), with some noting that it is young women in particular against whom these critiques are levelled against (Rettberg, 2014; Murray, 2015; Burns, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2018; Caldeira et al., 2020). Anne Burns challenges assertions of narcissism by arguing it represents "a poor understanding of the complexities of narcissism itself" (2015, p.1720), suggesting these arguments demonstrate how selfies are underpinned by contemporary anxieties around young women's behaviours. For example, Burns argues that selfies are commonly associated with negative feminine stereotypes such as vanity and sexualisation, leading to a circular argument "in which women are vain because they take selfies, and selfies connote vanity because women take them" (2015, p.1720). In doing so, Burns suggests this argument positions selfies (and the women who take them) as problematic, and requiring regulation.

Eschewing calls of narcissism requires different ways of accounting for selfies. One way of doing so has been through acknowledging self-representation, which Nancy Thumim (2010) has argued is a key part of digital participation. Similarly, Cati Vaucelle (2009) has argued that sharing selfies online can be seen as a way to construct the self through selecting and de-selecting particular images, with Andrew Mendelson and Zizi Papacharissi's (2011) study of college student's Facebook pages suggesting that men and women construct their selves differently through selfies online. For example, they have shown that women are more likely to share selfies showing physical affection with their same-sex friends, or that display provocative poses. Exploring selfies taken by women, Derek Murray (2015) discusses the photographer Noorann Matties, who circulates photographs of herself online in protest at the lack of racially diverse bodies on television, online and in art galleries. Murray has argued that selfies could be seen a new form of visual politics that can trouble the way women's bodies have been represented throughout traditional media as sexual objects of the male gaze (as suggested by John Berger (1972) and Laura Mulvey (1989)), and instead produce images that offer alternative representations of women's bodies through their choiceful acts.

Importantly for this thesis, Edgar Gómez-Cruz and Helen Thornham (2015) have highlighted the limitations of understanding selfies through notions of representation as discussed above. For example, they argue that understanding selfies through self-representation positions selfies as an object utilised by a reflexive subject who uses images as a rational means to present the self to others, invoking individualistic discourses that situates only the *user* as powerful in these relations. Gómez-Cruz and Thornham instead encourage researchers to move away from only considering an image's content, and user intentions, towards exploring the socio-technical practices that constitute selfies. Through this, it becomes possible to understand how "selfies are created, displayed, distributed, tracked, and monetized through an assemblage of nonhuman agents" (Senft and Baym, 2015, p.1589), made up of different practices, and situated within social networks (Gómez-Cruz and Thornham, 2015; Hess, 2015). Through researching selfies across different platforms, Katrin Tiidenberg (2018) has also cautioned researchers to be attentive to the socio-technological contexts selfies are shared in, arguing that across and between platforms, human and non-human agents can shape how selfies are produced, circulated and viewed. These arguments are important as they are attentive to the particularities of sharing selfies on social media – for example, requiring Internet access, and platform affordances. Subsequently, I address how selfies on *Instagram* have been studied, foregrounding research that considers their sociotechnical context.

2.5.1 Selfies on Instagram

Research has explored how a range of users share selfies on Instagram. Using content analysis, Lauren Smith and Jimmy Sanderson (2015) and Andrea Guerin-Eagleman and Lauren Burch (2016) have explored how athletes use their profiles to

represent themselves, highlighting similar arguments to Mendelson and Papacharissi (2011) regarding the gendered differences in images, with women more likely to share sexually-revealing images and personal photos. Researchers have also explored women bodybuilders who use selfies to trouble traditional associations of strength and masculinity, though retaining some 'traditional' femininity to minimize hateful comments from (predominantly) men (Marshall et al., 2019; Rahbari, 2019). Scholars have also explored selfies in relation to feminism (Olszanowski, 2014; Caldeira et al., 2018; Holowka, 2018a), with Magdalena Olszanowski (2014) offering an insightful analysis of how feminists utilise self-imaging practices to navigate Instagram's community guidelines (which censor or ban accounts that share nude bodies). Olszanowski's work is useful as it echoes Gómez-Cruz and Thornham's (2015) argument that thinking only of users as freely-acting, rational individuals overlooks how affordances may constrain how social media is used; here, how women navigate receiving explicit comments from men (Chapter 7), and the moderation of images of nude bodies.

Selfies have also been studied in relation to their political valence, through what they make visible. For example, Tamar Tembeck (2016) conceptualises selfies of individual experiences of ill-health as a way to connect the user to others *and* raise awareness of illnesses that may be unseen. In addition, much attention has been paid to selfies within trans communities (Duguay, 2016; Raun and Keegan, 2017; Steinbock, 2017; Aiello and Parry, 2020). Stefanie Duguay's (2016) comparison of selfies from celebrity Ruby Rose across Vine[7] and Instagram illustrates how platform affordances may shape how selfies are shared, and the political discourse communicated through them. Duguay argues that Instagram's stricter censorship policies in alignment "with the dominant discourses employed by Instagram's model users (celebrity glorification, consumerism and normative beauty" (2016, p.7), in contrast with Vine's more relaxed content and regulation, may have resulted in differences in the selfies Rose shares. While Rose's Instagram presents images of herself such as a "bright, in focus, desexualized Instagram 'family portrait'" (2016, p.6), Duguay has highlights that Rose's Vine contains images of herself such as a blurry, dark video of her kissing her same-sex partner.

Similarly, in studying the selfies (alongside other images) on Instagram tagged with #funeral over five 24-hour periods, Martin Gibbs and colleagues have also demonstrated that it is crucial to account for how platforms may shape how and why selfies are shared. Gibbs et al. argue that sharing images on Instagram is shaped by 'platform vernacular', defined as the "mediated practices and communicative habits of users" (2015, p.257). In addition to affordances, platform vernacular is useful in enabling a thoughtful consideration of selfies, as it demonstrates:

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[7] Vine was a platform where users could share six second clips.

how particular genres and stylistic conventions emerge within social networks and how – through the context and process of reading – registers of meaning and affect are produced (Gibbs et al., 2015, p.258).

That is, while selfies at funerals may be interpreted as self-obsession, studying the captions demonstrated the users were attempting share grief with others. In this instance, the platform vernacular of selfies here was shaped by Instagram's affordances (an image-based SNS) and the communicative practices of users (to illustrate funeral presence, and seek support). Consequently, Gibbs et al. advance research by Duguay, Olszanowski and Gómez-Cruz and Thornham above by offering a conceptual vocabulary to illuminate the importance of acknowledging how "the architecture shapes and directs practices alongside the multiple 'cultures of Instagram'" (MacDowall and de Souza, 2018, p.11). Taken together, this work is useful as it encourages a consideration of how and why platform vernaculars may (or may not) become embedded in users' practices (MacDowall and de Souza, 2018).

Finally, researchers have studied motherhood selfies, through hashtags such as #motherhood and #breastfeeding (Zappavigna, 2016; Locatelli, 2017; Tiidenberg and Baym, 2017). Michele Zappavigna (2016) and Elisabetta Loccatelli (2017) demonstrate how mothers use selfies to connect with others, indicating that dismissing selfies as narcissistic overlooks their social, relational elements (Rettberg, 2014; Humphreys, 2018). In addition, Sonja Boon and Beth Pentney argue that breastfeeding selfies "can produce resistant communities within mainstream social media spaces" (2015, p.1761) through troubling the association between breasts and sexuality, and traditional depictions of the maternal body. Tiidenberg and Baym similarly highlight the discursive power of the hashtags and captions that accompany motherhood selfies, suggesting that studying the three together "illuminate[s] the moral regulation of pregnancy" (2017, p.11) on Instagram. Tiidenberg and Baym demonstrate that pregnant women utilise selfies to display their pregnancy bump, and use captions to tag the clothing brands they are wearing, following #OOTD[8] genre formats. Expectant mothers also shared images of the expert information they were consulting, using captions to account for their diet and exercise choices. Tiidenberg and Baym suggest that the three elements of the Instagram post work to produce a particular kind of motherhood, which is affirmed by the engagement given by other users through encouraging comments and likes.

These studies demonstrate the importance of addressing Instagram's affordances, to ascertain how they shape the production and circulation of selfies. These elements are not static and can be altered by developers *and* users; for example, breastfeeding images were prohibited due to nudity until 2015 in response to user protests (Locatelli, 2017). While Sumin Zhao and Zappavigna have cautioned against research that focuses on specific platforms as its risks "forcing a narrow

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[8] Outfit Of The Day

lens on the multidimensional socio-techno phenomenon" (2018, p.667) of social media, I instead argue it is crucial to be attentive to the particularities of platforms to understand how their affordances may constrain or enable particular uses – here, in relation to images that are viewed and shared. However, these studies overwhelmingly focus on analysing the *images themselves,* rather than supplementing this with engagement with users, and the practices of *taking* images. Next, I outline research that has explored the strategies and labour involved in producing social media content, particularly amongst influencers on Instagram.

2.6 Micro-celebrity

Through her research on camgirls, Senft has defined camgirls as examples of micro-celebrities, defined as:

> a new style of online performance that involves people 'amping up' their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites (Senft, 2008, p.25).

This definition suggests that micro-celebrity is something one *does*, rather than something one *is* (Marwick, 2015). Senft contrasts microcelebrities to traditional celebrities, as the former's popularity is dependent on the intimate relationships they forge with their audiences, where part of becoming a micro-celebrity is about 'grabbing' spectators; "to seize for a moment, to command attention" (Senft, 2008, p.46). With the abundance of content online, attention has long been conceptualised as something for users to compete for to become visible (Goldhaber, 1997). For the camgirls Senft spoke with, this could involve engaging with audiences via instant messaging, and live-streaming their day. Some of Senft's ideas retain resonance for today; for example, YouTube vloggers have been well-documented as using their videos to forge intimate relationships with their viewers through on-screen personal disclosures and crying (Cunningham and Craig, 2017; Bishop, 2018a; Berryman and Kavka, 2018; Tobias, 2018). In addition, Senft's assertion that camgirls "must brand or die" (2008, p.26) has been shown to hold significant weight.

Self-branding offers one lens to explore the labour involved in social media content production to forge a micro-celebrity status. Self-branding refers to the application of economic principles to oneself, including developing a distinctive persona through brand management, and self-promotion to market the self to others, often drawing on social media to do so (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Marwick, 2013; Khamis et al., 2017). For example, Marwick (2013) argues that individuals in tech cultures used incessant self-promotion and marketing oneself as working around the clock on Twitter to demonstrate passion to brand oneself as a passionate, hard worker, masking the labour, stresses and gendered exclusions involved in such self-branding practices.

Like Senft's camgirls, research has demonstrated authenticity as a crucial element for content producer's branding across a range of platforms (Audrezet et al., 2017; Khamis et al., 2017; Duffy and Hund, 2019), particularly YouTube vloggers (Cunningham and Craig, 2017; Berryman and Kavka, 2018; Bishop, 2018a; García-Rapp, 2018; Raun, 2018). For example, Brooke Duffy and Urszula Pruchniewska (2017) suggest that self-employed women in digital media and creative fields curate a persona that enables them to interact intimately with their audiences, balancing the sharing of personal life and work to communicate themselves as trustworthy and real. Similarly, communications scholar Sophie Bishop suggests that vloggers "perform a degree of authenticity" (2018a, p.80) in their YouTube videos. Discussing popular UK lifestyle and beauty vlogger Zoella, Sophie Bishop argues authenticity is performed to build stronger audience connections through incorporating a 'blooper real', and recording the video within her bedroom while Zoella's two dogs fight behind her.

Where Senft's arguments begin to falter in capturing practices of micro-celebrities today is in the context of commodification, writing that "Web viewers don't seem particularly interested in purchasing products endorsed by Web stars" (Senft, 2008). While this may have been true of the audiences of camgirls, the same cannot be said today. As Duffy (2015) notes, many of the women fashion and lifestyle bloggers she spoke to prioritised documenting their own consumption to gain visibility, and encouraging consumption amongst their audiences. For example, blogs often feature paid advertisements, or use affiliate links that generate revenue if a user clicks on the link and purchases something (Müller et al., 2011). Similarly, in Singapore, Crystal Abidin and Eric Thompson point to online blogshops that "entice consumers to desire and to seek, through vicarious consumption and emulation, the lifestyles of blog shop models who are young, feminine, successful and rich" (2012, p.467). Thus, while the research above has highlighted the importance of intimacy, authenticity and commodification in becoming a micro-celebrity, in attending to the particularities of Instagram, I next explore influencers in relation to commodification and visibility.

2.6.1 Influencers, commodification and visibility on Instagram

Marwick (2015) argues that micro-celebrity takes a slightly different form on Instagram, arguing that while micro-celebrity was primarily about forging intimate audience relationships, *Instafame* is about "a specific type of visual self-presentation strategy" (2015, p.139), such as conspicuous consumption and coveting particular aesthetics. Today, micro-celebrities are more likely to be described as influencers, which digital anthropologist Abidin defines as

> users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in 'digital' and 'physical' spaces, and monetize their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blogs or social media posts (Abidin, 2016a, p.3).

Research has explored influencers on Instagram in relation to how they acquire engagement (Zulli, 2017; Cotter, 2019; O'Meara, 2019), and their relationship to consumer's purchasing habits (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Evans et al., 2017). More specifically, researchers have studied specific categories of influencers, such as travel (Smith, 2019), fitness (Baker and Walsh, 2018), body positive (Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Cohen et al., 2019b), family (Abidin, 2017), and most commonly, fashion, beauty and lifestyle influencers (Abidin, 2015; 2016a; Duffy and Hund, 2019; Hurley, 2019; Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020).

Abidin has conducted extensive ethnographic work exploring how influencers in Singapore use Instagram to build an audience, gain economic capital and establish their self-brand. Her early work on bloggers as they migrated to Instagram draws on Thorstein Veblen's work to argue that bloggers use Instagram to demonstrate taste through displaying lavish and luxury consumption (Abidin, 2014). Abidin further highlights how Instagram is used by bloggers as "an innovative medium for advertising in the electronic base" (2014, p.122). For example, one woman Abidin spoke to displayed an aspirational, travel-based lifestyle filled with designer goods on Instagram, whilst accepting payment from mass-produced fashion companies to advertise their products. While it is the conspicuous display of expensive and upper-class goods and holidays that helped to build this influencer's following, Abidin's further research also suggests it is important to maintain a careful balance of sponsored and personal posts so as to maintain credibility and authenticity their audience (Abidin, 2015; 2016a).

Importantly, Abidin (2014; 2016a; 2016b; 2017) suggests these influencer practices should be understood as *labour.* In contrast to Instagram's claim that using Instagram should be about documenting life as it happens, Abidin argues that influencers have developed a range of strategies to attract attention in Instagram's "war of eyeballs" (Abidin, 2014, p.119). From this we learn that "images are more than just representations of people, events and places" but that "[t]hey also capture attention" (Carah, 2014, p.138), and are crucial in how influencers are able to develop their audience and economic potential. For example, Abidin (2016) highlights a range of tacit labour (which she defines as labour that is understated, undervisibilized and appears spontaneous) involved in influencers producing selfies to be shared on their Instagram. This includes taking multiple shots, lighting and editing, and staging to make adverts appear more 'real'. This idea of content production as labour has been echoed by other scholars who have studied influencers outside of Instagram (Duffy and Hund, 2015; Cunningham and Craig, 2017; Raun, 2018; Bishop, 2018b).

Further research has demonstrated the importance of maintaining an *authentic* persona on Instagram for influencers (Abidin, 2015, 2017; Cotter, 2019; Duffy and Hund, 2019; Hurley, 2019). Duffy and Emily Hund's in-depth interviews with 25 influencers demonstrates the tension many face in navigating projecting "themselves as 'not real enough', or alternatively, as 'too real'" (2019, p.4985). In an attempt to retain visibility whilst navigating unknown algorithmic processes

(Chapter 7), and an abundance of users also competing to be seen, Duffy and Hund argue influencers must balance sharing content framed around consumption to attain aspirational value, at the same time as disclosing personal aspects of their lives to seem authentic. While this helps develop intimate relationships with their followers, as others have argued (Bishop, 2018a; Abidin, 2015), Duffy and Hund also note that "several interviewees acknowledged a desire to break from the visibility demands they experienced, especially those deemed excessively curated" (2019, p.4990). Taken collectively, the research discussed so far demonstrates that there are social, technological and economic elements that must be navigated for users who desire to become visible on Instagram.

Notably, this strive for authenticity has also been illustrated as important for athletes (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018), and 'ordinary' users (Zulli, 2017; Faleatua, 2018; Reade, 2020). Drawing on interviews with young women in Australia, Rachel Faleatua (2018) demonstrates that 'ordinary' Instagram users must also navigate the 'authenticity bind' that Duffy and Hund explore. For example, Faletula's participants described being "concerned with appearing authentic but not literally being authentic" (2018, p.722). This included sharing 'in the moment' images onto their profile that, rather than being spontaneous, were posted after capturing multiple shots of a staged scene to *appear* unplanned. In particular, Faleatua highlights that Instagram Stories were used to cultivate a sense of authenticity, as it was perceived as less staged and more personal. Similar to other scholars' arguments about Instagram Stories and authenticity (Abidin, 2017; Reade, 2020; Chapter 8), this demonstrates how application features may acquire uses beyond the intentions of platform designers. Moreover, this work establishes the importance of exploring the strategies that users implement to become visible on the Instagram platform, including if and how it may vary between different users due to, for example, their follower count, or the content they post.

Similarly, Abidin (2016b) explores how the *audiences* of influencers mirror influencer practices, such as tagging[9] brands in their outfit posts. In doing so, Abidin suggests the 'ordinary' Instagram user also performs what 'visibility labour' – that is, "work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of selfconspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for a favourable end" (2016b, p.90). This labour is echoed in focus groups conducted with American adolescents by Joanna Yau and Stephanie Reich (2019), where adolescents described their social media practices as 'work'. For example, on Instagram specifically their participants would post images at particular times of day when more followers were online to maximize receiving likes. While they may not receive economic payment like influencers, this visibility labour may boost user's followers or likes as they use these strategies to become visible. What this labour also illustrates, however, is how "women invest their emotional energy to engage with and generate content that in turn adds value to branded platforms" (Arcy, 2016,

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[9] Using @[brand]

p.366), demonstrating the importance of being conscious of how unequal relations of power and market logics feed into the web of social media content production, even when they bring benefit to (some) social media users.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that much fitspo research does not go far enough in offering a fuller picture of the practices of young women in fitspo communities. I argued that this necessitated a consideration of scholarship that can help aid this understanding; namely, social media research and feminist work on bodily surveillance. My choice in doing so lies in showing what can be gleaned through tying these different elements of scholarship together for this thesis. For example, while feminist theorisations of bodily surveillance are important due to the nature of these practices being embedded within fitspo cultures, my concern with fitspo content and Instagram specifically has meant that this required a more specific consideration of literature that approaches this. In particular, I have foregrounded research that highlights the importance of utilising qualitative research methods with social media users to provide a depth of insight into the practices interwoven with taking and sharing images. Exploring this research has thus enabled me to be well-placed to tie considerations of Instagram's affordances to broader debates in feminist research about women's body management and surveillance, to consider how Instagram may facilitate, change or enable new forms of surveillance within fitspo communities.

In the following chapter I turn to my fourth move discussed in the introduction to this chapter to chart the ontological position that will enable me to explore fitspo images in a way more suited to the aims and questions of this research. Through this, I continue to push my arguments away from cause and effect analyses, towards acknowledging processes of becoming, assemblages, and lively and affective bodies.

Chapter 3 Theorizing 'fitspo': Becoming, affect, assemblages

Building on my argument in the previous chapter, in this chapter I outline the conceptual approaches that frame this thesis to consider fitspo in alternative ways. As noted in the Introduction, while this thesis is embedded within a feminist new materialist perspective, many of the concepts I discuss in this chapter have their origins in the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. However, I use this chapter to follow the rhizomatic connections of various concepts – to follow where they go, and to understand how particular feminist scholars have pushed their work. In doing so, my aim is "to make it work, to develop and experiment with it in order to further develop theories and concepts that Deleuze and Guattari do not" (Grosz, 1994, p.166). This chapter therefore demonstrates what these concepts have facilitated within different contexts, to highlight what they can do to aid an understanding of the fitspo assemblage.

I begin by considering what it means for a body to become through its relations with other bodies. Next, I explore affect, and what it means for a body to affect and be affected. I tie these ideas together through the concept of assemblage, exploring the productive potential of bodies that come together. I have ordered these concepts to build a narrative through them, recognising them separately but also as part of a broader onto-epistemological understanding, engaging with primary scholarship and empirically-based work that has furthered these ideas, particularly in relation to women's bodies, images and/or social media. Rather than an exhaustive review, then, this chapter provides a focused engagement with work that is productive in its approach.

3.1 Bodies that can become

In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari (2004) suggest that Western philosophy is preoccupied with a binary logic that has resulted in a number of dominating dualisms, particularly that of the mind/body. This understanding has led to the conceptualization of the liberal subject as self-regulating and unitary (Braidotti, 2006), with the body as a passive, ahistorical slate onto which the mind can project itself (Gatens, 1996). Further dualisms stem from what Deleuze and Clare Parnet term *molar lines* that originate from "binary machines" (2006, p.96); for example, gender, class and/or race. These molar lines are defined as "hard and sedimented structures which work to constrain and bind subjects in social space" (Renold and Ringrose, 2011, p.394). For Deleuze and Parnet (2006), these molar lines are a segmentation of power that work through differentiation; bodies are positioned differently through exclusionary categories of being.

In contrast, Deleuze draws upon the philosopher Baruch Spinoza to argue for a move away from understanding the body as static and singular, known through binary machines, towards defining the body through movement, and its relations

with others. Deleuze (1988) highlights two propositions articulated by Spinoza to move towards this understanding: first, that bodies are in process; and second, that they have the capacity to affect and be affected (see 3.2). The first advocates that bodies are defined by their "relations of motion and rest, [and] of speeds and slownesses" (Deleuze, 1988, p.123), where a body here is not confined to human corporeality; it could be an idea, a technology, or a social body. This proposition is important as, while bodies may be territorialized through molar lines of power, Deleuze and Parnet (1983) suggests this does not mean they must become *fixed* through them. Instead, for Deleuze and Guattari the body is conceived through its potential for *molecular flows,* for deterritorialization away from rigid forms of being*.* In this sense, "the molecular are those micro processes and tiny movements in everyday relations which make visible (if seen) the fragility and malleability of the molar" (Renold and Ringrose, 2011, p.394). These molecular flows do not exist 'outside' the social, but "constitute the social field, tracing its shapes and borders" (Deleuze and Parnet, 1983, p.91), and its state of potential. This is significant, as instead of a human body understood in relation to binary, fixed states of identity, there is the potential to understand bodies for what they can *become,* where a body's potential is framed through encounters with others (Colebrook, 2002).

Thinking in terms of becoming is about tracing the lines *in-between* bodies*,* and producing something new (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Deleuze and Parnet, 2006). For this thesis, this is not seeing Instagram, bodies and images separately, but thinking about what Instagram-bodies-images-and-… *together* can do for how bodies are understood. For Deleuze and Guattari, a becoming is not "a resemblance, [nor] an imitation […]. Becoming is a verb, with a consistency all its own" (2004, p.262-3). From this, we learn two things that demonstrate why thinking about what bodies can become is important: first, becomings themselves are movements, or "pure relations of speeds and slowness" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.30). Second, in understanding becoming not as an imitation, but as the forging of something new, bodies become understood *through their relations with other bodies*. Thus, "bodies are not passive entities" (Braidotti, 2006, p.148), but can become through the lives, affects and intensities they encounter (Colebrook, 2002). In this way, "[b]ecomings take place when a body connects to another body and in doing so, begins to perceive, move, think and feel in new ways" (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2006, p.6). For Deleuze and Parnet, it is important to "pursue the study of these lines" (2006, p.94), to understand what they can do.

These arguments are crucial as they provide a basis for understanding *what* young women's bodies can become *through* their relations with other bodies – other human bodies, but also Instagram, fitspo images, cameras and so on. Notably, Deleuze and Guattari argue that it is not possible to:

> say in advance whether two borderlines will string together or form a fiber, whether a given multiplicity will or will not cross over into another given multiplicity […] No one can say where the line of flight will pass (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.276).

This means that what a body can become cannot be known in advance (Coleman, 2009). To echo the research in the previous chapter, these arguments mean that I avoid suggesting that fitspo images contribute to, for example, poorer body image *before* having empirically considered the relations between these different elements.

The concepts of the actual and the virtual are also important in relation to becoming. As Deleuze (1989; 1992) notes in his work on cinema, this is not a separation from that which is real from that which is not real. Instead, he suggests the world is composed of the virtual-actual: that which *has* become (the actual) and that which has the *potential* to become (the virtual). Deleuze and Parnet suggest that "[e]very actual surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images" (2006, p.112); from this, we grasp that there are a series of virtuals that *could* feed into what bodies can become. These ideas have been taken up in insightful ways through the study of images. For example, building upon her earlier work (Coleman, 2009), feminist visual culture scholar Coleman (2015) considers how different screens and images work to instigate transformation within the viewer, arguing they can be understood as *virtual* potentials of a better future. Coleman argues that:

> [t]he virtual is a potential – process, becoming – which might yet become actualized. This coupling of the actual and virtual enables an understanding of the relationship between intangible experiences or feelings and 'actual' objects (Coleman, 2015, p18).

This is important as Coleman articulates that while the virtual may lack a substantive form, it is still material (it is no less 'real') as a mode of becoming. That is, the *idea* of, for example, transformation may not tangibly exist; however, it still retains the possibility of becoming actualized through particular ways of acting.

Addressing a range of images such as Weight Watchers websites and interactive changing rooms mirrors, Coleman (2015) argues these images can be understood as containing virtual potential, with the way these images become lived out as a process of actualization. To detail her example of changing room mirrors, Coleman explores department stores where users are invited to engage with the mirror to digitally 'try on' different clothes and accessories. Coleman argues that such mirror-images are potentials of how bodies *could* be experienced through purchasing consumer goods. Whether or not this imperative to transform is made actual is linked to the shoppers' actions – whether or not they purchase the advertised goods, living out the virtual "process of change and transformation" (2015, p70) circulating through the image. This work is important as it centres the relational nature of becomings (here, mirrors–women's bodies–ideas of change), and the *potential* of images that may encourage bodies to become experienced differently (Coleman, 2015).

Coleman highlights the strength of thinking through images this way is in addressing how power works through images, though not through their content;

instead, it is not what is *in* the image, but rather what the image may stir through viewing them. This is central, as through their virtual potential, images "are involved in the production of feelings and experiences… [which] are themselves involved in the production of particular ways of life" (Coleman, 2015, p.18). Where I look to build upon this is to explore the potential of particular images (such as before-and-after images, or selfies), and whether they *do* instigate change, by engaging with women who produce and view them.

3.1.1 Becoming-feminist

These ideas have found utility and contestation[1] within feminist scholarship. For example, philosopher Elizabeth Grosz suggests that Deleuze and Guattari's:

> notion of the body as a discontinuous, non-totalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities, durations may be of great relevance to those feminists attempting to reconceive bodies outside of the binary polarizations imposed on the body (Grosz, 1993, p.170).

As historically denotations of sexual difference have meant that women's bodies have been positioned as lacking, and associated with irrationality and emotion (Braidotti, 1993; 2002; Grosz, 1994; Gatens, 1996), these ideas offer ways to think through women's bodies *differently.* For example, philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2000) argues:

> the enfleshed Deleuzian subject is…[n]either a sacralised inner sanctum, nor a pure socially shaped entity…it is a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outwards of affects (Braidotti, 2000, p.159).

As with Grosz, for Braidotti Deleuze's reformulation of the body is useful as it directs attention towards the subject as "embodied, but dynamic…built up over and over again" (Braidotti, 2002, p.99). Once again, relationality is of prime importance; just as the body is open to different rates of speed and change, it is also open to the social "folding-in" (Braidotti, 2000, p.159). This is not, however, the social acting 'on' the body (as through the two were separate), but a dynamic and iterative process of the body shaping the possibilities of the social, at the same time as the social may limit what a body may become.

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[1] See, for example, Grosz (1994) and Braidotti (2002) who advocate for the breakdown of binary machines that Deleuze and Guattari propose, but equally hold reservations for alleviating sex- and gender-based subjectivities whilst feminism has sought (and seeks) to redefine and reimagine these otherwise.

However, while acknowledging how bodies can become, it is crucial to recognize what may limit this. Across her work, Braidotti (1994; 2000; 2002; 2006) has argued for this, maintaining that:

> [a]s people who come after Deleuze… [we should] explore further the notion of how the asymmetry between the Majority and the minorities affects the entire process of becoming (Braidotti, 2002, p.168).

This has two implications. First, while a diverse range of becomings are possible, we should not overlook that these are limited by "our embodied and historically located subjectivities" (Braidotti, 2002, p.168). That is, the possibilities for deterritorialized lines of flight may mean little when contrasted against the reality of systemic inequality. Second, it requires challenging womanhood as a universal category; just as there may be different becomings between broader categories of sex and gender, so too do they vary *amongst* women (Braidotti, 1994). This is important for this thesis as, in moving away from universal arguments about the 'effects' of fitspo images, I am attentive to how the becomings of bodies may vary, for example, due to different experiences of disordered eating (Chapters 5 and 6), race (Chapter 6), and/or body size (Chapter 6).

One strength of an ontology of becoming for feminist research is the kinds of questions it becomes possible to ask (Coleman, 2009; 2015; Jackson and Mazzei, 2013; Kyrölä, 2014; Rice, 2014, 2015; Markula, 2019). Notably, Coleman has explored how young girls' bodies can become through their relations with different images (broadly defined), such as images taken of themselves and the 'looks' they receive, through data produced through interviews, focus groups and image-making exercises. In response to panic surrounding the (perceived) growth of young women's body image problems, Coleman (2009) advocates an analytical approach where images are not seen separately to bodies, acting independently upon them, but one that explores bodies as *understood* and *experienced* through images. For Coleman, bodies "cannot be understood as discrete autonomous entities, not only because they are always in process, but also because their movement is always through their *relations* in the world" (Coleman, 2009, p.1, emphasis in original). In this way, Coleman argues that bodies, images and the social they are part of should not be understood in terms of cause and effect, akin to 'media effects' research (and, I would add, akin to many perspectives on fitspo discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 2), existing prior to the relation itself. Instead, Coleman suggests we consider "how they assemble and become through each other" (Coleman, 2009, p.49).

Through this, Coleman argues that research about images and bodies should not focus on:

> what are 'good' and 'bad' images, or what are dissatisfying or unhealthy bodies… [. Instead,] research would focus on what the relations between bodies and images limit or extend. For example,

what knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies are
produced through images? (Coleman, 2009, p.50).

This is crucial for this thesis as Coleman is incisively arguing that *we cannot know in advance what the relations between different bodies can do;* they could "be non-linear, coincidental, resonant, rather than…predictable correlations" (Coleman, 2009, p.44). For example, Coleman (2009) demonstrates how images can (temporarily) capture bodies in relation to how they look at specific moments in time, whereby her participants suggested that images of themselves with or without make-up on enabled different, often temporary, ways of understanding themselves. Through this, Coleman (2009) argues there are multiple possibilities of becoming through images, as these images were not perceived as *fixed* representations of bodies, but particular means to know a body at that time. That is, a 'bad' image was not equated with looking bad all of the time, as the girls did not see one image as reducible to their body (Coleman, 2009).

Thus, Coleman asks that we "move away from asking, 'what is a body?', to exploring what a body might *do,* that is, what a body *might become"* (Coleman, 2009, p.49, emphasis in original; 3.2). In asking this, Coleman highlights that the content of images did not dictate the kinds of becomings that were possible; instead, these were mediated by *particularities* to the girls. For example, Coleman highlights that the becomings of the girls' bodies were marked by the unequal relations between boys and girls at school, or the girls' long-standing weight concerns. This demonstrates two related points: one, it affirms Braidotti's (2002) argument that the body is both a folding-in and unfolding out of the social; and two, the need to go beyond understanding images in terms of their homogenous effects, and instead to consider the varied ways images become felt and known in relation to specific positions and experiences (Coleman, 2009). The utility of doing so for Coleman, and with which I would agree, is that this style of thinking "open[s] up the ways in which bodies, and the world, might be understood and might be explored" (Coleman, 2009, p.218).

Feminist scholar Carla Rice (2014; 2015) has also utilised similar ideas in her work on body image and media culture. Rice advocates moving away from biomedical approaches to bodies that seek to impose particular bodily norms, and instead "ask how physical, psychical, environmental, and cultural forces might expand or limit possibilities for what bodies might become" (2014, p.277). Drawing on interviews with Canadian women, Rice argues that in "coming of age in a consumerist, image-oriented society" (2014, p.239), where the body is understood through problem areas to be managed, the women in her study described imagining or actively adopting practices "to remake their differences desirable" (2014, p.239). Through perceiving their bodies through images, many of the women navigated puberty through various experiences "from hair relaxing and eating disorders to cosmetic surgery" (2014, p.239), shaped by their sociocultural positioning. Rice argues this demonstrates that what a body can become, and how it is understood, is shaped

by both personal gratification and desire *in conjunction with* normative cultural expectations.

Rice's (2015) work is also insightful in articulating how other human bodies, institutional practices, and physical spaces may restrict the possibilities of how fat bodies can become known and experienced. Through interviews with Canadian women, Rice argues that bodies move from being big (as an adjective) towards becoming fat (as morally-laden) through "symbolic systems, social structures, and face-to-face exchanges that taught them that their big bodies transgressed the culturally normal – feminine, fit and flawless – body" (2015, p.390). For example, many women in Rice's study recounted physical education teachers that would conflate the women's fat with being unfit, irrespective of their abilities, and reproachful looks from others on public transport. Reminiscent of Braidotti's (2002) arguments that thinking about what bodies can become does not mean thinking about the body as a free-for-all project, Rice's work demonstrates that what bodies can become can still be limited by "binary machines" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006, p.96).

This work has demonstrated what it means to argue that, and research how, bodies can become through their relations with other bodies (Coleman, 2009). Moving forward, this thesis understands fitspo images and Instagram's affordances not as separate from the body that engages with them but, as important in *what* and *how* a body can become. Crucially, building on Coleman (2009), thinking in terms of relations and becomings pushes analyses *beyond* thinking about what fitspo images cause, to instead explore how images and women's bodies (and Instagram, and so on) are constitutive of bodies and "the social field" (Deleuze and Parnet, 1983, p.91). To add to this discussion, I now turn to the concept of affect.

3.2 Affect

Over the last three decades, the concept of affect has seen a surge of interest across the social, cultural and psychological sciences. Here, I focus on a handful of key points to outline my understanding of affect, following Clare Hemmings' (2005) heeding of the importance of explaining, and not only celebrating, affect. I begin by focusing on how affect has been discussed by Deleuze and Guattari, demonstrating the utility of these ideas for this thesis. To further align myself with specific interpretations of affect, I highlight the limitations of some scholars' arguments, making the argument that "[i]t is not enough to describe affect simply as an unconscious process" (Williams, 2010, p.253). In particular, I move towards highlighting feminist literatures that have pointed towards the ways affect plays a key role in the reproduction of social inequalities. I use this understanding to demonstrate what affect "might do to the possible ways in which (women's) bodies and images have been understood" (Coleman, 2009, p.44). While these discussions cannot provide a full overview of the different ways affect has been conceptualised, what it does allow is this thesis to begin to understand how images and Instagram can feel, and what they can do, enabling an analyses that can

consider the reproduction of inequality *without* relying on linear understandings of cause and effect (Coleman, 2009, 2015; Kyrölä, 2014).

As highlighted above, Spinoza's second key proposition for the body considers what a body can *do,* where it is not possible to "know beforehand what a body or mind can do, in a given encounter" (Deleuze, 1988, p.125). This proposition articulates that a body should not be defined by its substance, but through its "capacity for affecting and being affected" (Deleuze, 1988, p.123). Through this, "[t]he body is not simply a sign to be read, a symptom to be deciphered, but also a force to be reckoned with" (Grosz, 1994, p.121). Thinking about what a body can do necessitates focusing on the relations between bodies, at it is in this in-between where affect arises (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010). Through exploring this in-between it further becomes possible to think about bodies in processes of movement and change, rather than beginning with a preconfigured notion of what a body *is* (Coleman, 2009; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010).

Thus, in starting not with an idea of what a body is, but rather what it can do, it is crucial to consider:

> what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.284).

From this we learn two things. First, we learn that thinking about affect is to affirm the discussion above that bodies must be understood through their *relations with others.* For example, cultural studies scholar Lisa Blackman (2012) argues that thinking about affect supports the idea that the body must be understood not as a singular entity, but as a "thoroughly entangled process" (Blackman and Venn, 2010, p.9). This is important as thinking about bodies through their affective entanglements involves considering how their "capacities are mediated and afforded by practices and technologies which modulate and augment the body's potential" (Blackman and Venn, 2010, p.9). Thus, bodies are not only able to be affected by human bodies, but can *also* affect and be affected by Instagram, images, or comments by other users.

Second, we learn that affect can increase or decrease a body's potential, or capacity to act (Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Affect, then, is *productive*, and can contribute to what Braidotti (2002) refers to as the continuous (re)building of bodies through encounters with others. Thinking about the capacities of bodies for anthropologist Kathleen Stewart is related to the *intensities* affect can build, and the "thoughts and feelings they make possible" (2007, p.3). Similarly, for Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, studying the body's potential involves accounting for the "plus/minus of their intensities, their incremental shimmer" (2010, p.11). In highlighting *intensity* in relation to affect, Stewart and Seigworth and Gregg allude to something *viscerally* felt that may build. Thus,

intensity can be defined as a dynamic "flow of variable strength and of differential processes" (Bertetto, 2017, p.792). These ideas are useful as they can refute the idea that engaging with fitspo images have straight-forward effects on bodies; instead, particular affects may gather momentum between bodies, with different intensities and potentials.

In contemplating the relations between intensity and affect, philosopher Brian Massumi (2002) suggests that while the two can be equated, they cannot be equated with emotion. Massumi illustrates his argument through a psychological study that showed groups of children three versions of a snowman film; one wordless, one with a 'factual' voice-over recounting the story, and one with an 'emotional' voice-over to articulate the story's emotional tones. The children were asked to rate the films "on a 'happy-sad' scale and a 'pleasant-unpleasant scale'" (Massumi, 1995, p.84). The researchers found that the children rated the 'sad' scenes the "*most pleasant,* the sadder the better" (Massumi, 1995, p.84, emphasis in original). Also measuring their physiological responses, the factual version "elicited the highest level of arousal", though reported the most unpleasant to watch (Massumi, 1995, p.84).

Because of this difference between the children's reporting and their body's physiological response, Massumi deducts that "an image's effect is not logically connected to the content in any straightforward way" (Massumi, 1995, p.84), attesting to the random nature of affect[2]. Instead, Massumi argues that images have an *intensity,* which "is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin" (Massumi, 1995, p.85). From this, Massumi argues that bodies are *affected* in ways that may exceed our interpretations; or indeed, may even be conscious of. Thus, while emotion is conceived of as the moment intensity becomes registered within sociolinguistic meaning, affect for Massumi *exceeds* emotion and "any narrative or functional line" (Massumi, 2002, p.26), as it is the *moment* of a given bodily sensation. In this way, affect is positioned as autonomous, as "a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious automatic reminder" (Massumi, 1995, p.85) - in other words, this understanding of affect is to think of "[b]odies [doing] their own thing" (Wetherell, 2012, p.58).

On the one hand, this argument is useful as it demonstrates the absence of a logical relation between "a cause (the film) and an effect (the children's reaction)" (Coleman, 2009, p.45). This adds weight to my argument that it is less helpful to assume in advance what the *effects* of fitspo images and Instagram can have, than to explore what relations can *do* through accounting for non-linearity and movement (see also Coleman (2009) and Kyrölä (2014)). On the other hand, I am left asking – what does Massumi's argument *do?* What does conceptualising affect

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[2] We could also derive from this that there may be difficulty in using sliding scale measurements to assess subjective states such as pleasantness – or indeed, body satisfaction and self-esteem.

as intensity, something distinct from emotion, and as something that cannot be verbalized[3], enable? In asking these questions, I am interested in considering what *kinds* of analysis this conceptualisation of affect makes possible. In the same way that bodies have the potential to be limited or expanded through their relations with others, so too do the mobilisation of particular concepts have the potential to limit or expand social inquiry (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013a).

Some feminist scholars have directed critiques at this understanding of always-autonomous affect. For example, Wetherell (2012), Ruth Leys (2011) and Clara Fischer (2016) suggest that such accounts make a clear distinction between the affective, material body and the perceiving, cognitive mind. While agreeing that acknowledging the materiality and liveliness of the body can be productive for social inquiry, they collectively suggest this argument risks reinforcing "dualisms feminists have long sought to dismantle…[through] introducing a distinction between emotion and affect, and theorizing affect [only] in vitalist terms" (Fischer, 2016, p.815). Such scholars argue for a way of conceptualising affect that does not maintain such a severe distinction, instead allowing for "the relays and ricochets of the human body [to] be grasped, and the visceral put in touch with the social" (Wetherell, 2012, p.12). Adding to this, Clare Hemmings (2005) offers an insightful critique of this framing of affect. Highlighting the way Massumi's argument relies on being offered as a 'way out' of poststructuralist theories of discourse and signification that do not foreground the fleshy, feeling body, Hemmings argues that this evades the way feminist, postcolonial and queer theory have theorised the body through these terms (see also Ahmed (2008), Pedwell and Whitehead (2012) and Fischer (2016) for this argument). Citing Audre Lorde, Franz Fanon and Sara Ahmed, Hemmings demonstrates such authors' arguments that chart how affect moves between raced and gendered bodies, producing particular bodies as sites of suffused and intensive affect (I expand on Ahmed's work below).

Consequently, accounts that foreground the spontaneity and random nature of affect have come under fire for their perceived lack of political utility (Hemmings, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Ahmed, 2008; Hsieh, 2008; Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012). For example, cultural geographer Divya Tolia-Kelly argues that this account occludes:

> sensitivity to 'power geometries' and an acknowledgement that these are vital to any individuals' capacity to affect and be affective…[A]ffective registers have to be understood within the context of power geometries that shape our social world, and thus research in this field requires an engagement with the political fact of different bodies having different affective capacities (Tolia-Kelly, 2006, p.213).

Like Braidotti, Tolia-Kelly suggests it is important to consider how bodies that have been marked (for example, as raced or gendered) may lack the capacity to affect

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[3] See Chapter 4.

others, or may themselves experience greater affective intensities that relate to "movement *and* fixity" (Ahmed, 2004, p.60, emphasis added). This argument demonstrates that is it fundamental to consider how the capacities of bodies may be shaped by how they have been positioned within a given social and historical contexts (Ahmed, 2004).

I have begun to sketch out that it is crucial to consider how "affect manifests…as a central mechanism of social reproduction in the most glaring ways" (Hemmings, 2005, p.551). This argument is significant as it lays the groundwork for an analysis that can account for *why* and *how* specific bodies may be affected by particular fitspo images, without assuming these relations in advance (Coleman, 2009). This opens up avenues for thinking about how particular women may utilise their images to affect other bodies, and who is (and is not) successful in doing so (Chapter 5, 7 and 8). Next, I discuss scholars who have explored affect in similar vein to Tolia-Kelly's call above, in relation to how affects circulate and build in intensity in different ways. In these accounts, bodies and affects are not 'doing their own thing', but are imbricated within the reproduction of unequal relations of power.

3.2.1 Circulation and sticking points

Thinking about affect in relation to intensity is still important[4]. However, here I foreground a consideration of affect in light of "'sticky' clusters of relational intensities" (Williams, 2010, p.253). Ahmed's (2004) work in particular is perceptive in considering not only how affects move between bodies, but also how it sticks to *some* bodies, and in doing so positioning affect "in the context of social narratives and power relations" (Hemmings, 2005, p.562). Refusing a clear distinction between emotion and affect, Ahmed reflects upon how affect "work[s] to shape [the] 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (Ahmed, 2004, p.1). Ahmed describes how affect thus produces bodies "through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others" (Ahmed, 2004, p.4). Importantly, rather than understanding affect as owned by a body, Ahmed suggests affects circulate *between* bodies. It is through this movement that "the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by…contact with others" (2004, p.10). Thus affect:

> connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others. Movement may affect different others differently…emotions may involve 'being moved' for some precisely by fixing others as having certain characteristics (Ahmed, 2004, p.11).

Thus, while affect can move, for Ahmed affects do not circulate and reside equally. Drawing on a Marxist critique of the logic of capital, Ahmed suggests that affect gains value (or, becomes intense) through its circulation. Ahmed suggests that the body affect passes through "is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than

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[4] I return to discussions of intensity in the proceeding chapters.

its origin and destination" (2004, p.46), suggesting affect is not confined to the human body. This is important for this thesis to acknowledge how *images* and *Instagram* may exist as another point in what Ahmed terms an 'affective economy'. Exemplifying this, Ahmed argues that as 'hatred' circulates in this economy, the surfaces of the bodies it touches become materialised – both the hater and the hated, or to use her example, those in the Aryan Nation and asylum seekers. The way these affects 'stick' is what contributes to the surfaces of bodies being produced and known differently: the asylum seeker accumulates greater affect over time as they become known and invested in through, for example, "sticky words…like 'flood' and swamped'" (2004, p.46) in relation to migration and population.

Ahmed's argument raises two crucial points. First, that affect can materialise bodies *differently.* Second, this happens through affect *circulating* between different bodies, 'sticking' and becoming more intense for some, including and excluding. This is key as it allows for the consideration of affective *cycles*. These are defined by Hemmings:

> not as a series of repeated moments – body-affect-emotion – a self contained phrase in repeated time, but as an ongoing, incrementally altering chain – body-affect-emotion-affect-body – doubling back upon the body and influencing the individual's capacity to act in the world (Hemmings, 2005, p.564).

In understanding affect as that which moves between bodies *in addition* to something that can shape the organization of the social, this understanding of affect *does* something. That is, it enables reflection on how inequality may become entrenched through mapping these relations, enabling a consideration of how "feelings might be how structures get under our skin" (Ahmed, 2010, p.216).

3.2.2 Images

Further considering affect in relation to inequalities, Coleman (2009; 2015) and Kyrölä (2014) have explored how the "relations between viewing bodies and imaged bodies forge, repeat and transform relations and materializations of social cultural power" (Kyrölä, 2014, p.1). For example, considering the UK government's Change4Life campaign, Coleman considers "how affects are distributed unequally and therefore appeal to some bodies more than others" (2015, p.115). As part of an initiative in response to the 'obesity epidemic'[5], the Change4Life campaign encourages practices such as reducing calories and increasing exercise. Rather than the content of the advice, Coleman focuses on how such advice speaks to and attempts to engage with *particular* bodies, in ways that embed relations of difference.

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[5] See, for example, Karen Throsby's argument that 'obesity' is "morally and ideologically driven" (2009, p.201).

Continuing to draw on Deleuze's work on the virtual and actual, Coleman argues that the future exists as *virtual potential* in these images, where this future is encouraged to be actualized in the present through taking up 'healthy' practices. Here, Coleman argues that the registers of such images affect bodies to turn towards "ways of life that anticipate and are alert to the requirement to transform into a healthier, happier, longer-living (and hence more efficient and cost-effective) body" (Coleman, 2015, p.132). What is important here is how Coleman is explicit in noting that what becomes actualized is linked to the (re)production of inequalities. That is, Coleman notes it is only *some* bodies who are aimed to be affectively grasped – for example, women (as primary caregivers) or the working class (as 'at risk' of becoming obese) – through Change4Life's imagery, words and the places they are circulated. For Coleman, the way bodies are (hoped) to be affected by Change4Life evades the temporal and financial constraints that make it difficult for these groups to pursue such practices, individualizing the responsibility of health.

Thus, Coleman argues:

> the capacity for change has here become not only one of the aims of Change4Life, but one of the ways in which at risk clusters are themselves understood, categorised and targeted. The capacity for transformation becomes a means of defining those bodies 'at risk' of future bad health (Coleman, 2015, p.132).

By this, Coleman illustrates that affect is "not only regulating social differences, but is *making or (re)inventing* difference" (2015, p.131, emphasis in original). By marking *some* bodies as having the capacity to transform, they are brought into this 'at-risk' logic. For example, those labelled overweight are categorised as different due to negative social perceptions of fat (Chapter 6), but *also* because they are marked as a 'new' category who are perceived as able to work towards an altered (healthier) future through living *differently* in the present. This is what Coleman alludes to by *(re)inventing difference;* those who are impelled to change, but do not, risk additional stigma due to failing to actualize becoming better citizens. Coleman's framing of affect is crucial in thinking about what Ahmed and Hemmings refer to as the 'doubling back' of bodies and affect in producing the social, in addition to incisively mapping how relations of power flow through highlighting how the affects of images can shape the possibilities of living for *some* bodies (Coleman, 2015).

Feminist media scholar Katariina Kyrölä (2014) has also explored affect and bodies through addressing portrayals of fat in the media, arguing that as these images circulate, "the more societal weight they can carry, making bodies visible and comprehensible as certain kinds of bodies" (Kyrölä, 2014, p.1). One example Kyrölä explores is weight-loss reality TV shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, describing these shows as "an affective loop into which viewers are invited…[where] the loop disguises itself as a promise, a linear narrative from disgust and shame to pride" (Kyrölä, 2014, p.61). While acknowledging the shows promise a "healthier, more confident, skilful [and] fully realised" (2014, p.74) self through weight loss, for

Kyrölä these cannot fully "explain the appeal of dieting narratives" (2014, p.74). What is also required is the creation of:

> moments of bodies as spectacles on display, moments of heightened, even unbearable affective intensity, which function to gather momentum for the narrative to move in a certain direction (Kyrölä, 2014, p.75).

These are moments marked by disgust and shame: stomachs stretching against tight clothing, and shots of the oft used trope of 'headless fatties' (see Cooper (2007)). As bodies lose weight through gruelling exercise and dietary regimes, the later shots use uplifting music, show bodies in bright lighting and focus in on family members smiling proudly at the participant's 'improved' body.

Notably, Kyrölä highlights that for these moments to be felt through moments of disgust and pride requires a collective investment in fat and slim bodies. Consequently, Kyrölä's analysis is insightful in raising the importance of *audiences* in producing "affect: through them, the display of shame and shaming becomes public and intensified, and they function as the necessary audience for the display of pride" (2014, p.76). Through this, Kyrölä is considering *how* affect gathers momentum; for her, images must be *seen* by audiences, *and* recognised through shared understandings for affects to stick. For example, these shows require a shared idea in fat bodies as immoral and unhealthy for such images to *be* points of 'sticky' affect. This is vital for this thesis as it raises questions relating to *why* particular images may become felt with greater intensity; for example, whether images become felt to a greater extent due to shared investments in particular ideas, and/or when shared by influencers with larger followings.

Like the feminist scholars above, Kyrölä thus understands affect through relations that are "constantly reforming, but not…proliferating freely" (Kyrölä, 2014, p.18). However, Kyrölä also perceives images and bodies as "analytically separate entities" (2014, p.17), marking her analysis as partially distinct from Coleman's (2009) work. Kyrölä argues that:

> important aspects may be lost, if bodies and images are seen as transforming and moving freely on an affective plane of immanence…it would be easy to lose… audiovisual, visual and textual narration and address in different contexts…[and] the…repetitiveness…in media images (Kyrölä, 2014, p.17).

Returning to a detailed discussion of immanence in Chapter 4, Kyrölä is referring to Coleman's analyses being underpinned by Deleuze's (2001) refusal to distinguish between subjects and objects; for example, between images and bodies. Considering a plane of immanence for Deleuze (2001) is to challenge the hierarchy that exists between different bodies. For Coleman specifically, this enables her to consider what images and bodies can do in relation *with* one another, rather than *on* one another. In aligning with Coleman's arguments, I find Kyrölä's separation untenable; in moving away from media effects (where an object acts upon the

subject), it is important to offer an ontology that does *not* separate the two. However, this is not to see images as divorced from social context, moving 'freely' on a plane of immanence as Kyrölä notes. That is, while Coleman's (2009) work challenges the distinction between images and bodies, this is still embedded within an acknowledgement of what may constrain becomings, such as relations of inequality, and the different contexts that shapes these becomings (for example, through considering how images affect bodies differently). Thus, while I share with Kyrölä her commitment to acknowledging the inequalities that circulate and are produced through affect, this thesis begins from the position that it is possible to so *through* foregrounding notions of immanence (Chapter 4).

I have used this section to map out other scholars' analyses of how affect may "(re)produce dominant social and geo-political hierarchies and exclusions" (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012, p.120). Through this, I have offered work that demonstrates how affect may 'stick' to particular bodies over time, favouring an onto-epistemological position that does not position affect as only ever autonomous, and that advocates for challenging the separation between bodies and images (nor the technology used to engage with them). Next, I discuss the concept of assemblage to justify this by foregrounding scholars that have researched social media through the concept of assemblage.

3.3 What can an assemblage do?

The final theoretical concept I outline here is that of the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari argue that:

> assemblages have elements (or multiplicities) of several kinds: human, social, and technical machines…We can no longer even speak of distinct machines, only types of interpenetrating multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.40-41).

Here, Deleuze and Guattari point towards the relational nature of assemblages, and the flux between their elements. I have already emphasized that Deleuze and Guattari suggest we think of a body not as unitary and fixed, but as continually produced through its relations with others. Taking this further, *the body* for Deleuze and Guattari is an assemblage. It is "an aggregate whose elements vary according to its connections, its relations of movement and rest, the different individuated assemblages it enters" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.282). Thinking of bodies as both part of various assemblages *and as an assemblage itself* is to understand bodies as:

> collections of disparate flows, materials, impulses, intensities and practices, which congeal under particular and specific conditions, in complex relations with the flows and intensities of surrounding objects, to produce transitory but functional assemblages (Currier, 2003, p.326).

Bodies are thus understood as assemblages insofar as they come together and (temporarily) stabilize as a body under specific conditions. For example, sport

scholar Pirkko Markula (2019) suggests that in unpicking the 'physically inactive' body as an assemblage we can see *how* this body comes to be recognized as unhealthy through intangible values (such as Western ideals of health and appearance), material elements (such as measurements and definitions), and bodily practices (being sedentary). While these elements can fall apart, in coming together they are *productive* of a body. To build on the work above, *particular bodies* are more likely to be produced as 'physically inactive' through this assemblage – for example, those who are 'overweight' due to sociohistorical constructions of weight, fat and health (Chapter 6).

Continuing with this example, for cultural theorist Ian Buchanan (2017), it is important to consider not only the elements of an assemblage, but what these assemblages *structure* (the physically inactive body), and what these assemblages are structured by (specific technologies, normative understandings of health, and so on). Buchanan suggests that to understand an assemblage, researchers:

> should (1) seek to determine the specific conditions under which matter becomes material…[and] (2) seek to determine the specific conditions under which semiotic matter becomes expressive…[where] 'becoming expressive'…does not mean simply that something has acquired meaning(s) in the semiotic sense…[but that] it has acquired a performative function (Buchanan, 2017, p.472).

In this vein, adding to Markula's example, I may ask: how do specific materials such as activity trackers that assess calories burned become recognized as an adequate measurement of physical activity? How do weight and physical activity acquire a performative function in relation to health, ability and citizenship? That the physically inactive body assemblage *can* come together is thus dependent on an array of social, cultural, historical, moralising and technical elements; assemblages do not, therefore, come together randomly (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004).

Health scholar Cameron Duff (2014) shares Buchanan's idea that it is "assemblages that explain the existence of things in the world" (Buchanan, 2017, p.463), through what does or does not come together. In particular, Duff explores what a given assemblage can make possible in the context of mental illness recovery, arguing that the "assemblages of health in which recovery is enacted or performed always contain social, material and affective forces, [and] bodies" (2014, p.100). Thus, rather than thinking of health as fixed, the health assemblage enables considerations of how 'becoming healthy' (or here, recovered) acquires meaning and may stabilise. Drawing on case studies with Australians, Duff looks to "reframe recovery in terms of the broad assemblages of health which sustain recovery in particular territories or milieus" (Duff, 2014, p.94).

Utilising interviews, ethnography and visual methods, Duff has explored "the human and nonhuman constituents of the varied assemblages of health" (2014, p.108), arguing that recovery is not something that happens *to* a body, but something that stabilises through relational, affective encounters. For example,

many of Duff's participants echoed the importance of community participation to support their recovery, stressing the links between specific places (such as restaurants) and social inclusion. For Duff, these examples demonstrate that "[i]n acquiring novel social parts, the body of recovery grows, 'becoming well' to the extent that each social interaction furnishes resources in the process of recovery" (Duff, 2014, p.113). Duff highlights that when participants were asked to describe their favourite places, they highlighted "an array of distinctive feeling states, as well of some sense of empowerment or motivation, an enhanced capacity to act" (Duff, 2014, p.115). Thus, the body *becomes* recovered through its relations with others in an assemblage, such as places and feelings, each with capacities to affect and be affected.

As well as physical spaces, Duff demonstrates the importance of possessions in this assemblage; for example, retail therapy at charity shops. This echoes Buchanan's argument that not only do assemblages *structure,* they are also *structured*: from this example we could infer that the conditions of a consumer society that demarcates the acquisition of consumer items as important (Bauman, 2007) shapes these conditions of recovery. These have the capacity to structure recovery (how people become recovered), in addition to being structured by other conditions (such as, for example, social interaction and consumption as a societal norms), illustrating how the social unfolds through these assemblages as it in turn is folded in (Duff, 2014).

Duff's research is rich in providing an example of *how* these ideas can aid our understanding of the individual body and the social body, foregrounding the transient nature of assemblages, and how they are dependent on material objects, human bodies, affects and ideas. Building on this, in this thesis I look to explore *the fitspo assemblage*, considering not only its elements, but also what it structures (in terms of what a body can become), and what it may be structured by. Next, I foreground research to advance these ideas by exploring assemblages in relation to social media research.

3.3.1 Social media-bodies-technology-and-and…

The concept of assemblage has been highlighted as valuable in researching technology, enabling "a new means of thinking both bodies and technologies and the conditions of their intersections" (Currier, 2003, p.324) through exploring what these conditions are, and what they enable. Understanding assemblages as "the provisional linkages of…ideas, things – human, animate, and inanimate – [that] all have the same ontological status" (Grosz, 1994, p.167) means that phones, images, algorithms, and human bodies *all* have capacities to affect/be affected. In this vein, social media is not understood as a separate object used by humans, but within assemblages with human bodies, and so becomes understood as co-constitutive, relational and agentic (Kember and Zylinksa, 2012; Paasonen et al., 2015).

Such an understanding foregrounds an acknowledgement of our affective entanglements with social media, and the social and political implications of these (Van Doorn, 2011; Kember and Zylinksa, 2012; Postill and Pink, 2012; Paasonen et al., 2015; Pink et al., 2016; Andreassen et al., 2018; Fullagar et al., 2018). Echoing arguments made by feminist technology scholars such as Katherine Hayles (1999), Donna Haraway (1990) and Dianne Currier (2003), new media scholars Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinksa argue that media technologies "have become a part of us, to the extent that the us/them distinction is no longer tenable" (2012, p.13). This argument is important is it enables an understanding that can consider how "visual digital media [have] become folded into our embodied habits and modes of perception" (Pedwell, 2017, p.158). Similarly, Susanna Paasnonen and colleagues argue that because our connections to media technologies are often "near constant [and] prosthetic", this requires we address "the affective underpinnings of human-machine relations and the complex forms of agency that arise" (Paasonen et al., 2015, p.2). These ideas are significant to help consider *what* may hang together in the fitspo assemblage, as they recognize mobile phones and cameras as "intersecting and intertwining with our daily lives, our bodily and intimate practices, and our relationships" (Andreassen et al., 2018, p.1), and thus how this may shape the capacities of bodies.

Related to technology, platform *architecture* is a further crucial aspect in considering social media and assemblages; the architecture itself can affect and be affected. A growing concentration of research has addressed affect in relation to social media: for example, exploring how affect accumulates and intensifies across different platforms (Cho, 2015; Dean, 2015; Paasonen, 2015; Pybus, 2015; Coleman, 2018; Kofoed, 2018); the affective labour of users (Holowka, 2018b; Raun, 2018; Kanai, 2019) and the affective nature of sharing images of bodies online (Tiidenberg and Gómez-Cruz, 2015; Warfield, 2016, 2017; Lupton, 2017; Hakim, 2018; Riley and Evans, 2018; Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2020; van der Nagel, 2020). Affect has also been explored in relation to algorithms (Bucher, 2013, 2017, 2018; Carah and Dobson, 2016; Chapter 7); users who capitalize on 'negative' affect (Berryman and Kavka, 2018; Dobson, 2014; Holowka, 2018a; Chapter 8); and hashtags as mobilization of affect (Papacharissi, 2016; Rentschler, 2017; Fullagar et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). Returning to some of these studies in the chapters that follow, I focus specifically here on scholars that highlight *platform affordances* as affective *and* affected, to enable this thesis to explore what they may do in the fitspo assemblage.

New media researcher Neils Van Doorn (2011) explores the platform MySpace[6] in this vein. He argues that the images, text and music that make up a MySpace profile must not be understood as a representational copy of the user, but as having agentic potential. That is, it is through profiles that:

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[6] MySpace is a social networking site that was popular in the mid-2010s.

friends experience and perform their embodied affection for one another, producing digital conceptions of the gendered and sexualized self/other that are highly specific to the socio-technical assemblage from which they arise (Van Doorn, 2011, p.536).

For Van Doorn, gender and sexuality are conceived of as "partly 'virtual' phenomena…[that] constitute a variety of events, affects, ideals and regulatory norms that are repeatedly *actualized"* (Van Doorn, 2011, p.534, emphasis in original) through this socio-technical assemblage. For example, blogs and images are ways "that gender and sexuality can be visually articulated" (2011, p.538), and made actual. While thinking in terms of potential in how non-normative genders and sexualities could become actualized, Van Doorn concedes that within his research, these articulations rarely veered from conventional norms. Van Doorn partially attributes this to the commodification of MySpace that constrains what content can be shared, demonstrating the importance of thinking about what assemblages may be *limited* by. Building on this, I would argue it is also pertinent to explore what can be produced through a social media assemblage due to technological and design shifts; how do changes from computers to mobile phones shape what can be materialized through digitally mediated encounters?

Similarly, communication scholar Taina Bucher (2013) explores what she has termed the 'friendship assemblage' on Facebook. Bucher suggests this friendship assemblage constitutes "*programmed sociality…*[, which is] understood as a process of sociotechnical engagement between users an software" (2013, p.490-1, emphasis in original). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Bucher positions friendship on Facebook as assembled through Facebook's architecture and users. For example, Bucher highlights how the People You May Know feature that appears to prompt users to add others by showing them their profile pictures, names and mutual friends is driven by algorithms that determine the compatibility between users. In this sense, "algorithms can be considered actors in the sense that they prompt action" (Bucher, 2013, p.483); or, the capacity to affect whether or not friendships take place. Existence on Facebook for Bucher only becomes meaningful through accumulating friends, leading to a range of "subtle ways in which the software thus pushes, reminds, and introduces users to each other" (Bucher, 2013, p.486) within the friendship assemblage.

Acknowledging the co-constitutive nature of digital and face-to-face environments is a further key element in understanding social media assemblages. In particular, Jessica Ringrose has conducted extensive work along these onto-epistemogical lines within schools (2011; Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Kofoed and Ringrose, 2012; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013b; Handyside and Ringrose, 2017; Renold and Ringrose, 2017; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015). Through this, Ringrose highlights the utility of ideas such as affect and assemblage as they "foreground the complex and shifting dynamics of power and desire at work in social media school-based friend groups" (Handyside and Ringrose, 2017, p.351). Like Van Doorn, Ringrose (2011) argues that social media should not be viewed as exemplary of uninhibited self-

expression, but as something that can *mediate* and *intensify* power dynamics. Focusing on Bebo[7], Ringrose argues that personal expression through Bebo's features such as 'skins' (profile backgrounds), and pictures are "constrained through striations that cohere around commercialized norms of consumption and physical embodied ideals" (Ringrose, 2011, p.603). For example, while the skins young men used tied masculinity to the purchase of cars and designer shoes, skins utilised by young women mapped femininity as being passive, and therefore sexually desirable.

Importantly, Ringrose's work highlights these digital striations are not confined to the platform, but can intensify "the performance of femininity and masculinity at school" (Ringrose, 2011, p.604). Within the interviews she conducted, discussion centred upon the labour of producing (idealized) femininity, such as the 'right' way to do one's hair and make-up for school and for taking selfies. Ringrose links this to the image-centred aspects of Bebo, and the comments received on images from school peers (such as "'Hello Sexy'" and "'well ugly', 'slag'" (Ringrose, 2011, p.605). This example demonstrates how the Bebo assemblage *intensifies* "existing gendered and sexualized affective relations, in ways that harden striations of…social hierarchies at school" (Ringrose, 2011, p.602) through the affirmation of molar identities.

Similarly, Emma Renold and Ringrose's (2017) study considers how the circulation of images of body parts across school-social media assemblages shapes how bodies become understood as gendered and/or sexualized. While girls risked being perceived as 'slaggy' through sharing images of their breasts or 'relfies' (rear selfies), boys who were able to attach themselves "to a 'sexy' image of a girl via the process of tagging…[were able to] actualize rewards" (Renold and Ringrose, 2017, p.1069) through status and peer approval. Renold and Ringrose point to the *hierarchical economy of value* that is produced through this assemblage of comments, images, gendered norms and values, the school setting and so on. Importantly, both these examples do not position social media as the *cause* of these unequal gender and sexual relations. Instead, this research highlights:

> the underlying gendered discourses and power that enable a context
> where girls' mediated body parts (e.g. images of breasts) are highly
> valued as commodities, where it is possible for such images [for boys]
> to be traded like currency (Ringrose et al., 2013, p.320).

That is, it is not the consumption of social media that *caused* girls' body parts to be sexualised, but cultural discourses regarding *which* body parts are understood as sexual already inform young people's consumption of social media. Ringrose demonstrates how a platform's capabilities have the capacity to intensify *already unequal* gender dynamics, exemplifying how the politics within school become magnified by a platform's features (such as commenting, or sharing images easily) *and* broader cultural values relating to gender, sexuality and bodily value. What

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[7] Bebo was a social networking site popular in the mid-2000s.

Ringrose highlights, then, is what may *condition* what an assemblage can or cannot produce.

The concept of assemblage also allows for a consideration of potential subversion to molar forms of power. Jette Kofoed and Ringrose (2012) discuss the example of the mobilisation of the word 'slut' amongst school peers, arguing these words were saturated "with an affective force that made the girls lives temporarily unliveable" (Kofoed and Ringrose, 2012, p.15). However, Kofoed and Ringrose suggest that Bebo offered "a virtual space, and affective movement and molecular line of flight away from the pejorative bodily capture of 'slut'" (Kofoed and Ringrose, 2012, p.15) for two of their participants named Danielle and Louise. Through changing their usernames to 'slut' and 'whore', and referring to each other in these terms online, Kofoed and Ringrose argue the girls were able to challenge their affective force through divorcing them from 'unacceptable' sexuality. However, Kofoed and Ringrose take care to highlight that these girls may have been more able to blur these boundaries through being "aligned with many of the norms of whiteness and beauty in Western media contexts" (2012, p.16), in addition to Danielle's relationship with a popular boy (where when they broke up, these words were removed from her profile). While potential exists, they concede that in this example, social perceptions of bodily appearance, class and race could make such terms "more difficult to manouver" (2012, p.16).

Considering social media *assemblages* is therefore valuable in challenging "the hierarchy of human/non-human relations" (Allen, 2015, p.126), and in illustrating how interactions with media are "dimensions of an active, ongoing process" (Buchanan, 2017, p.471) that are subject to change. Thus, the consideration of the fitspo assemblage in this thesis offers a persuasive way to consider new ways of thinking about fitspo images, being attentive to the elements within the assemblage such as platform architecture, images, human bodies and shared social values (and so on) that may come together to be productive in different ways.

3.4 Conclusion

In the introduction to *Deleuze and Feminist Theory,* Claire Colebrook suggests that:

> When confronted with a theory or body of thought, feminism has
> tended to ask an intensely active question. Not 'What does it mean?',
> but 'How does it work?'. What can this concept or theory do?
> (Colebrook, 2000, p.8).

Likewise, here I have asked what particular concepts can do for this thesis, and what kinds of framings they enable, demonstrating how the concept of affect, becomings and assemblages are fruitful in enabling alternative considerations of fitspo images. In doing so, I have highlighted a range of scholarship to show the utility in considering bodies as produced and understood *through* their affective relations with other bodies - that cannot be known in advance –, which have the potential to expand or limit capacities for action through coming together in

different assemblages. Moreover, I have argued the concepts discussed here are particularly suited to consider what fitspo images on *Instagram* can do – enabling a consideration of how these images are produced, viewed and circulated, and Instagram's affordances. These concepts are therefore useful to consider Instagram not as a definitive break from 'old' media, nor fitspo practices as a definitive break from 'older' bodily surveillance, but to address their continuities and changes to consider what *new* conditions emerge as these different elements collide – but also what limits may already be set in place.

In framing my research through these concepts, I have been following Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) call to think rhizomatically, foregrounding the 'and…and…and'. That is, how do women's bodies become through the fitspo assemblage - through technology, and images, and cameras, and other bodies, and Instagram, and so on? In the following chapter, I outline the creative and multi-method approach required to show how these concepts may 'work' in relation to my methodology.

Chapter 4 Research design and methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology of this thesis. 30 women participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews, a photo-taking exercise and media 'go-alongs' of their Instagram account. First, I focus on sampling and recruitment, before evaluating my methodological choices and analytical approach. Next, I outline my feminist epistemology and provide more detail to the theoretical approach discussed in the previous chapter, to address how the two shaped my methodology, illustrating how my onto-epistemology shapes: the questions it is possible to ask; how data can be understood; and the kinds of analysis that can be conducted. Finally, I reflect upon the ethical considerations I encountered, and highlight the limitations of this research.

4.1 Research outline

4.1.1 Sampling and recruitment

30 women aged 19-29 took part in this research (Appendix A). Given this research is not driven by making generalizable claims, but producing rich data, a smaller sample is justifiable as it enabled the exploration of topics in detail (Mason, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2013). All of the women lived in England, with the majority residing in urban areas. After gaining ethical approval from the University of Leeds (AREA 17-153), recruitment took place through an Instagram account created for this research (@lrmresearch). Through @lrmresearch, I circulated a call for participants (Appendix E) and contacted women who fit the sampling criteria (women aged 16-30 who share and view 'fitspo' images on Instagram), making the sampling procedure purposive due to the sample having characteristics suitable for the research (Ritchie et al., 2013). Some participants were recruited through snowball sampling, whereby participants passed on my contact details to others. Relatedly, following the interview, I asked the women if they would share an image they had taken with me to their profile. This served two purposes: first, to boost the visibility of the research, as digital fitness communities have been shown to be communicative with one another (Jong and Drummond, 2015; St.James and Lacoursiere, 2016); and second, so I could repost and archive this to my research account. While most of the women agreed, a handful did not like the images they had taken, and sent an image to me to upload it directly to the research profile.

While social media is often used to access hard to reach populations (Palys and Atchison, 2012; King et al., 2014; Sikkens et al., 2017), the women I sought to recruit could not necessarily be understood in this way. Instead, I utilised social media to make it easier to highlight who participated in producing, sharing and consuming fitspo content. While the research profile had the primary objectives of recruitment and image storage, it also enabled me to develop my digital research

presence through sharing personal information, and about the research. My actions mirrored the decisions of many of the women in the study, in that I prioritised showing high quality images of myself (that were taken by photographers at sporting competitions). As one aim of the account was recruitment, I chose to share these images as they received the highest engagement – as evidenced through sharing such images on my personal account, and the research account. Upon reflection, acting on this meant I contributed to a space where particular bodies became more visible than others. Thus, while my desire to share information about myself was partially driven by a feminist ethic by prioritising dialogue and challenging the notion of the distant observer-researcher (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002), this method could be seen as reproducing the power relations under study through using images of my body to gain attention, thereby crowding out images of bodies that may not fit normative fitspo standards (Chapter 7).

Initially, I additionally sought to recruit participants through sending direct messages. I quickly realised that if users were not following me, my direct message would go into their 'message request' inbox. Some of the women relayed they did not check their message request inbox regularly as it was usually filled with spam messages, or unsolicited sexual messages (Chapter 7). Consequently, I also commented on the most recent images shared by potential participants, whereby using a combination of recruitment techniques and an informative profile I increased the chance of my messages being responded to. If a woman expressed interest, I expressed she was able to ask any questions, and requested her email address to send an information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix B). Given the topics that could be discussed within the interview, the information sheet offered references on where the women could seek advice regarding eating disorders. If they agreed to take part, we decided on a date and time that suited them, where they could spare around four hours. In nearly all cases[1], this involved me travelling to their gym so we could train together, before conducting the photo-taking exercise, interview and media go-alongs.

4.1.2 Ethnographic elements

Choosing to train with the women at their gym was informed by ethnographic research. There is much debate surrounding the definitions and boundaries of ethnography (Hammersley, 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bagley, 2009; Walford, 2009; Pink, 2012; Pink, 2015; Pink et al., 2016). Here, ethnography is defined as a research method driven by first-hand experience of the people, experiences and activities the researcher is interested in studying (Hammersley, 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2008), incorporating visual, sensory and emotive elements (O'Reilly, 2008; Bagley, 2009; Pink, 2015). In this

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[1] One participant asked to train the CrossFit gym I trained at, as she wanted to experience it. Another participant suggested we meet at a central yoga studio as she lived in a rural area.

research, training alongside the women gave me the ability to experience the activities that informed the content they shared on Instagram, which produced contextual knowledge that I may not have learned otherwise (O'Reilly, 2008), and enabled observation of how they took images of their bodies (4.1.3). Ultimately, training together proved valuable in terms of points of discussion to refer to during the interview, and to contextualise data during analysis, rather than being incorporated systematically into the analysis.

Training together was additionally motivated by my desire to conduct feminist research *with* the women, rather than *on* the women, as an attempt to navigate the unequal power relations inherent to social research due to being driven by my aims (England, 1994). In training at their gym, I sought to make the women feel at ease as it was something they were comfortable and familiar with. This was particularly important when it came to asking them to take images; some women expressed embarrassment doing so in front of me, which may have increased were we in an unfamiliar gym. This element of my research design is thus informed my feminist research principles, so as to challenge asymmetrical research relationships (Scharff, 2010). Moreover, it enabled the chance to build rapport with the women, as the gym provided an opportunity to engage more conversationally, where the women asked me questions such as why I was conducting this research. Like Ann Oakley (1981; 2016), I did not see building rapport as a means to an end, but something that happened through engaging with one another as we helped each other load our barbells, and swapped stories about our training histories.

4.1.3 Visual methods: taking images

As discussed in Chapter 2, much research about fitspiration has focused on incorporating images through content analyses, experimental and/or survey-led approaches. Some limitations of research of this kind is that it is restricted to analysing the representational content of the image, and lacks the depth and complexity of understanding that I argue is central to research in this field. Moreover, as Rebecca Coleman (2009) notes, researching images in this way confines analysis to a cause-and-effect model, as images are understood as separate to bodies and having one-way, linear relationships to them, rather than accounting for how bodies and images (and Instagram here) are productive of one another in varied ways. As a consequence, I looked to other studies to consider how images could be incorporated into research. Images in social research have been used in photo-elicitation interviews (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Mizen, 2005; Kuhn, 2007; Liebenberg, 2009), through photo-voice methods (Radley and Taylor, 2003; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Packard, 2008; Burles and Thomas, 2014), video diaries (Holliday, 2000) and in ethnographic studies (Schwartz, 1989; Pink, 2007; Larsen, 2008; Pink, 2012). More recently, images have been a central concern for scholars researching *how* images of the body are shared on social media, in relation to selfies (Lasén, 2009; Tiidenberg and Gómez-Cruz, 2015; Warfield, 2016, 2017; Renold and Ringrose, 2017; Enguix and Gómez-Narváez, 2018), thinspo (Schott,

2017; Cobb, 2020), 'alternative' fitspo images (Lucas and Hodler, 2018), live-camming (Senft, 2008), Not Safe For Work (NSFW) communities (Tiidenberg, 2016; van der Nagel, 2020), and influencers/micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2016a).

Visual scholar Katie Warfield's (2016) study of selfies offers a useful framework regarding how images can be incorporated within research. Using video software, Warfield asked the four women in her study to "narrate their thoughts and feelings to [her]— externalize their internal impressions—through the process of taking selfies in the adjacent room" (2016, p.3). For Warfield, narrating photos as they are being taken is useful as it produces knowledge relating to what cameras and images do alongside bodies, as the women recount what is important when they take photos. For example, rather than being understood as habitual, Warfield highlights how taking selfies may limit the women to express their bodies outside of "gendered apparatuses of bodily production" (2016, p.4), illustrating how the women articulated trying to 'appear cute' through smiling. Asking the women to narrate and take the photos in the presence of the researcher is also shown to be particularly useful as it shows what images are discarded. This study is important as it demonstrates Coleman's (2009) argument that the body is not separate from images, but becomes actively understood *through* the affective process of taking images, and offers an insight into methods suited to research this.

Following Warfield, after we had trained together, I asked the women to show me how they would take an image of themselves that they would share on Instagram. Most often, this was a mirror image, where the woman would pose in front of a mirror, and take a picture of her reflection. Three women asked me to take a photo for them, one woman used her camera's self-timer function, and six chose to film aspects of their workout (two of these shared the video, and four women screenshotted a frame). When the women were taking their images, I asked them to narrate the process, asking "what body parts are you moving, and why?", and "what do you think about your body while you're taking this image?".

In her analysis of how affect has been taken up in the social sciences, Clare Hemmings asks that if affect is perceived as only registerable through scientific experimentation (such as the snowman study discussed in Chapter 3), how can affect be utilised within critical social inquiry? In response to this, my use of visual methods was driven by a desire to produce data through creative methods to explore how affect moves through taking images (Pink, 2007; Blackman and Venn, 2010; Britta and Carsten, 2015). That is: how do the women's bodies become affected (their powers of acting increased or diminished) through taking photos? How do understandings of their bodies become expanded or limited through this? Given that a concern with affect is also a concern with movement, my inclusion of visual methods emphasised the importance of being attentive to the *process* of taking images, taking heed of arguments that what is produced through visual methods is never *only* visual, but *also* sensory and embodied (Pink, 2007; Larsen, 2008; Pink, 2011; Edwards, 2012). The use of visual methods was further linked to

my desire to go beyond the content of an image, as echoed by many visual scholars (Pink, 2003; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Pink, 2007; Ardévol, 2012; Edwards, 2012; Rose, 2012; Coleman, 2009; 2015). Consequently, the photo-taking exercise contributed to research about visual culture research more broadly, through a focus on researching image "production, movement and circulation" (Larsen, 2008, p.143)

Finally, the inclusion of visual methodologies was useful due to the richness of understanding they can produce (Harper, 2002; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Mizen, 2005; Guillemin and Drew, 2010; Harper, 2012; Drew and Guillemin, 2014; Burles and Thomas, 2014), often enabling the discussion of topics that may be difficult to verbally communicate (Schwartz, 1989; Harper, 2002; Radley and Taylor, 2003; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006; Liebenberg, 2009; Azzarito, 2010). Here, taking images proved productive as it provided the women with an action to verbally talk through what would otherwise be a fairly routine (and therefore unarticulated) practice. Like some of the participants in Warfield's (2016) study, some women were confused by my request for narration, with one woman noting "I'm not thinking or doing anything, I just take photos" (Charlotte). Despite this, as I watched her take the photo, I noticed she shifted her weight to one side, pushing her hips back, and her bottom out. Through asking her to take a photo with me I was able to ask about her movements, as the practice had become so second-nature so as to become mundane.

As Nick Fox and Pam Alldred note, "the question that needs to be asked when evaluating a method for inclusion is not what that method is but what it can do" (2018, p.191). What the incorporation of visual methods has done for this research is enabled the study of the relations between images and bodies as they occur, rather than assuming them *a priori* (Coleman, 2009); added to methodological considerations of how affect can be studied through a focus on process and embodiment; and has enabled the study of a practice that may be looked over as habitual, rather than socially shaped.

4.1.4 Interviews

After taking images, I conducted a one-to-one, in-depth semi-structured interview with the women in a public location. All interviews were consensually recorded using an audio-recorder, and lasted between 35 minutes to two hours. I transcribed these verbatim. When excerpts from the interviews are used in the following chapters, square brackets are used to give context (for example, [pause] to indicate a tangible break in speech). Ellipses […] are used to indicate an omission, but are used for brevity and not to alter what has been said. The interviews were semi-structured as they were informed by a topic guide (Appendix D), but allowed space for the participant to direct and guide the interviews (Mason, 2002; Hand, 2017). This style of interview is informed by feminist research, where knowledge is produced through dialogue (Rapley, 2001; Mason, 2002; Kvale, 2006; Way et al., 2015), rather than being fixed and closed. Conducting semi-structured interviews meant it was easier to draw on topics discussed in the gym, and

provided a space to discuss the image-taking process in detail, where images were used as a prompt for discussion (Radley and Taylor, 2003; Packard, 2008; Guillemin and Drew, 2010). For example, I asked the women to look through the photos taken, asking them how they shaped their feelings about their bodies, and which ones they would (and would not) share on Instagram. As Sarah Pink (2003) has argued, images were material objects which mediated the interview, offering the women something tangible to talk about as they scrolled through the images.

Jennifer Mason (2002) suggests that one limitation of interviews is that they rely on an individual's ability to verbalize their thoughts. This concern takes particular importance in relation to affect. For example, while Timm Britta and Stage Carsten (2015) argue that research concerned with affect could focus on producing "communicative content about experienced or attributed affect" (p.9, emphasis removed), there were instances within the interviews where it seemed as though the women struggled to articulate their experiences of how Instagram and images made them feel. For example, one participant noted "it's literally like [pause] it feels like [pause]" and "it's [pause] it's crazy how much it affects you" (Tania). The pauses that punctuate here attest to the difficulty in verbalizing (and consequently, researching) affective responses, where affect is not just a sensibility, but something we try to make sense of (Wetherell, 2012). From this, I do not want to suggest that affect *cannot* be understood through attempts to conceptualise it, but that "affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic" (Wetherell, 2012, p.20). I am also not suggesting the women were not able to articulate themselves, but I could easily interpret them. Instead, because the women sometimes found their experiences difficult to verbalize, I have been cautious about the knowledge claims produced through the interviews, and have considered the experiences as they are rather than imposing a 'correct' interpretation onto them (Coleman, 2009; 4.2.2)

4.1.5 Instagram 'go-alongs'

One element of the interview involved media 'go-alongs', where I asked the women to talk me through their Instagram accounts. Incorporating this method alongside 'non-digital' methods such as interviews strengthens the ontological position of this thesis that there is no clear division between 'online' and 'offline', and thus the social world should be studied to reflect this (Postill and Pink, 2012; Rogers, 2013; Golder and Macy, 2014; Hine, 2015; Luders, 2015; Pink et al., 2016; Jenzen, 2017). However, rather than being seen as a replacement for 'traditional' research methods, media scholar Noortje Marres (2012) argues that researchers should augment methods to produce more insightful research that acknowledges experience as mediated by the multiple relations between digital technologies and humans.

Media go-alongs are defined by Kristian Jørgensen (2016) as a method that "allows the researcher and participant to navigate and talk about media in that they have sensorial access together and simultaneously" (2016, p.39). While similar to the

walk-through method (Light et al., 2018), the go-along has been more useful for this research as it focuses less on the researcher systematically detailing their step-by-step actions of using an application, and more instead on how users "look at, navigate and talk about" (Jørgensen, 2016, p.40) the applications they use (see also Jenzen (2017), Kaufmann (2018), Raun (2017), Robards and Lincoln (2016), Postill and Pink (2012)). In his study of dating and hook-up apps, Jørgensen advocates using "[o]pen touring invitations" (2016, p.40) and "[t]hematic touring invitations" (2016, p.40), which he suggests better reflects the idea that data is produced *through* interactions between the researcher and participants, rather than lying 'out there' waiting to be uncovered. Consequently, the go-along method aligned well with how I conceptualised data production and the role of method in this research.

The idea of open and thematic touring invitations was something that I implemented within the go-alongs. For example, I would often begin the go-along with an open invitation such as "can you talk me through your Instagram?". In using open invitations I aimed to make the women feel at ease, as it was a question that let them decide what they wanted to discuss about their Instagram. Listening to them talk about their Instagram more generally as I watched them navigate it enabled me to make more specific thematic touring invitations – if they noted that particular images were more likely to go on their profile rather than their Story, I would then ask if they would show me their Story archive, and to reflect upon how they used the Story function. Moreover, if they talked about using their profile to share images of their bodies, I would ask them to pick out and discuss examples. When particular images were discussed, I would ask the women to describe the image so I could have a sense of what image we were talking about when I was transcribing and analysing. If they did not do so in as much detail that would aid me when it came to analysing the data later, I would verbalise the image myself (for example, "just so I remember this, the image we're looking at is…").

The go-along method was also driven by a desire to understand how engaging with Instagram can be affective – to understand what Instagram can do. Consequently, one question I would ask was "are there any images that you see that provoke a particularly strong feeling?". Rather conducting a specific analysis of their images, I instead used this to enable the women to demarcate the images that were affective for them, as indicated by the way specific images were referenced over others (or, as Coleman (2009) would articulate, how particular moments of experience were discussed over others). In thinking about strong feelings, I was asking the women to note images that they perceive as productive of a change in, for example, their bodily state, their feelings, or images that perhaps 'stirred' something in them. Some women would use this prompt to show me images of their bodies taken in the past, where reflecting upon (what they deem) their 'better' physiques became experienced in the present as limiting how they perceived their bodies (Chapter 6). Additionally, the go-along method enabled me to reflect upon my topic guide as the research progressed, as it gave the women

the space to tell me the kinds of things that were notable about their Instagram use that I had overlooked. For example, while I knew I wanted to discuss Instagram Stories, I had not expected them to relay the level of detail that they paid to curating their Stories. Moreover, in asking about any strong feelings produced through engaging with Instagram, this was often where the women would make reference to the 'excessively' sexualised bodies of other women (Chapter 7), which is something I had not anticipated. In addition to supporting one of the key arguments of this research that there is no division between online/offline, the go-along method was also one of the areas of the research that felt particularly driven by the women, aligning with my desire to do feminist research focused on what *they* felt was remarkable.

4.1.6 Analysis

After the interviews had been transcribed, I began reading and rereading the data so I could familiarise myself with the content, making notes of recurring elements or things of interest. After around ten interviews, I produced a loose coding framework based on my notes, and used NVivo to organise this. After conducting all interviews, I reworked my framework and organised it through ten parent codes and a range of child codes (for example, the 'body' parent code had child codes such as 'body understood through images' or 'body understood outside of images'). There has been some pushback towards using coding by writers who also research within the onto-epistemological position I work within here (see, for example Jackson and Mazzei (2013) and St. Pierre and Jackson (2014)), whereby coding is challenged due to perceptions of its systematic nature, prioritising sameness over difference and unable to account for affective moments. Despite this, I chose to use coding to aid data analysis as, alongside NVivo, it enabled me to manage and sift through my data, and facilitated easier comparisons across transcripts (Rivas, 2018). Bearing these critiques in mind, I prioritised a framework that produced codes inductively and deductively, in that they were composed of things I did not expect to see and were produced in the process of analysis, and things I did expect to see, respectively (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Moreover, the coding framework that I used was not fixed, but changed throughout conducting the interviews and the initial analysis period following this, as my understanding of the data progressed and as new data was produced (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Excerpts were moved into codes in different ways. At times, the quotes were literal of the code – for example, when the women described the processes they underwent to take images, this was coded under 'image' (parent code) – 'taking images' (child code). At times codes were more conceptual (Mason, 2018) – for example, whilst none of the women talked explicitly about postfeminism, I coded their speech as alluding to the different postfeminist sensibilities that scholars of postfeminism have discussed (Chapter 2). Moving between these enabled me to think at different levels of abstraction. For example, literal codes could account

literally for the physical poses that the women described when taking images, whereas conceptual codes instead pushed me to think about what the data was *doing*; for example, in relation to affect. For this I looked for instances where the women would describe a change in bodily state, which I would code as instances of bodies being limited or enhanced through their relations, and 'other' for those excerpts that did not fit neatly into either category.

My analytical framework was influenced by thematic analysis, by moving from smaller codes to larger themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Following Braun and Clarke, producing themes from codes captured "something important about the data in relation to the research question", and was indicative of "some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (2006, p.82). Through revisiting the codes, I produced themes that spoke to the research questions. While some of the questions I asked of my data were directly derived from my research questions, at this stage of analysis I broadened these to consider the data in different ways. For example, how do the women come to know their own bodies and the bodies of others? How do some bodies become valued over others? Do the affects of images become patterned in any way, and if so, how? How do the capacities of bodies become fixed or enhanced? What is the role of images and Instagram in these concerns? What do images make visible (and consequently, invisible)?

In asking my data these questions, I underwent what Braun and Clarke have termed a "recursive process" (2012, p.65) - producing and reviewing themes in line with the codes and individual data. The production of themes was therefore purposeful, as I chose to incorporate some codes and not others in the final stages of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These themes are below, and form the basis of the chapters that follow:

Theme 1: Transformations
Theme 2: Feeling bad
Theme 3: Becoming visible (and associated boundaries)
Theme 4: Authenticity

In producing themes, I organised excerpts of data under the relevant theme to provide evidence for it. This was to test whether the theme was 'thick' enough – that is, did I have enough data to make a convincing argument (Braun and Clarke, 2012)? In particular, the evidence I sought to articulate these themes were focused on acknowledging Instagram's affordances and fitspo images (that is, in relation to elements of the fitspo assemblage). For example, I did not only look for evidence of women 'feeling bad', but how they felt bad in relation to navigating Instagram and images. Similarly, I did not only look for evidence of the women 'being' authentic, but how they used particular strategies of Instagram use to *do* authenticity. Arguably, the final four themes that structure the following chapters are not original in and of themselves; for example, postfeminist scholarship has been attentive to issues of transformation, women's bodily visibility and the cultivation

of particular dispositions, and much research about fitspo has addressed instances of women 'feeling bad' when engaging with fitspo images (which I acknowledge is an oversimplification). However, what *is* original is my consideration of these themes in light of how the fitspo assemblage may intensify and shape, for example, desires and practices of transformation, or experiences and understandings of becoming visible. I wanted to push these themes to explore *what else* we can learn about them – particularly from the position of women as *producers* of media, and in understanding Instagram.

In response to some of the critiques of coding raised above, I was further cautious to produce themes that could attend to the multiplicity of the data, rather than foreclosing it, hence the production of Chapter 5 and 6 from Theme 1 and 2 that seem almost oppositional from one another (though linked through a focus on affect and intensity), and the contradictions inherent within Chapter 7 from Theme 3. This was born out of a desire to stay *with* the difference and complexity (Braidotti, 2006), and to attend to the relations between images, bodies and Instagram in ways that much research on fitspo communities to date has not done.

My thematic analysis was aided considerably through the concepts outlined in Chapter 3. In dialogue with Michel Foucault, Deleuze noted that "[a] theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful" (Deleuze and Foucault, 1977, p.208). Concepts, then, are the particular elements of the ontologies I drew on that I found useful to explore *what is different* here in contrast to research that has explored fitspo images. Consequently, my thematic approach can be described as a way of analysing and thinking *with* theory (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), as the concepts from Chapter 3 were tools to consider the themes in a more abstract sense. This combination of approaches is in keeping with my epistemology more broadly, in that I have chosen to deviate from following one strict approach, through a creative and concept driven approach to research (Coleman, 2009; Schulte, 2018).

4.2 Considering epistemology

Following Coleman (2009), one of the foundations of this research is to explore not what images are, or what Instagram is, but what images, Instagram and bodies can do through their relations with one another within the fitspo assemblage. This focus on what things *do* requires an ontological shift that understands the social as "a web of forces, intensities and encounters" (Braidotti, 2006, p.41), playing a central role in shaping the methodology here. First, I consider how aspects of Deleuze's philosophy, and strands of feminist epistemology, have formed my approach to research. Second, I consider what this means for how data can be conceptualised, and the claims that can be made with it. I argue that in bringing Deleuze's philosophy in conversation with feminist thinkers, and foregrounding authors who do so in their own research, it becomes possible to explore different ways of knowing and researching through where they merge and depart from one other (Braidotti, 2002; Grosz, 1994).

4.2.1 Immanence, relationality and feminist epistemology

Deleuze's (1997) essay *Immanence: A Life* provides a way to ground the methodological choices I have made. Drawing on Baruch Spinoza, he argues that "absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, to something; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject" (1997, p.4). Thinking through immanence is not about our perception of the world as researchers, as this would divide the world into subjects that perceive and objects that are perceived. Instead, it involves a flattening of hierarchies onto which "all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated" (Deleuze, 1988, p.122). Through this, "one becomes less interested in what is and more interested in what might be and what is coming into being" (St Pierre, 2019). For this research, this means exploring: what do particular configurations of images, bodies, and Instagram produce in the fitspo assemblage? Under what circumstances? Asking what the fitspo assemblage does is to attend to flattening out these hierarchies; for example, neither images nor Instagram profiles are understood as representing the bodies of the women, as that would reify their differences as subject and object. Research conducted through notions of immanence would then resist the production of "a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world), a field of representation (the book), and a field of subjectivity (the author)" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p.52).

In order to *do* research as immanent, Coleman (2009) suggests that research must think through relations, multiplicity and the 'in-between'. Writing about multiplicities, Deleuze and Parnet suggest that:

> in a multiplicity what counts are not the terms of the elements, but what there is 'between', the between, a set of relations which are not separable from each other…[to understand] a multiplicity is to trace the lines of which it is made up, to determine the nature of these lines, to see how they become entangled, connect, bifurcate, avoid or fail (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006 , p.viii)

For this thesis, I have chosen methods and concepts that can consider this 'in-between' of images-bodies-Instagram, to understand what they can do as they become entangled and connect, or avoid and fail. For example, my focus on the relations *between* images, bodies and Instagram meant that a focus on the *process* of taking images and using Instagram became central parts of my methodology. Moreover, insisting "on the flattening out of relations" (Grosz, 1994, p.180) between bodies resists "a relation of causation" (Grosz, 1994, p.180). This offers grounds to move away from researching what the *effects* of Instagram are, as to do so would reinforce a subject/object distinction through focusing on the 'terms of the elements', rather than the relations between them (Coleman, 2009). This is important as it offers a different way of framing the research design in contrast to studies that focus on 'media effects' analyses (Coleman, 2009). It is for this reason that data analysis here has been illuminated through concepts such as affect, assemblage and virtual-actual, as they allow for a consideration of process, rather than taking elements as static. Concepts in this sense are not *applied* to the social,

but are "generative of different ways of thinking" (Fullagar, 2017, p.250), and consequently, of doing research.

The purpose of thinking through such conceptual work is that it resists the production of research that looks to produce knowledge 'about' women, and instead aims to produce different *knowledges* that do not rely on universal categories of womanhood, enabling different forms of knowing *with* and *about* the body (Grosz, 1994; Braidotti, 2002; Coleman, 2009). While Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland suggest that a focus on multiplicity risks ignoring the "constraints on choice that limit so many lives, [and] the ubiquitous structures and institutions of inequalities" (2002, p.100), I argue that conducting research in this way does not mean a concern with gender inequality is foreclosed – it just requires different ways of thinking about and researching bodies *as they become gendered*. Research must not, then, be driven by the aim of trying to uncover an 'authentic' experience of womanhood, as this begins from the assumption that this exists (Skeggs, 1997). Instead, as Coleman notes of her own research:

> [My research] does not *begin with* the objective of investigating the girls' bodies in term of gender, race, class and age, but rather it traces the actualisation of the virtual. As virtualities, social and cultural categories might be, and most probably will be, actualised, but this is not to be presumed in advance (Coleman, 2009, p.74).

Following this, this research has explored how such social and cultural categories, such as gender, become produced through the fitspo assemblage. This is important as it enables the consideration of how gender is produced *through* the relations between bodies, images and Instagram, re-thinking "how bodies relate to one another" through mapping how particular bodies may become captured and fixed through gendered differences (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013b, p.142).

An example of this kind of feminist-Deleuzian research can be found in Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose's (2011) study regarding how teen girls negotiate social "expectations to perform as agentic sexual subjects" (2011, p.389). Rather than positioning young girls within the binary tropes common to contemporary Western society, such as sexual agents *or* sexualized victims, Renold and Ringrose instead advocate considering how sexual subjectivities, women's desires and alternative figurations of these become through mapping these *as they occur.* Through this, they aim "to capture the movement and doing of subjectivity" (2011, p.394), specifically in relation to social media, popular music and friendships. Analysing the Bebo profile of one teenage girl (Natalia), Renold and Ringrose trace the multiplicitous becomings of Natalia's sexual subjectivities through her incorporation of knowledgeable, 'adultified' sexual media in her username and images, alongside her blog which contained reference to the loss of a care-free childhood due to engaging with older boys. Through this, Renold and Ringrose produce evidence to support their argument that Natalia's femininities and sexualities are not something that pre-exist the Bebo assemblage, but rather are *done* through "contradictory, unstable and reversible becomings" (2011, p.397).

Building on this, this research has not sought to find a universal experience of Instagram, but instead has turned instead to the conceptual work discussed here and in Chapter 3 to focus on *how* bodies may become fixed through territorializing forms of gender and power within the fitspo assemblage (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013b). Through an understanding of immanence, this research explores how the fitspo assemblage may be a site of intensification for how the women are able to know and understand their own bodies in relation to processes of gender (and in Chapter 6 and 8, race, and Chapter 7, class), enabling a consideration of how social and cultural categories may feel more intense as they are actualised (Coleman, 2009). It has also provided the basis to consider of how bodies may become understood through social and cultural categories *differently,* as in mapping how these categories become 'sticky' and fixed, it is possible to hint at ways bodies could become known otherwise (Coleman, 2009; Ringrose, 2011; Coleman and Ringrose, 2013b).

4.2.2 What can data be(come)? Situated knowledges, reflexivity and affect

Conducting research through notions of immanence produces particular understandings of 'truth'. For example, Coleman argues there is no hidden 'truth' in the data that research can uncover; instead, "the data produced through the relations of research [is to] be explored as it is in itself" (2009, p.68) – as immanent. Thus, I have not sought to ask what the women 'mean' in their responses, where instead, in understanding data as immanent I have considered the specific (though at times shared) "knowledges, understanding, [and] experiences that can be thought through in-themselves" (Coleman, 2009, p.71). For example, through a mixed-method approach that utilised individual interviews and an image-making discussion workshop, Coleman highlights she was able to produce data relating to how the girls' bodies became experienced through different spatial and temporal moments. While Coleman's interviews enabled the girls to articulate moments of experience that could not be brought to the workshop format (such as the looks from others), the workshops enabled the girls to produce or bring along images to capture different experiences of images.

Relatedly, rather than studying Instagram or images as something separate to the women's bodies, or suggesting that one method is able to produce data that is more truthful than another, the incorporation of different methods allowed the women to articulate the different ways they came to know, understand and experience their bodies (Coleman, 2009). In this sense, the interview, the media go-along and the image activity are ways to produce data relating to what a body can do through its relations with other bodies within the fitspo assemblage. This further means that the methods chosen are can be understood as productive of the field of study, rather than a tool to collect data to objectively represent reality (Gerrard et al., 2017).

Denying that we can excavate a hidden 'truth' from data has links with Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of *situated knowledges*. Refusing the objective and detached nature of humanist science, Haraway instead advocates for an influx of "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (1988, p.584) to provide accounts of views from *somewhere* rather than a transcendent *nowhere.* The knowledges produced from data, then, are "situated and embodied" (1988, p.584), rather than "unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims" (1988, p.584). For Haraway, making such claims is not to provide "a single feminist standpoint[,] because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our visions" (1988, p.590), but rather to work towards joining together these partial knowledges into a collective that acknowledges its own position, limits and possibilities. Haraway's concept is particularly illuminating here for thinking about the political value that research can have when we refuse a universal meaning, or to assume in advance what particular bodies can do, in a way that does not collapse the ability to produce arguments that go beyond these specific encounters.

Thus, these arguments demonstrate that this approach to feminist knowledge-production "encompasses movement between partial knowledges, limited experiences and specific social locations" (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002, p.103). Building on this, within this thesis this also includes encompassing both human and non-human bodies, in relation to images and Instagram. Thinking in terms of partiality, then, has clear implications for the arguments I have been able to make, both in relation to demographics (4.3) and technology. I am not able to offer an account of *all* the ways *all* women become 'plugged into' the fitspo assemblage, nor can I use this data to make knowledge-claims about *all* of social media more broadly. Rather, I offer a specific, partial viewpoint from which we can begin to map out to others, informed by both the encounters and socio-cultural contexts through which they take place.

The situatedness of data, and considering methods as productive of the very thing under study, aligns with a feminist concern with researcher reflexivity (Oakley, 1981; Acker et al., 1983; Cook and Fonow, 1986; England, 1994; Skeggs, 1997; Deutsch, 2004; Broom et al., 2009; Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010; Throsby and Gimlin, 2010; Rayaprol, 2016). Taking a reflexive approach to research entails moving away from myths of the distant researcher towards acknowledging *how* the researcher shapes the research process (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002). This involves paying close attention to how researchers "are themselves entangled within the assemblages they seek to study" (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013a). Rather than seeking to find ways to avoid the researcher 'contaminating' the research data (as if this were possible), Kim England (1994) makes similar arguments to Haraway (1988) in suggesting that feminist researchers should seek to "locate ourselves in our own work" (p.87), acknowledging how this may contribute towards "the limitations and partial nature of that research" (p.87). This demanded a consideration of the way my embodiment impacted upon the data in ways that were both visible and not (Throsby and Gimlin, 2010).

Karen Throsby and Debra Gimlin (2010) argue that in calls to 'bring the body back in' to social research, emphasis is often placed upon the *researched* body, rather than the *researcher* body. In response to their appeals for researchers to account for their own "bodily desires and practices" (Throsby and Gimlin, 2010, p.106), it seems important to articulate that the beginnings of this thesis formed from using Instagram to track and document my attempts at weight loss and over five years ago. While it is something I no longer do, it was my own (largely constraining) relationships with these technologies that led me to conceptualising this PhD. While this has since been shaped and refined through the literatures and theories discussed in the previous chapters, my experiences of restrictive body and food surveillance, shaped *through* my engagement with the same technologies and practices I have studied, have driven my concern with how such experiences may be intensified (though not caused) by participating. Thus, rather than being disconnected from the research process, my own biography has formed the very basis of this research (Broom et al., 2009). While research has noted that similarities shared with the participants within the research does not automatically guarantee the researcher improved access or understanding (Acker, 2000; Merriam et al., 2001), there were certainly some benefits this afforded me.

Rather than being understood as a limitation, I argue this history has *aided* this research through what Hemmings (2012) has termed *affective solidarity.* Affects, as felt *within* and *through* the body can "draw us together" (Hemmings, 2012, p.154), whereby one's capacity to empathise and connect with others can be grounded through affect rather than through individual, singular identities. This is important, as I am not suggesting that it is due to a universal, shared category of womanhood that I was able to connect with the women in this research (nor, as I have made clear, do I seek to make claims that this exists). Instead, I am arguing that potentially experiencing similar (though not *the* same) affects produced through the relations between images, bodies and Instagram aided my ability to empathize with the women about how images can feel, and what they can do. For example, it was not uncommon for the women to undermine their own experiences – one participant, Artika, said that "I know that, that's really stupid and illogical but that, that thought process does happen when I look at certain pictures". The ability to listen, and at times relate, to the women enabled me to position myself as someone who understood these experiences as important. Such an understanding further strengthened the feminist ethic of the research in my ability to empathise beyond trying to mechanically build rapport (Oakley, 1981). In being conscious of the ways "affect might flood one's being and…change how everything else is seen and understood" (Hemmings, 2012, p.157), and verbalizing these shared feelings where necessary, I have challenged the idea that it is possible to claim an authority of knowledge on the basis of objectivity and distance, through staking my claims in relation to a feminist ethic of research and knowing. I return to how my presence shaped the research in 4.3.

Finally, incorporating affect into an empirical study warrants discussion regarding what 'counts' as data. In researching affect, I make an epistemological claim that emotion, affect and embodied forms of data are worthy of study, adding to discussions regarding what data can be conceived as (St Pierre, 1997). Consequently, while the theoretical framing of this research justifies the incorporation of affect to explore the 'in-between' of bodies and images (Chapter 3), this is also matched by a desire to challenge "the very epistemological foundations of what constitute[s] knowledge" (Fonow and Cook, 2005, p.2211). A concern with affect, then, has not only shaped the parameters of this research, but also the methods I have utilised to situate the body within the research process, to foreground the varied ways in which bodies become through their relations with others (Coleman, 2009). I am arguing, then, that these varied experiences of affect are worthy of mapping and acknowledging, rather collapsing such affective relations into specific 'effects' of media consumption. Moreover, my focus on affect and emotion, on how Instagram and images *feel* and what they *do,* aligns with a feminist ethic of research that takes seriously women's practices such as image-making and sharing that may have been dismissed as frivolous (see, for example, Crystal Abidin (2016a) recounting this in how others perceive her research on selfies).

4.3 Ethical considerations

28 women consented for their first names and usernames to be used within the research when necessary, with one woman requesting that I do not include her Instagram username, and another requesting a pseudonym. My decision to offer women the option to be anonymous was driven by a hunch that these women *wanted* their Instagram profiles to be seen by others. This was confirmed to me during discussions with the women about consent, anonymity and privacy. While I could not, and did not, guarantee that taking part in this research would enable them to gain more followers, the potential for increased visibility was clearly important for some. Bearing this in mind, I presented the women with a multi-level consent form (Appendix B) that gave them options regarding how they wanted their images to be used, and how they wanted to be referred too within the research, in addition to a more general research consent form. I have redacted instances where the women name partners, friends, family, or their employers. I turn specifically to ethical issues regarding images and social media below.

4.3.1 Images

Using images of the women's bodies in this research, and potentially sharing them through research outputs, was a key space for me to reflect on the ethics of this research. The literature has discussed ethical issues pertaining to who owns the images (Guillemin and Drew, 2010; Pauwels, 2010; Mitchell, 2012; Clark, 2012), the extent to which the use of images can be known in advance, thus affecting the participant's capacity to consent (Guillemin and Drew, 2010; Mitchell, 2012), and

the ability to preserve anonymity when the images involve the research participants (Pauwels, 2010). For my own research, the most pertinent ethical issues were regarding the visibility, and therefore lack of anonymity, of the women through the visual data. In Katrin Tiidenberg's (2014) study of NSFW Tumblr communities, she chose to digitally edit images to maintain anonymity, due to the sensitive nature of the images shared, and as such images risk 'outing' the participants. For this research, I did not think a blanket approach such as this was necessary for two reasons. First, the images that the woman took for the research were not sensitive materials. Second, and as many of the women noted, they often *wanted* their images and Instagram profiles to be seen.

Marilys Guillemin and Sarah Drew (2010) argue that given the grey areas regarding ethical issues in visual methodologies, the researcher and participant should discuss any ethical considerations at length before research begins. The multi-level consent form gave the women and I a chance to discuss in-depth the potential implications of having their images as part of this dataset. If anything, my approach to discussing the implications of having their images 'out there' prioritised the potential negatives more than the positives, as I wanted them to be aware that sharing them on their own profile that they could delete was different to them being shared in an output that they could not control. For example, I noted that if an image *was* used in a research output and this was put online, they nor I would have control over how that image may be used by others. Consequently, I engaged in a collaborative ethical dialogue with the women (Clark, 2012), as these were women who were knowledgeable about how they chose to share information about and images of themselves online, and were therefore able to make a decision about how they wanted to be visible in this research. The collaborative nature of the decisions made regarding anonymity can further be seen as a marker of feminist inquiry. Ultimately, only a handful of images the women took have been incorporated to illuminate the arguments that I make. This was borne out of two motivations. First, doing so is in line with my ethics-driven approach to research, as I did not find it appropriate to include images that did not further my argument, as I felt doing so may appear voyeuristic. Second, as I have argued extensively in the chapters that precede this, I am less interested in what is *in* the images, than what the images can *do,* and how they *feel*. As per Instagram's terms and conditions, when images are used they have been cropped so as to only show the image, and do not include any icons, logos or metadata.

4.3.2 Go-alongs and the researcher profile

One key ethical tension to be considered in digital research is making one's presence as a researcher 'known'. In relation to the research account, I had to consider whether I should be an active participator in the community, or only look at posts without engaging with them. One study about social media user's views about the ethics of social media research found that some users preferred a more collaborative approach that saw the researchers interact with participants, to

signify their presence and discuss the research with them (Beninger, 2017). As this aligned with my feminist research ethics, in addition to engaging with users through discussing potential recruitment, I engaged with posts on my feed by liking and commenting. In particular, I made the effort to engage with the women who had already participated to challenge the idea of the distant, observing researcher through this more informal interaction. As I began the 'writing up' year, my activity on this account waned, though I did initially try to post semi-regularly to make my progress public.

Another key ethical tension regarding internet research has been in relation to what can be counted as public, and can be used without permission, and what should be regarded as private and off-limits (Battles, 2010; Beaulieu and Estalella, 2012; Markham and Buchanan, 2012; Luders, 2015; Suguira et al., 2017). In this research, using go-alongs has meant that there has been no data 'collected' from Instagram profiles as such, as the data produced through go-alongs is through interview discussions. Thus, while I could access the women's social media accounts outside of the interview, I have not collected any images from their profiles, nor written about posts from their profiles that were not mentioned in the interview. In addition, unless referring to social media influencers or brands, the women's referrals to specific accounts have been redacted. When images have been used, any usernames or comments that are not my own or that of the women have been anonymised.

4.4 Research limitations

While the research was successful in what it set out to achieve, there were some limitations. These were largely centred on my presence as a researcher. For example, with regards to the image-taking exercise, some of the women expressed embarrassment when I asked them to show me how they would take an image that they would share on their Instagram profile. While this is something they would regularly do, having me standing there and asking questions altered the dynamic of the practice. While Warfield (2016) used streaming software to record the women as they narrated and took their photos while she watched from a different room, this was not something that I was able to do. First, it would have been logistically difficult and costly to organise this for 30 women in various locations. Second, it could have added to the uncertainty if I was not there to answer any questions. Ultimately, only a handful expressed some embarrassment, and in the end this was rectified through further discussion.

Research has demonstrated that what the participant may feel able to say in the interview may be shaped by the interviewer (Lundgren, 2012). For example, as with any interaction, there may be times where the women may have censored or revised their speech in light of my presence as the interviewer. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 7, I am conscious that the women's responses may have been, at least in part, shaped by my presence for concern over being judged. Thus, in suggesting that we do not know what a body can do, this extends to considering

my own body; I could not know in advance how I may impact upon what the women felt able to say or do.

Above, I highlighted how my previous engagement with fitspo communities could be seen as affording me 'insider' status, through a chance to empathize with shared experiences. However, this also raises a research limitation in regards to what I may have overlooked or failed to probe as a result of my presumed understanding. When re-reading the interview transcripts, I noticed there were times where "I did not allow—or, more accurately, require—study respondents to complete sentences, thoughts, or descriptions" (Kanuha, 2000, p.442). For example, while I asked the women to talk me through their process of image-selection, I did not push any further when they mentioned editing techniques, assuming that they meant the same kinds of things that I would do when sharing images on social media (such as adjusting brightness or contrast). In addition, while I made every effort to start questions with the request to explain particular things to me as though I did not know anything about them (for example, Instagram versus reality images, Chapter 8), in reflecting on my transcripts this was not always successful. Despite this, through these questions and the media go-alongs, I did aim to lessen the impact of my assumed knowledge.

It could be argued that a further limitation is that I did not make more use of the images in the analysis, as I chose not to conduct a systematic analysis on the women's images. However, this was born out of my desire to do research that goes beyond the representational content of such images, and instead to think about what fitspo images are *doing* when they are being taken, consumed or circulated. While what the image was *of* is no doubt important (and I explore how the women talk about how the content of images feel), in analysing the images as stand-alone elements I risked imposing my own interpretation on how images may feel, or what they may do, for the women. Instead, my analysis of the images taken by the women and those discussed in the interviews has deliberately concentrated more on how the women describe, explain and make reference to the images.

Finally, the diversity of the sample can be raised as a limitation. The majority of the women I spoke too were white, British and/or did not identify as disabled (or did not disclose this to me). This has placed limitations on the kinds of claims I have been able to make – I have not, for example, been able to make arguments related to how women with disabilities come to understand their own bodies through engagement with fitspo images. Moreover, while my sample focused on young women, this was motivated by the use of Instagram and participation in fitness communities as principally popular amongst this demographic. However, drawing on Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges discussed above, the incorporation of specific characteristics (such as disability, race, gender and age) does not mean that research is then best suited to speak in representation *of* these groups. My claims to knowledge have been in relation to the women I have spoken to, of which in the proceeding chapters I make tentative, though empirically

informed, arguments about how this data can be used to understand what Instagram can be seen as *doing* in this cultural moment.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview and evaluation of the methodological choices made for this research. I have shown that all stages of the research design have been carefully considered, and align with the epistemological background of the thesis. I have shown that while small and inevitably partial, my sample and the recruitment method used were suited to the topic under study. At both an institutional and personal level, this research has been conducted with research ethics as a priority, relating to recruitment, data production and analysis.

Through thinking about my research design via Deleuze's concept of immanence, I purposefully chose a mixed-methods approach that sought to refuse the separation between digital/non-digital, and images and bodies. Through this focus on creative mixed-methods, I have shown that it is possible to design research in a way that can go beyond these distinctions, and instead develop alternative ways of considering the process of researching fitspo images on Instagram, and researching social media and images more broadly. In addition to informing my research design, I have demonstrated that the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapter were instrumental in my analysis, considering them in tandem with thematic analysis to more fully answer my research questions in relation to what the fitspo assemblage can do.

Even in light of potential limitations, I have shown that the research design facilitated my ability to produce data in a way that has enabled a theoretically-driven analyses. In sum, I have demonstrated the utility of combining epistemological theories of knowledge and methodological approaches to avoid repetition, and produce something new in the study of women's bodies, images, bodily surveillance and Instagram through a "creative line of flight" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006, p.8). In the chapters that follow, I show the directions this creative line of flight takes.

Chapter 5 Becoming luminous: purposeful transformations, investments and surveillance

5.1 Introduction

While in Chapter 2 I highlighted that women desiring to change their bodies is not new, here I ruminate upon what is *different* in the women's desires to purposefully transform their bodies. Here, I consider what hangs together in the fitspo assemblage to produce various modes of surveillance, and ways of transforming and working on the body, that the women recognise as *affirming.* I demonstrate these transformations stretch beyond the physical appearance of the body, encapsulating health, emotional dispositions and subjective transformations. I argue that for such transformations to become recognised as affirming requires the sharing of particular images within the fitspo assemblage, through and alongside a range of socially shared values, such as meritocratic narratives of hard work and an array of postfeminist sensibilities (Gill, 2007b). Across this chapter, I begin to sketch out one of the core arguments of this thesis, arguing that the way these varied elements come together in the fitspo assemblage produces an *intensified* surveillance, where body management is felt *alongside* the monitoring of other bodily attributes.

To explore these affirming images, I build upon Angela McRobbie's (2009) conceptualisation of luminosity. This has two benefits. First, it enables the consideration of how the women's surveillance practices are made intelligible outside of accusations of vanity or self-obsession, pointing to how such practices are framed in terms of an *increase* in bodily capacities (Deleuze, 1988). Second, it enables the consideration of how *images themselves* are often the sites of luminosity through the kinds of bodies, or body parts, that are shared and thus seen by others. Consequently, I argue that while working on and managing the body (in various ways) is important, what *conditions* the fitspo assemblage is that such images must be displayed to the (real or imagined) audience to become luminous, where specific images accumulate feeling through display (Ahmed, 2004). While the women's perceptions of this (real or imagined) audience is shaped through what has been termed a postfeminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018), in this chapter (and those that follow), I show how the presumed surveillance of the women's audience also exceeds it.

I begin by defining the concept of luminosity. I then explore the women's desires for body recomposition, and demonstrate how their focus on transforming their appearance becomes conflated with improving their health. Next, I position exercise videos and pictures of body parts as images that have the capacity to *affect* the women's bodies through enabling "particular knowledges and understandings of and ways of living a body" (Coleman, 2009, p.87) – or, becoming

sites of luminosity. Following this, I explore *subjective* transformations, and the transformation images used to make these visible and knowable. Finally, in tying these arguments together, I demonstrate the thread running through these examples that it is imperative to *display* these transformations to the (real or imagined) audience, continuously pointing towards the intensified surveillance that is enabled through the fitspo assemblage.

5.2 Luminosity

In her analysis of the sociocultural context in the UK at the turn of the millennium, McRobbie contemplates the growing prominence of the 'Can-Do' girl (Harris, 2012) whereby young women are positioned as privileged subjects of economic, social and political change. Because young women are now seen as more equal citizens, for McRobbie this means that they have become "subjects worthy of governmental attention" (2009, p.57). In particular, McRobbie highlights that particular expectations are placed upon women to achieve specific goals, such as success in the labour market, and within the beauty-fashion complex.

Consequently, McRobbie argues that "[y]oung women are being put under a spotlight so that they become visible in a certain kind of way" (2009, p.54). Drawing on Gilles Deleuze, McRobbie positions these spotlights as luminous spaces of attention that make particular femininities visible, where in doing so "the theatrical effect of this moving spotlight softens, dramatizes and disguises the regulative dynamics" (2009, p.54) of it. Through this spotlight, *some* figures are able to shimmer whilst others are clouded and relegated. McRobbie conceptualises four luminosities that regulate young womanhood today: the postfeminist masquerade, the working girl, the phallic girl, and the global girl. For example, McRobbie links the postfeminist masquerade to the fashion-beauty complex, which encourages "lifelong and carefully staged body maintenance as an imperative of feminine identity" (2009, p.63), and retrenches sexual difference. This luminous postfeminist masquerade is hyperfeminine, concerned with all aspects of appearance and linked to the consumption of make-up, high heels and clothes. Importantly, this is recast as a *choice*, not an obligation, that women can make due to the (supposed) erosion of gender inequality, increased purchasing power and, as Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018), Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2015) and Ana Elias, Gill and Christina Scharff (2017) note, through the association of appearance management with empowerment.

While the transformations enabled through these luminosities are perceived positively culturally, McRobbie cautions being:

> alert to the dangers which arise when a selection of feminist values and ideals appear to be inscribed within a more profound and determined attempt, undertaken by an array of political and cultural forces, to re-shape notions of womanhood so that they fit with new or emerging (neo-liberalised) social and economic arrangements (McRobbie, 2009, p.57).

Through this, McRobbie is pointing towards the ways womanhood thus becomes "a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices" (2009, p.57), serving to include some whilst excluding others. For example, McRobbie argues the luminosity of the postfeminist masquerade re-secures racial divisions and normative whiteness, through being "unapologetically and invariably white" (2009, p.70), where women of colour are only included when Otherness is signalled but *subsumed* into the Western fashion-beauty complex[1].

While McRobbie draws on an understanding of the Symbolic[2] to think through luminosities as "spaces for this authority [of patriarchy] to be exerted anew" (2009, p.61), I instead position images as sites of luminosity that are *productive* and *affirmative* in how women may recognize their bodies in specific ways. Rather than articulating this as "maintaining and consolidating masculine hegemony" (McRobbie, 2009, p.63), I consider how images are used *by women to invest in themselves as luminous,* and what elements come together within the fitspo assemblage so images become conceived as evidence of this. Thus, rather than suggesting that luminous spaces of attention are ways women respond to their state of lack, where "in the hope of making good of this loss…[women self-impose new] feminine cultural norms" (McRobbie, 2009, p.63), I take a more affirmative stance that considers how bodies become through their desiring connections with others (Braidotti, 2002). Thus, I am concerned with what luminous becomings are enabled through relations with other bodies in the fitspo assemblage, acknowledging molar territorializations of power whilst being attentive to moments of rupture (Renold and Ringrose, 2008).

5.3 Purposeful bodily transformations

5.3.1 "I wanna be fitter, I wanna look fitter"

The most common transformation goal amongst the women was the desire to change their body composition, through losing fat and gaining muscle:

> Lauren: What are you monitoring and measuring, if anything at all?
> Megan: I don't know, it changes a lot. I think at the minute it's kind of like be strong but like to be muscular, so that is losing a little bit of weight, but it's not just a weight loss thing anymore it's getting leaner. Leaner, stronger, and like build muscle, and just get that more muscular sort of look, as opposed to being thin.

> Salma: In the beginning it was just 'oh I need to look a bit skinnier, thinner', and now it's 'I wanna be fitter, I wanna look fitter, I wanna be

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[1] Jess Butler (2013) critiques how women of colour have been addressed by scholars of postfeminism, which I explore in Chapter 6.

[2] Through Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler.

healthier'
Lauren: What would looking fitter look like?
Salma: I like a lot of muscle definition, erm, but I also like to be lean so that I'm able to see that muscle definition.

While the surveillance of women's bodies through weight loss has been highlighted by feminist scholars (Wolf, 1991; Chernin, 1994; Bartky, 1997; Orbach, 1998; Bordo, 2003), here the women reject (only) weight loss as a desirable body transformation. While Kim Chernin (1994) describes the Western obsession with weight loss as evidence of a 'tyranny of slenderness', and Naomi Wolf highlights a "cultural fixation on female thinness" (1991, p.187), Megan and Salma oppose thinness as something to strive for, instead aspiring to look 'fitter'. Instead, Megan and Salma can be seen as reflecting the cultural shift that has taken place more recently, where discussions of thinness are supplemented with discussions of fitness and health due to the perceived failures and obsessive nature of the dieting industry (Stinson, 2001; Cobb, 2020; O'Neill, 2020a) Through this, looking 'fit' is positioned as a practice that can be achieved and embodied through exercise and dieting. However, this is not to say the rejection of thinness results in body management being alleviated. Instead, collectively the women demonstrated their gaze upon their bodies shifted from the number on the scale, towards different muscle groups. Most often, these were glutes, abdominals and leg muscles:

Helen: I do think like, 'oh, my legs could be more muscular'.

Lorna: That's actually [what] got me very early on into weight lifting, was like abs.

Mollie: [I focus on] my quads, my glutes, my hamstrings.

This demonstrates that surveillance has not been eroded, but instead has become more *intense,* akin to the studies discussed in Chapter 2 regarding a growing preoccupation with the body within postfeminist media culture (Gill, 2007b; Elias and Gill, 2017; Elias et al., 2017). Elias and Gill articulate ideas of intensified surveillance through the growth of "apps that 'scan' the body for flaws and damage" (2017, p.66), where applications like *Facetune* enable users to edit and resize bodily features. Here, rather than the body as a *whole* being positioned as "always unruly, requiring constant monitoring" (Gill, 2007, p.132), where through being appropriately worked upon it can become "a vehicle to recognition" (Riley and Evans, 2018, p.212), the women focus on *individual body parts under the skin.* It is these muscle groups that are framed as requiring surveillance, and thus become 'a vehicle to recognition' through particular exercise choices (23 women in this study exclusively[3] trained through bodybuilding, training muscle groups up to six times per week). Such muscle groups were emphasized within the photos the women took during the photo-taking exercises:

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[3] Seven did perform bodybuilding, but were primarily focused on other sports.

Figure 1 Lauren, taken from @lrmresearch

Figure 2 Jodie, taken from @lrmresearch

Figure 3 Salma, taken from @lrmresearch

Exploring how images and Instagram *enable* this intensified surveillance shortly, this focus on muscle groups affirms arguments that women face an ideal that expects them to be slim *and* muscular (Markula, 1995; Sassatelli, 1999; Markula, 2001; Maguire, 2008; Talukdar, 2012; Walseth and Tidslevold, 2019). This emphasis on leanness *and* muscularity in the fitspo assemblage can be understood as intensifying surveillance through being examples of ongoing transformations (Jones, 2008; Raisborough, 2011). The goals the women articulate are not marked by a final point (such as a goal weight), but are a continuous process of bodily monitoring, whereby transformation is sought through the enduring labour of bodybuilding. For example, Salma and Megan's aims are indicative of the women's ever-moving goal posts due to the (somewhat empty) signifiers of looking *more* muscular, or *leaner*; no one expressed their body at present was 'enough', as all were looking to improve *something*. Thus, the surveillance of the body here can be understood as more intense due to: a focus on specific muscle groups; an enduring labour; and somewhat ephemeral goals.

Crucially, there was one way desires to transform *did* have a tangible end point:

> Kay: I said [to my husband], you know, 'I want to get more athletic', so he was like 'you should try weights' [laughs]. And I was like, 'I really don't wanna turn into the hulk'.

> Lorna: I want to put a little bit of size on, not too much, because I don't think, I mean. I do want to be big, but I don't, I think I'd rather save that for later. 'Cos you can be a big female bodybuilder later in life, but it could stop you from getting a job.

Through highlighting there is a point at which muscularity tips into transgression for women, Kay and Lorna demonstrate that building muscle is accompanied by a caveat, suggesting body recomposition goals are regulated by normative understandings of gendered bodies and muscularity (Markula, 1995; Bordo, 2003; Bunsell, 2013; Sassatelli, 2014; Wiklund et al., 2019). While important, visible muscularity must not come at the expense of being coded as *too* muscular, and by extension, masculine. These concerns can be understood as adding to the intense nature of surveillance in the fitspo assemblage, as *in addition to* enduring labour over body parts, this is matched by monitoring they have not breached the confines of an acceptably feminine body, through comparisons to a monstrous Other (Shildrick, 1996). Thus, despite the potential for a molecular line of flight away from molar figurations of masculinity and femininity through the potentially subversive act of women bodybuilding[4], feminine muscle acquisition is instead *reterritorialized* back into molar and binary forms of power. These lines of flight are obstructed through being understood as slipping into transgressive territory through perceived limitations placed employment opportunities and appearance, whereby such obstructions work through "segmenting them [lines of flight],

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[4] Due to a focus on strength and muscularity, which are commonly associated with masculinity (Bunsell, 2013).

blocking them, plugging them, or plunging them into a kind of black hole" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.158). This is important as it "reminds us that movements and ruptures and lines of flight are not grand or total escapes but [are] often subject to recuperation" (Renold and Ringrose, 2008, p.320).

Finally, Marika Tiggeman and Mia Ziccardo (2018) note that while fitspo communities seek to differentiate themselves from thinspo content through a focus on strength and muscularity as opposed to thinness, in some way this data affirms the argument that fitspo communities may impose *new* bodily norms to strive for (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015, 2018; Boepple et al., 2016; Talbot et al., 2017; Riley and Evans, 2018; Uhlmann et al., 2018). For example, the data here demonstrates highly gendered bodily norms, as the goal of muscularity is counter-balanced with an inclination to avoid looking 'too' masculine. Next, I build on these arguments to demonstrate that while these bodily norms and ways of achieving them were related to aesthetic goals, they was also underwritten by an additional justification of improved health. Through this, I argue this conflation of health and aesthetics *adds* to and *shapes* how desires for transformation are enacted, illustrating the importance of engaging with women who share fitspo images to highlight the complexities of the surveillance enabled through the fitspo assemblage.

5.3.2 Looking and being healthy

Through associating body fat with poor health, regulating food and exercise became a way to achieve transformation goals *and* avoid becoming 'unhealthy':

> Lauren: What would you say healthy is like now, after going through these processes of dieting and exercise?
> Charlotte: Just eating right. Just eating good food, and not eating too much, and portion control.
> Lauren: How have you come to understand that, is it stuff through Instagram or other places online?
> Charlotte: No, so through myself I know for a fact if I'm eating four take aways a week I'm gonna be fat, so I just won't.

> Zoe: I probably didn't think of them [my friends] as bigger either until I started like getting healthier, and I started to realise that actually what they're doing is unhealthy […]. I agree with body confidence, but I think it gets to a point where you do need to think about your health.

First, this data demonstrates that Charlotte and Zoe's experiences of losing weight has meant they are more aware of the intricacies of their food intake (Longhurst, 2012), contributing to particular foods like take-aways becoming demonised for 'causing' weight gain. Second, this demonstrates how the women perceived their food intake as intimately connected to body size and health, reinforcing the idea that being fat is unhealthy. Interestingly, rather than attributing this to the content they see on Instagram, Charlotte and Zoe affirm the Western, cultural associations of fat and poor health documented in the literature (Longhurst, 2012; Throsby,

2008; LeBesco, 2009; Evans, 2006; 2010), where anti-fat policies are framed as a "war [which] must be waged through the disciplining of bodies" (Throsby, 2008, p.117). In particular, "'excess' body weight is constructed as unhealthy and a consequence of irresponsible life choices" (Malson et al., 2009, p.331), as shown through Zoe's appraisal of her old friendship group and Charlotte's positioning of four take-aways as *too* much, rather than conceived in relation to, for example, socio-economic circumstances or pleasure. This is important as it illustrates the utility of *the fitspo assemblage,* to consider what this assemblage conditions at different times, in different ways, for different bodies. Here, it becomes possible to see that what is produced is indicative of the entanglement Western cultural and medical discourses *and* 'fitspo specific' body ideals (such as possessing shapely glutes) that permeate the women's understandings of their bodies. In addition, in reinforcing fat as unhealthy, this enables Charlotte and Zoe the chance to reframe their concerns about the *aesthetics* of their body towards "seemingly gender-neutral concerns of proper nutrition and exercise" (Welsh, 2011, p.34), where the "slender body is read as a sign of health" (Malson et al., 2009, p.331). *Because* body fat is perceived as unhealthy, the practices the women undertake become reconfigured as a moral endeavour; while they are about aesthetics, they are *also* related to the conflation between leanness and health.

The women's bodily transformation goals, then, are forged through: a focus on specific body parts; bodybuilding exercises; a conflation of health and appearance, seemingly shaped through Western cultural and medical discourses; diet preoccupations; and the desire to avoid becoming fat[5]. However, while a few women highlighted their strict diets (for example, for bodybuilding shows)*,* the majority spoke against rigidity, and for moderation and balance:

> Zoe: I started tracking it [food] to make sure I get enough protein, and then I just realised how many calories everything has in it, and now I'm just more aware of it. And like, obviously I'll have a day where I go way over, but then the next day I'll just make sure I eat better, and go do some cardio. So it's not that I'm overly obsessed with it, I'm just keeping it in mind.

> Eryn: Everything in moderation, because a chocolate bar isn't going to make you fat, like olive oil isn't gonna make you fat. Anything will make you overweight if you just eat too much of it. Like carbs, fat and protein will all turn into fat in your body if you eat too many of them, so just don't eat so many. Yeah. Enjoy your life basically.

Reflecting mainstream dietary advice as seen in, for example, the *Change4Life* campaigns (Public Health England, 2019) and *The Eatwell Guide* (Public Health England, 2016) issued by the UK government, Zoe and Eryn position the body as a rational vessel that can be controlled through individual choices of food input and

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[5] In Chapter 6 I further explore the collective fear and anxiety over body fat amongst the women in this research.

exercise output. This individualises ideas of health, and overlooks the complex relationships bodies have to weight, food and activity levels (Malson et al., 2009; Bacon, 2010), positioning the body as always at risk from the threat of fat that can be managed through our present actions (Evans, 2010; Coleman, 2015). Moreover, the data points towards the gradual derogation of dieting as obsessive and restrictive (Stinson, 2001; Mallyon et al., 2010; Woolhouse et al., 2012; Chapman, 2013; Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Morris, 2019; Cobb, 2020). Rather than being symptomatic of obsession, the women position dieting through *individual choice* and *health improvement,* managed via a careful (though arguably no less restrictive) management of food, and exercising to "make up" for going "over". Women *must* enjoy their lives – but this enjoyment must be sought through their transformation goals by making the correct food decisions, maintaining distance from fat gain, and (through this) keeping their health intact.

Through this conflation of health and appearance, this data suggests an additional manner through which the fitspo assemblage *intensifies* surveillance. While perhaps not following a strictly scheduled dietary plan, the data demonstrates the women are still continually monitoring their food intake vis-á-vis ambiguous food rules, and as with their muscle goals, as part of *ongoing lifestyle changes.* This echoes Kate Cairns and Josée Jonhston's (2015) idea of the 'do-diet', whereby "dietary restrictions [are reframed] as positive choices, while maintaining an emphasis on body discipline, expert knowledge and self-control" (Cairns and Johnston, 2015, p.153). Thus, the women's perception of their individual responsibility for health, aided *through* their diets, can be seen another way women are called upon to regulate their appearance through making 'correct' choices, which in turn become framed as modes of individual empowerment and legitimated forms of postfeminist femininity (Riley et al., 2019b) within the fitspo assemblage. As Rachel O'Neill suggests in her analysis of wellness culture, this emphasis on choice has ontological stakes through encouraging "the idea that health is something that we *can* be in control of, despite the fact that health" is not something that can be willingly chosen due to factors such as the decline of the welfare state, and economic and temporal constraints (2020a, p.14).

However, despite the prevalent association between fat and poor health, there were still instances of women *challenging* the associations of leanness and good health:

> Megan: If you're being really, really restrictive and it's making you miserable then that's not healthy…no matter how ripped or shredded you are.

> Daria: [There are] people that are like, they look great, um, they're so fit and stuff but they're just really unhappy in their lives.

This is important, as in contrast to Susie Orbach's assertion that "every woman wants to be thin" (Orbach, 1998, p.62), there is a point at which the costs of achieving a 'good' (slim and fit) body outweigh the outcome. Megan and Daria

evidence a deterritorialization of the conflation between appearance and health, where looking *overly* lean and the processes involved in achieving this become known as unhealthy. This *could* demonstrate a move away from binary health associations that position fat bodies and lean bodies as indicative of poor and good health, respectively. However, although elements of this binary appear challenged, the data broadly suggests the association between fat and poor health is left largely intact. This could suggest that the cultural narratives that circulate about fatness, "cleverly intertwined with concepts of nature, health and beauty" (LeBesco and Braziel, 2001, p.2), are still too pervasive so as to be fully recuperated, even as there are some pushbacks. Moreover, Megan and Daria's assertions could be recognized as a reterritorialization of power as this acknowledgement of being *too* "shredded" as unhealthy becomes recuperated as *another* act of surveillance for their own bodies and others. The intensity of surveillance is felt not only through body parts, gender-bound values relating to muscularity, 'excess' fat management and diet, but also in avoiding 'excess' leanness - like body fat, obsessive body management is also culturally derided[6] (Cobb, 2020). These intricacies are important as they challenge the positioning of women of dupes of diet culture (and culture more broadly) through demonstrating the "micro complexities that reveal girls as at once reinscribing and disrupting" (Renold and Ringrose, 2008, p.315) dominant ideals of health, bodies and fat through the fitspo assemblage.

5.4 Luminous images: physical transformations

So far I have outlined the transformation goals the women desired, highlighting these as instances of intensified body surveillance that are cut through with gendered norms. Next, I consider how *exercise videos* and *pictures of body parts* shared on Instagram contribute to *how* the fitspo assemblage is productive of this intense surveillance. I argue that the young woman who works hard upon and deserves her body emerges as luminous through these images, *enhancing* the capacities of the women's bodies through being invested in as markers of hard work and effort. Drawing on Akane Kanai's concept of "affective glue" (2019, p.10), I argue these images secure "certain attachments to neoliberalism" (2019, p.10) and normative body standards, thus acting as a regulative form of power (McRobbie, 2009). Through this, I show the affects of such images are not random, nor without perception, as they become known through broader cultural values relating to meritocracy and appearance.

5.4.1 Exercise imagery: deserving transformation

All of the women noted they regularly made their workouts visible on Instagram:

> Lauren: I'd rather that [shows video of exercise] than a posed shot. That looks like I work hard in the gym, rather than me posing
> Lauren (interviewer) (LI): Is that important for you to display that?

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[6] Though not in the same way.

Lauren: Yeah
LI: Why do you think that is?
Lauren: 'Cos then it shows that I exercise, and work hard as well.

Eryn: There's a difference between having like, overly sized features because you've had plastic surgery, and just actually being physically strong. People aren't bothered about being strong so that if you were drowning you could lift yourself out of a pool, people are bothered about being strong so you've got a big bum. It's not the same thing
Lauren: So you think it's more important to demonstrate the hard work that goes into it rather than just – [interrupted]
Eryn: Exactly, rather than just you look yeah, I did some glute bridges and now I've got a big bum
Lauren: Do you think that's what one of the kind of motivations of sharing your videos and stuff like that is, this is the hard work I've put in?
Eryn: Exactly. I like to show people, as I say, when people say 'you do this resistance workout your glutes will grow', and I'm like, no, doing a set of 100kg glute bridges will make your glutes grow. People are given this false sense of, idea of how to make their bodies look a very easy way just so people can sell some resistance bands, where there's a lot of hard work that goes into it, and you kind of need to show people that.

Lauren and Eryn tie images of exercise to hard work and success, alluding to ideas of meritocracy. Jo Littler (2018) describes meritocracy as a cultural and social trope in contemporary British society that propagates the notion that society will "offer enough opportunity and mobility for 'talent' to combine with 'effort' to rise to the top" (2018, p.1). Meritocracy enables success to be understood through individual pursuits and failures – success is achieved, and therefore deserved, through individual hard work (Littler, 2018). Thus, Eryn and Lauren suggest that not only is working on the body important, it is also important to share images of specific exercises to make their transformation intelligible to others though notions of deservingness and hard work.

In her study of Tumblr blogs, Kanai argues that young women used memes to demonstrate resistance towards productivity, evoking a "pleasingly mild contestation of neoliberal standards of productivity" (2019, p.55). These relatable, workshy posts for Kanai betray how entrenched values of productivity and hard work are in that it is notable (and meme-worthy) when standards of productivity are *not* met. In contrast, Eryn and Lauren use images to demonstrate their relation to hard work and productivity differently, whereby images are not used to maintain their *distance* from these values, but to make visible and secure their *closeness* to these values. The hardworking woman who deserves her body emerges as luminous *through* sharing specific images in the fitspo assemblage, securing attachments to this idealized figure and enabling this specific becoming and knowledge of Eryn and Lauren's bodies. Consequently, we learn that images are

not static representations, but are endowed with the capacity to affect (Coleman, 2009; 2015).

Thus, had I followed an analysis akin to those outlined in Chapter 2 that focused on a content analysis of what is *in* fitspo images (here, exercise), this would risk overlooking how power works *through* images (Coleman, 2015). Alternatively, through this understanding, it becomes possible to see that in securing investments to meritocracy, the women's images demarcate who is and is not deserving of their transformations:

> Beth: The more photos and videos we put up online about it [CrossFit] the more it's going to grow
> Lauren: Yeah, so leading to increased participation?
> Beth: Yeah, and more like girls, I think that's more important
> Lauren: Do you, why do you think that?
> Beth: Because so many girls that like don't do fitness stuff, they just go to the gym and they just want big butts or like just do the glute exercises which I fell for and [pause] they don't believe in like, lifting heavy weights or working hard, or sweating, and getting dirty in their training. They always think they've got to look nice when they're in the gym, when they don't.

Akin to the "moral dimensions of 'authentic' swimming, which privilege hard work, bodily discipline, [and] individual responsibility" (Throsby, 2016, p.167), and how patients of weight loss surgery are framed as lazy, and cheating the hard work of dieting and exercise (Throsby, 2008), Eryn and Beth articulate the moral dimensions of *legitimate* ways to attain one's body within the fitspo assemblage. For example, the women collectively tied being *deserving* of their bodies through sharing images that evidence exertion, such as sweat and heavy lifting (see also, Reade (2020)). Moreover, this differentiation is comparable to the moral narratives that circulate through thinspo communities (Cobb, 2020) and appraisals of cosmetic surgery (Jones, 2008) that serve to differentiate practices from vanity, and instead link them to productive labour. What is different to this research is how Eryn, Lauren and Beth describe their *purposeful* sharing of exercise images as *enabling* this distinction. Through this, we learn that these images are more than representative, through securing affective investments to specific values (Kanai, 2019).

In addition to highlighting images they purposefully share, the women further understand their bodies as luminous through using images to identify against what they do *not* do[7]. In their discussion of reality makeover television, Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine highlight that working class subjects are included to "talk about class as a dynamic of identifying against what we must not be" (2008, p.227). Similarly, Eryn, Beth and Lauren contrast their own images towards those that suggest evidence of cosmetic surgery, or the 'wrong' glute exercises. Notably, it is

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[7] This is similar to Chapter 7 where the women deride some images as 'too' sexual.

not the spot exercising itself that is the problem, but the exercises that are used to do so. In this way, images of the 'right' kinds of exercise work to affectively glue (Kanai, 2019) the women to hard work and meritocracy through demonstrating typically masculine activities (such as 'heavy' weights). Due to this, not all bodies *can* become luminous; as the women highlight, images of typically feminine exercises (such as using resistance bands), or those that suggest hard work has been 'cheated' (such as cosmetically enhanced bottoms) continue to be affective, but in ways that stick *derision* to others.

Crucially, these affective investments are saturated by 'power geometries' (Tolia-Kelly, 2006), whereby these affects are not accidental but become extensively organised through mechanisms of exclusion. That is, while there is an investment in images of bodies that are able to affirm the women as industrious and deserving, this excludes bodies that cannot, or do not want, to display their exercise in this way, or exercise like this at all. The data demonstrates this particularly occludes those who upload the 'wrong' images, such as images of women not sweating, or doing banded exercises, fixing these bodies as undeserving through ideas of what has not been 'earned'. While these luminous images are discussed by the women as enhancing the capacities of their bodies, this entrenches self-worth with the visibly toned, (correctly) exercising woman. Thus, what the *affects* of images do here is reinforce bodily hierarchies, positioning the body as something that *should* and *can* be transformed through individual, correct choices. On the one hand this data could demonstrate a deterritorialization of molar femininity whereby women do not *always* have to share images of themselves that are (socially deemed) aesthetically pleasing (through showing sweat or redness). However, this potential is blocked as this specific becoming of Eryn, Lauren and Beth's bodies occurs through the exclusion others through the production of binary machines (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006), and doubles back into other forms of normative appearance management.

5.4.2 Body parts: progression, journeys and self-esteem

Images that showcased specific body parts were also commonly shared, reflecting the women's transformation desires:

> Zoe: So I like ones like this [video of Zoe flexing her back muscles] where you can see muscle definition and stuff because, because it's more [pause] I dunno, because it just shows where you've come from. And I like the fact that I get a positive reaction because I've never really had that before.

> Megan: I think its [sharing images of body parts] for myself, yeah, for my own sort of self-esteem, and like I think I use it as a progress thing. Rather than like, now and again I'll post because I think I look good, and that's when I'd put it on my personal one

Lauren: Would one of these go on your personal one?
Megan: Probably not no. When I train with other people and I've done back, like, that's one thing I really want to look good, and have made loads of progression on. So someone got a photo of my back and I posted it cos I thought that's actually like not [pause] and that's pretty like ok, so I was quite buzzed.

First, Zoe and Megan articulate that images are crucial in *enacting* intensified surveillance through enabling them to scrutinise their bodies. Just as the rise in self-tracking technologies have aided more focused surveillance of the body (Lupton, 2012), the ability to take *and* share multiple images with ease within the fitspo assemblage has enabled the possibility of a more intense surveillance. For example, the ease of taking multiple photos was reflected in this research, where I watched the women sometimes take over 20 shots until they had taken one they were satisfied with, and within the interview data, where some women admitted to sometimes taking over 40 to get the 'right' shot. Taking multiple shots coalesced with how body parts looked, for example, because glutes were not big enough, or muscle tone was difficult to see. Taking these images thus allowed the women to capture how muscles looked at particular moments in time, where sharing these to their Instagram profile enabled instant comparison (and, as I explore in 5.6, allowed others to see this too).

For example, Zoe describes the images of her upper body on her Story highlight. A Story highlight is a collection of Stories that, instead of disappearing after 24 hours, are saved permanently. That Zoe used the Story highlight function is notable, as rather than letting the images disappear, she *curated* an archive of her bodily changes that she (and others) could tap through. Zoe invests the process of making these ephemeral images permanent as making intelligible "where you've come from", where visibility secures attachments to her body as positively changed. This highlights the affective capacities of archival technologies in what they can *do* for bodies (Pybus, 2015), and suggests images that do *not* show specific bodily changes would not be shared (Chapter 6). This speaks to my argument that the fitspo assemblage *intensifies* surveillance, as technologies such as cameras and Instagram profiles make "transformation seemingly more attainable, binding some to the self-surveillance, self-monitoring and self-disciplining of postfeminist regimes" (Riley et al, 2019, p.163). Here, this takes place through enabling images to be taken easily, the capacity to display those that show (the right) transformation, and the ability to be viewed by both the women *and* their (real or imagined) audience.

Second, their focus on journeys and progression enables Megan and Zoe to secure a positive closeness to the surveillance of their body parts, rather than something disciplinary. Popular in reality television (Pitts-Taylor, 2007; Jones, 2008; Raisborough, 2011) and in patients' narratives of weight loss surgery (Throsby, 2008), the journey trope evokes a feeling of empowerment and confidence through uncovering the 'authentic self' through changing the body. While not accounting for the authentic self, Megan and Zoe still position these surveillance 'journeys' as

affirming, rather than constraining, echoing research accounting how dieting, appearance management and exercise is discussed across different postfeminist media (Gill, 2007b; Roberts, 2007; Lazar, 2011; Gill and Elias, 2014; Cairns and Johnston, 2015; Elias et al., 2017; Riley and Evans, 2018; Riley et al., 2019b). Mirroring Riley and Evans (2018) analyses of fitblr blogs, the women articulate the positive aspects of surveillance through highlighting their *choice* in uploading these images, deflecting calls of obsession. Instead, the way Megan and Zoe conceive their images through notions of journeys, and the positive feedback they receive, enables them to understand themselves as "empowered and valued through work on the body" (Riley and Evans, 2018, p.211). Crucially, as above, this data suggests that only *some* images enable bodies to become luminous. Zoe and Megan demonstrate that images that show body parts transforming in the 'right' way enable them to understand themselves positively, becoming luminous through narratives of linear progression that circulate in neoliberal societies (Miller and Rose, 2008; Littler, 2018), and through receiving positive comments.

This data supports Cressida Heyes (2007) argument that, in exploring practices such as dieting, it is important to be critical *while* acknowledging the different capacities they enable. For Heyes, in doing so it becomes possible to understand the appeal of dieting, despite its failures. Similarly, while I have shown the capacities of Megan's and Zoe's bodies become enhanced through the fitspo assemblage through sharing *specific* bodily changes, this comes with the caveat that this risks limiting the potential of their bodies. As with Eryn, Beth and Lauren above, this enactment of surveillance and investment through images a risky game, as when they *do not* show these changes, such images may contribute to altogether different becomings (Chapter 6). This demonstrates Coleman's (2015) argument that how images are *felt* is linked to questions of power, as when bodies are only understood as *better* in relation to gendered appearance norms, instilling (precarious) positivity and enhanced capacities to act, such images make luminous that which should not be deviated from. Arguably, this prevents alternative ways of understanding women's bodies outside of their appearance and the work they do to 'improve' it, as images are used to affectively *glue* (Kanai, 2019) themselves to appearance-focused and hierarchical forms of esteem.

5.5 Luminous images: subjective transformations

The before-and-after image is a trope common to makeover TV, and on Instagram it circulates through a weekly hashtag (#TransformationTuesday). While typically these show weight loss, here I consider transformation images that show weight gain. I demonstrate how such images make luminous the women's subjective transformations through displaying their weight gain after (self-defined) disordered eating and exercise, where images, Instagram and bodies come together and produce luminous bodies through a postfeminist rhetoric of individualised empowerment and resilience.

5.5.1 Remembering weight loss, sharing weight gain

> Jodie: I was like, so obsessed with my body like two years ago that I would delete all of the ones I didn't like. I was a lot skinnier, I've showed you, but if I didn't look at all good I'd just delete them […] there was this one, so I had like, no erm quads, and just like no definition. It was just like skinny grossness.

> Lianna: That doesn't even feel like me in that picture anymore
> Lauren: Why not?
> Lianna: Because I'm so different like in all senses of the word. I'm a different person entirely, I've got a different headspace, I look different.

This data demonstrates the visceral and limiting experiences of disordered eating and exercise that 11 of the women explicitly noted they had experienced, or were still experiencing. Together, Jodie and Lianna articulate Coleman's argument that focusing on an "external reading of what the image *is of* cannot capture the intensive experience of it" (2015, p38). For example, Jodie notes she has few images of herself from this "obsessed" period, because she would often delete images that did not show her looking "good". This keenness to erase any trace of images that, for example, did not show her abdominals, positions images not as representative, but as things that can be *felt* within specific contexts (Coleman, 2009; 2015). Additionally, this demonstrates the process of self-selection that takes place to understand bodies *through* ideas of onward progression.

Moreover, the data illustrates that *viewing* these before images is both visual *and* affective. Lianna and Jodie suggest their bodies become understood *through* the relations that are formed with images, rather than external to them, where their images capture their bodies at specific temporal moments, producing particular bodily knowledges (Coleman, 2009). For example, the affective relations between Jodie and her image enables her to produce differential temporal knowledges about her body, as someone who was previously "skinny grossness". Jodie's 'before' image is felt through remembering her past behaviours as obsessive, speaking to cultural narratives that deride women for being obsessed with their appearance (whilst still expecting women to be concerned with how they look) (Bordo, 2003; Jones, 2008; Elias et al., 2017; Cobb, 2020). Similarly, Lianna expresses the temporal knowledge produced about her body as a jarring disjuncture with how she 'knows' her body now. While such images may 'show' the women as in alignment with the slender normative body ideals echoed by many feminist scholars (Chapter 2), the content of the images cannot grasp what such images do for how Jodie and Lianna can know their bodies, demonstrating the importance of engaging with women who produce and share such images.

The 'before' images were often positioned side by side with the 'after' image when shared on Instagram:

> Lauren: How do you feel about your body when you compare these two side by side?
> Jodie: That I'm so much prouder of what I look like now, and really am.

And like, internally I feel so much better. I feel like I have more energy. I was in a weird phase, and it's weird to look back on. Like, I always like wanted a six pack as well, I was obsessed with it.

Sam: I put them side by side to remind people, to remind myself how far I've come, I remind people that it's not just, erm, a weight thing. So it's not just about 'you weigh this much, now you weigh this much', well done you are a number. It's about 'you looked like this, remember a feeling' […]

Lauren: You said it was a way to help you remember how you felt, so what do you mean by that?

Sam: […] I posted a picture of when I used to be in college and I used to be very thin, very underweight. Erm, and I just thought, like it was in the early 2000s like it was just trendy to just be thin, and you know just be thin erm. […] [Now,] I'm proud of what I'm achieving and I want to remember it and I want to share it with other people […] And I think it's important to reflect, but not to like ponder on it too much. So not like get fixated over, like 'I need to get away from that person', but also just thinking, that person wasn't a very healthy person, and I'm happy with the person I am now, and I'm looking forward to the future when I'm gonna be even more happy.

Thus, images are not just representative of Sam and Jodie's appearance, but are sites of experience (Coleman, 2009) through which their bodies are understood as becoming better through the fitspo assemblage. What these transformation images *do* is enable *subjective transformations* to be known and made visible through sharing an image within a recognisable picture layout, and narrating this within the caption. Here, the past is enclosed within the images, where the past does not exist *separate* to the present, but is experienced alongside Jodie and Sam's 'after' bodies through archiving them (Coleman (2009); Chapter 6). Crucially, Jodie and Sam articulate these before-and-after pictures as ways to *occasionally* acknowledge the past to overcome it. Just as postfeminism demands that women monitor their bodies (Gill, 2007b; McRobbie, 2009), here it is possible to see postfeminism's calls to work upon one's character (Gill, 2017; Gill and Orgad, 2018), whereby resilience and positive mental attitudes are favoured as the "'right' kinds of dispositions for surviving in a neoliberal society" (Gill, 2017, p.606). These are often favoured over other emotional states (particularly sadness and anger). For example, Sam demonstrates negativity is allowed to be experienced but only as a "pedagogic tool" (Gill and Orgad, 2018, p485), where her past experiences are acknowledged within the context of moving forward.

The 'after' image also produces different temporal knowledges of their bodies (Coleman, 2009). The transformation images enable the women to become known as profoundly *different* and improved, where what such images *do* is demonstrate the ability to "to grow, develop, and become more resilient" (Gill and Orgad, 2018, p.485). This suggests the affective relations between images and bodies here are not autonomous, but are shaped by ideas around appropriate emotional and

feeling states, where women are encouraged to *"take into account such burdens rather than being overwhelmed by them"* (Kanai, 2019, p.31, emphasis in original). That is, bodies can *only* be affected in this way by images that can account for and display the individual overcoming of past injuries towards becoming resilient and stronger. Crucially, and as with many of the examples in this chapter, it is not only *images* that enable this becoming, but having these images *witnessed* by others in the fitspo assemblage (5.6).

5.5.2 What happens *after* the before-and-after?

If these women are able to understand themselves, and their past experiences of eating and exercise disorders, through their individual strength and resilience through these images, it feels uncomfortable to critique this. However, while these images can be understood through their individual positive benefits, they must also questioned in terms of what *else* they do. For example, it is still *through images of their bodies* that these women become luminous, where the most prominent feature of their posts is their bodies. This has two implications. First, such posts repeatedly make visible and connect smaller bodies to disordered eating and exercise habits, which may limit how far bigger bodies can be understood in relation to such illnesses (see Saguy and Gruys, 2010). Second, the 'after' body is reminiscent of the idealized body discussed above, raising questions relating to whether bodies of women who gain significantly more weight would also be understood as successfully transformed. To echo Su Holmes in her appraisal of anorexia recovery videos on YouTube:

> this is not a critique of how the girls present their problems in the videos. Rather, it is rather [sic] a critique of the often very narrow ways in which girls and women are encouraged to understand the significance of self-starvation (Holmes, 2017, p.13).

In the images above, the way disordered past experiences are fleetingly discussed, rather than perhaps sitting with anger or frustration, means that the systemic problem of such experiences become individual problems to overcome. Akin to popular feminism in relation to the 'confidence crisis' (Banet-Weiser (2018); Chapter 8), transformation images are used to understand disordered eating and exercise as individual problems to be resolved, rather than questioning their aetiology. For example, in positioning behaviours as obsessive, or as following trends, there is a risk of pathologization. This is opposed to, for example, considering the cultural conditions that allow such practices to flourish (Cobb, 2020), such as "the individualizing trajectory of dominant clinical narratives on anorexia with the neoliberal emphasis on health and success as the domain of individual responsibility" (Holmes, 2017, p.13). Through disavowing feeling states such as anger that are often positioned as toxic in women (Ahmed, 2010; Gill, 2017; Gill and Orgad, 2018; Gill and Kanai, 2018), and making their problems legible through these individualizing narratives, women become luminous here *only*

through becoming a beacon of resilience the face of their individual hardships, rather than for systemic critiques.

Finally, these images require further consideration due to their captions, which account for their weight gain through reference to their 'obsessive' past practices. In addition to pathologising language, these captions suggest such images cannot speak for themselves within a culture that valorises weight loss, but require *narrative*. Bodies thus become stronger, resilient and transformed through explaining this to others. Thus, to become luminous through weight gain, this specific transformation must be accounted for or risk becoming known as a 'failing' body, avoiding the risk of their big(ger) body becoming 'known' as something else due to fat gain (Murray, (2005); Chapter 6). In a culture where appearance weighs so heavily on the meaning of health (both broadly speaking and within this microcosm), this data demonstrates it is crucial that weight gain is explained to others to become luminous.

5.6 Being seen

I have argued that particular images affect how bodies can become through enabling the women to invest in their transformations as luminous through knowing their bodies as hard working, with greater self-esteem, and as more resilient. However, what I have hinted at throughout this chapter is the importance of these images *being seen by others.* While the subjects of media surveillance were once primarily (women) celebrities (Winch, 2013; Nurka, 2014), this data demonstrates that here women are putting *themselves* in the spotlight to be gazed upon by others through the fitspo assemblage. I use this section to begin to sketch out the argument I advance throughout this thesis, in that the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience is one key element of the fitspo assemblage that contributes to an intensified surveillance. Drawing on the postfeminist gaze discussed in Chapter 2, whereby "women scrutinise themselves and others for their ability to transform their bodies to meet cultural ideals, prioritising appearance as a vehicle to recognition" (Riley and Evans, 2018, p.212), Instagram's affordances and the sociocultural context of the fitspo assemblage, I use this section to argue these images, and so the women, gain the luminosity discussed in this chapter *through* their display to the (real or imagined) audience.

In 5.4.1, I demonstrated the iterative nature of the fitspo assemblage in conditioning, and being conditioned by, the social (Duff, 2014; Buchanan, 2017). That is, for bodies to become enhanced through notions of hard work and meritocracy requires that these are already intelligible as socially prized values. Notably, this data demonstrates that for this investment to happen, this requires these images being *shared on Instagram.* What images *do* here is make these values visible to others, through the surveillance enabled through Instagram's follower/audience model. This suggests it is not enough to take exercise videos and keep them private – *others must witness these images*. While Alison Winch (2013) frames the surveillance women submit themselves to as disciplinary, the data here

positions surveillance as in some way affirming, as it is only through being seen by others (and showing what you are not) that the women can become luminous.

While photographs have always enabled the viewer to look back and reflect upon the past in the present day (Kuhn, 2007), for example, in family photo albums (Rose, 2003), in 5.4.2 and 5.5 I demonstrated that this reflection takes on a specific form through addressing the changes bodies have undergone *publically*. For example, I have demonstrated that having a public *archive* of body parts that have been shared due to improving in the 'right' ways, whether due to changing body parts or weight gain, enables an investment in themselves as luminous through displaying the right kind of transformation journey. While images are important to understand the possibilities of bodies, so too are the digital spaces through which they are shared, through enabling a public archiving of specifically selected images. If images are one means through which bodies become known (Coleman 2009), here it is the awareness of the (real or imagined) audience that contributes to the curation of *particular* images across Instagram profiles to enable *others* to invest in the women's bodies accordingly. Relatedly, the data has also demonstrated the importance of receiving feedback from others, where for Megan, Zoe and Sam, comments from others were affirmative and enhancing through engaging positively with their images that made visible their various labours of progression (whether in the context of recovery and/or appearance goals). This demonstrates that it is not just human bodies that are affective in the fitspo assemblage, and that secure attachments to transformation, but also *comments*. In this way, it becomes possible to begin to understand the appeal that taking and sharing these images have, as they become circulated and felt within a community that offers praise for making particular images public[8].

These examples dovetail with the postfeminist gaze Riley and Evans (2018) describe through their analysis of fitblr blogs. Riley and Evans suggest that the rise of the postfeminist gaze, whereby "women are foregrounded as the viewers of other women" (2018, p.212), is enabled through the technologies used within fitblr communities, including cameras and Tumblr. For example, within fitblr blogs, Riley and Evans highlight that "transformation is constructed as empowering by offering self-mastery, health, a moral position and associated citizenship" (2018, p.213), where the images that women share (such as of their weight loss) positions the body as "one 'worthy' of viewing" (2018, p.213). Similarly here, the images worthy of being shared and viewed by the (real or imagined) audience are those that enable an investment in: appearance; transforming and working on the body (in the right way), confidence and self-esteem; and resilience in the face of hardship. Notably, these are all key examples of the themes that comprise the postfeminist gaze.

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[8] As I go on to show, the affective communal aspect of the fitspo assemblage forms a double-edged sword, as it can impede some images from being shown (Chapter 6, 8), and some images receive more hostile remarks (Chapter 7).

Consequently, the postfeminist gaze is important in understanding how the women perceive the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience, as such images only gain their luminosity and investment due to the persistence of the postfeminist gaze. That is, for images of hard work on the body to become recognized as luminous, this requires particular conditions to enable bodies to become intelligible in this way. Crucially, akin to arguments made by Riley and Evans (2018), it is the *affordances of Instagram* within the fitspo assemblage that allows this gaze to flourish – or, in the terms I have used throughout, intensify this gaze, and the surveillance the women experience. I have illustrated it is the ability to archive bodily changes, and the knowledge that the (real or imagined) audience *may* be surveying the women's images, that contributes to the intensity with which this surveillance is felt and experienced. Assemblages do not come together at random, but are dependent on specific configurations of bodies within specific sociohistorical conditions (Buchanan, 2017). The intensity of surveillance that is produced through the fitspo assemblage here is dependent on the coming together of the (real or imagined) audience, the women's awareness of the postfeminist gaze in terms of their knowledge of how women's bodies are assessed by others and themselves, *and* the ability to take, share and caption photos.

This analysis therefore suggests it is important not *only* to ask what images do, but ask what images do when they are shared through particular platforms and digital communities. This is not to *blame* Instagram nor fitspo cultures for this intensified surveillance, nor the values that circulate through them, but to acknowledge that the fitspo assemblage *enables* the production of particular conditions *that women are taking up.* It is fitspo users who select particular photos and *invest* in them as showing, for example, their hard work and/or resilience. This underscores the importance of acknowledging: women as *producers* of cultural content, as opposed to only consumers who are victims of the 'effects' of images (Dobson, 2015); platform affordances; and both community-specific *and* socially shared values that enable, in this example, the postfeminist gaze to thrive. Throughout the chapters that follow, I continue to trace the intensified surveillance that is produced through the affective capacities of the (real or imagined) audience for the women in this study, in ways that both affirm *and* exceed the postfeminist gaze.

5.7 Conclusion

Across this chapter I have demonstrated the purposeful transformations desired by the women. These findings perhaps seems obvious, given the broader pressures placed on women to do so, and that pursuing fitness is often driven by desires for bodily changes. However, I have argued that what is different here is the *intensity* of bodily surveillance that is produced through the fitspo assemblage. Through this, this chapter has supported Coleman's (2009; 2015) argument that images must be explored beyond their representational content, as focusing on the content of these images may overlook their affective capacities. I have followed Coleman in arguing that images are affective sites through which bodies become understood

and made visible *as* transformed, and are central in *demonstrating* transformations, or the labour involved within them, producing a range of affective capacities for those who view and share them.

Drawing on Kanai (2018), McRobbie (2009), and Riley and Evans (2018), I have shown images concerning transformation enabled the women to foster specific attachments to neoliberalism and appearance, particularly in relation to images that make visible the hard work involved in transformations, display resilience, and that show transformations in the 'right' way (in the sense of muscle gain and fat loss). However, while McRobbie argues that the idea of luminosity enables us to think about how women are "deeply invested in achieving an illusory identity defined according to a rigidly enforced scale of feminine attributes" (2009, p.120), in this chapter I have demonstrated moments of challenging this luminosity. The women are not *always* and *entirely* invested in these luminous figures any more than it can be argued that all of these images cause poor body image, disordered eating, and so on.

In particular, I have looked to build upon Coleman's work by exploring what images can do within the context of the Instagram platform. I have demonstrated how the women *use* Instagram and images to *make and understand themselves as luminous,* drawing on Riley and Evans (2018) through being attentive to how Instagram's affordances enable this. What images do, then, and how they act as social agents, is dependent on the technical architecture they are shared through. This is something I revisit throughout this thesis, and is in keeping with the ontological position I first sketched out in my Introduction that moves away from questions of representation and effects towards a more affirmative, affective politics.

In sum, this chapter has shown the varied, enabling affects gleaned through fitspo images, but in doing so has raised a number of questions: what is at stake when particular forms of femininity are valued over others? Who, and what, is excluded from this? What happens when the women's images do not make their luminosity visible? Thus, while this chapter demonstrates how the capacities of bodies become enhanced *through* images that display successful, purposeful transformations, the data suggests there are limits on how far, and in what direction, these becomings can travel. It is these limits I turn my attention to in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 Becoming stuck: embodied histories, prominent whiteness and fearing fat

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I explored how the relations between images and bodies enabled the women to invest in and understand their bodies as empowered, resilient and hard-working, discussing this in relation to the postfeminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018). Here, I focus on what happened when this investment was *not* successful, exploring the circulation of images that did not affirm the women's bodies as luminous, but those that produced a range of constraining affective responses. Thus, while last chapter coalesced around relations that *affirmed* and *enhanced* bodies (albeit in particular ways that could not be accessed by all), this chapter is oriented around relations that *limit* and *fix* bodies. I address how encounters within the fitspo assemblage can be read as limiting for both the *individual* body, but also the *social* body, through being productive of a shared fear of fatness, and experiences of racial marginalization. Through this, I demonstrate that what hangs together in the fitspo assemblage is not a haphazard assortment of bodies, but is structuring and structured (Buchanan, 2017), a folding in *and* out of the social (Duff, 2014).

In some way, this chapter shares affinities with the social psychology research on fitspo images outlined in Chapter 2. For example, I address the less positive aspects the women raised from sharing and viewing such images, such as those relating to self-esteem and poor body satisfaction (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015; 2018; Boepple et al., 2016; Slater et al., 2017). However, while such research has focused primarily upon the *effects* that *viewing* such images has, this chapter differentiates itself in two ways. First, rather than assuming that all images will be felt homogenously, I highlight that not all bodies share the same capacity to affect or to be affected (Deleuze, 1988) - that is, not all bodies will be affected by a given image in the same way. Through following Rebecca Coleman's (2009; 2015) advancement of the concepts *intensity* and *duration,* I consider that how images may limit the capacities of a body is linked to the *embodied histories and memories* of the viewer and/or producer. Through this I advance the ontologies of bodies and affect articulated by Coleman, Katariina Kyrölä and Jessica Ringrose through mapping how the relations between images and body may limit the capacities of bodies, lessening their powers to act (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006). Crucially, while acknowledging these more constraining affects, I position myself in distinction to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 by arguing that the fitspo assemblage is a site at which such feelings *intensify*, rather than where they originate.

Second, I argue that while encounters between images and bodies are mediated by personal experiences, the affects produced through the fitspo assemblage I outline

here become highly *patterned* through their repetition (Wetherell, 2012). Rather than positioning affect as spontaneous and random in how it travels between bodies (Chapter 3), I demonstrate how these affects feed into the production and sustaining of bodily hierarchies, where "the degree of knitting reinforces the affect and can make it resistant and durable" (Wetherell, 2012, p.14). I show that as affect moves between images and bodies, it becomes patterned in two ways: first, and most commonly, in relation to anxieties around bodies, which fixes bodies through concerns of being/becoming fat; and second, in relation to the prominence of images of white bodies that fixes the bodies of women of colour through experiences of marginalization. It is crucial, then, to consider that while images can be felt in ways that vary, affects can 'stick', build and endure as they become woven with, and weave, relations of inequality (Ahmed, 2004). Further, these particular patternings and 'sticky' points demonstrate that surveillance of the body is not experienced as homogenous, where in contrast to the previous chapter, here surveillance is felt in relation to perceptions of (future) fat, and/or experiences of racialized bodies. Thus, while the postfeminist gaze remains an important shaping element of the surveillance directed towards the women's bodies from themselves and the (real or imagined) audience, here I demonstrate that how this surveillance is felt is qualified by the embodied location of the gazed upon.

I begin by detailing Coleman's (2009) work on intensity, duration and images, before turning to the data produced within this research. I consider how embodied histories trouble how the women imagined themselves to look through the images taken of themselves, coalescing around a fear of 'being' fat. In relation to images shared by others, I explore how these images are linked to embodied histories in relation to 'feeling' fat, before next examining how race intersects with the becoming of bodies through the 'Instagram body', and the repetition of whiteness. I conclude by arguing that how images *fix* the capacities of bodies in the fitspo assemblage is mediated by individual embodied histories and collective bodily hierarchies that fold into one another, shaped by the assignment of value to particular body types within Western culture, rather than intrinsic to a given image.

6.2 Revisiting affect: intensity and duration

Coleman's (2009) empirical work offers a means of thinking through how and why the affects of some bodies (including images, looks and so on) are felt with varying intensity. Intensity is described by Coleman as "particular moments of experience that are in some way set apart from other experiences, for example, through their affectivity" (2009, p.169). Such a focus on intensity attends to exploring "*what* of a body is experienced intensely" (Coleman, 2009, p.65, emphasis added) and "develops the emphasis on the affective relationality of bodies" (2009, p.65). For example, in asking how the young girls' bodies in her study became experienced through different images, Coleman explores which images contribute to their bodies becoming experienced with greater intensity. The looks that the boys give to girls, for example, are discussed as particularly intense, as these looks "become

extensively organised to mean particular things" (2009, p.137). Such looks are understood in relation to the boys judging the girls' bodies based on their appearance, rather than for who they 'really' are (such as the girls' personalities).

For Coleman, then, one way that looks have varying intensities is due to their differing "spatial and temporal experience" (2009, p.126). For example, while looks the boys give are experienced as "immediate and enduring" (2009, p.132), the looks between the girls and their friends are rooted in moments experienced as both immediate (how they look in that moment) and through time (through knowing their personalities). Coleman (2009) argues the intensity of looks from boys has the capacity to limit the girls' bodies to their appearance, whereas looks from friends have the potential to expand the possibilities of a body, knowing them in different ways.

The intensity of an image is also linked by Coleman to its durational capacity. Drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, Coleman (2009) suggests that whether or not a comment is experienced *as* intense or not can be understood through whether or not it endures. While cause-and-effect models of analysis "assume time as an unproblematic, straightforward advancement from the past (cause) to the present (effect)" (2009, p.171), Coleman suggests this linear understanding must be troubled to recognize the variance of the duration of affects between bodies. For example, drawing on one of her participants (Katie), Coleman suggests that some comments that Katie receives about her weight are particularly intense and 'stay' more than others due to Katie's past experiences of being bullied about her weight. Such comments in the past do not *cause* Katie to feel upset in the present, where the past is experienced as something that *has* happened, but "rather what *is* (still) happening, what she is (still) experiencing" (2009, p.174, emphasis in original). Instead, "a past comment endures and qualifies the intensity of a present comment…[becoming] part of other moments of experience" (2009, p.171). This demonstrates that whether a comment endures is not linked to a comment being inherently good or bad, but is linked to past experiences, and how such comments are recognised by the person who receives it.

This analysis is important as it illustrates the ontological position I set out in Chapter 3 that bodies cannot be known in advance (Deleuze, 1988). Consequently, we cannot assume that engaging with fitspo images *will* limit the capacities of women's bodies. Thus, rather than starting with measurement scales rating whether or not the women felt dissatisfied with their bodies, this chapter draws upon data that relied on ambiguous questions such as "how do you feel when looking at that image[1]?". Combining these questions with the concepts discussed here (and in Chapter 3) enables a move *away* from understanding images as having causal effects on bodies, and instead towards considering bodies as "experienced through different durational rhythms, some of which pass, some of which endure"

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[1] Where "that image" refers to an image the women have shown through either the photo-taking exercise, or from the media-go along.

(Coleman, 2009, p.173). This is important here, as it points towards the ability to grasp at: *why* some moments, some images, some comments and so on are discussed by the women over others; why some images are recounted in ways that are distinct from others in terms of how they are perceived as limiting; and, to build on Coleman (2015), how these affects become organised extensively through anxieties around fatness and race. Rather than being beyond linguistic interpretation, then, thinking about moments of becoming in terms of affective intensity offers a way for social inquiry to consider this.

6.3 Taking images, 'being' fat

In what follows I map out two trajectories to consider how the capacities of bodies became limited through the fitspo assemblage. First, in relation to their embodied histories, and second through being shown their 'real' body.

6.3.1 Embodied histories

What follows has been taken from my field notes from when I met Jen:

> I ask Jen to show me how she takes photographs for her profile. She admits she tends to ask other people to take her photos, so I offer to do so. She runs over to a white wall positioned centrally in the gym in front of floor-to-ceiling windows, moves a chair out of the way, and asks me to stand back so the lighting will be better. Standing in front of the wall, Jen unties her hair and takes her glasses off, and is ready to begin taking photos.

> Jen stands with one hand on her hip, tilted towards me, and pulls her fingers through her hair. While I'm taking images, Jen adjusts and moves her body slightly, freezes in place for a second, then moves to a marginally different pose before repeating this several times, seemingly unphased by the busyness of the gym. The movements she makes have obviously been repeated in the past, as she breezes through them comfortably. Jen moves her body so that sometimes she appears to me angled more from the side, twisting her waist towards the camera but pushing her hips and bottom out. Jen also gives a lot of thought to her face – sometimes she looks straight at the camera, laughing and smiling, in others she'll look coyly down at her feet, or off to the side as though she was looking in the distance, although never too serious.

> After taking around 12 photos, Jen divulges she used to take her top off and pose in a sports bra, but since she has gained weight she doesn't feel as comfortable doing this. I ask her why, and in response she grabs the skin around her armpits and back, telling me that she is carrying a lot more weight in these areas now, and generally feels 'blockier'.

Jen could be understood as happy and empowered through taking images, based on her smile, assertive posing and seemingly uninhibited actions within the gym. However, to suggest this would overlook how the encounter between Jen's body

and the final image she chose to share on Instagram shapes how she knows her body:

> Lauren: How do you feel about your body now you've took that picture? Well, I took it, but you know what I mean.
> Jen: I find it frustrating because I don't mind my body, I don't hate it but I find it frustrating because it doesn't look like how it looked four months ago, do you know what I mean? And it irritates me but [pause]. What are you gonna do [laughs]? I don't feel upset, I guess I just feel annoyed because I've had a better relationship with my body.

The way Jen describes this image is bursting with affective responses – frustration, irritability, annoyance and laughter. But why does *this* image become felt with greater intensity? From Jen we learn that viewing the image does not *cause* a given effect, but that the intensity of this image is qualified by *past* knowledges of her body. Thus, this image is significant for how Jen's body can become as it visualises how her body has changed, through being experienced *alongside* other images in the fitspo assemblage – the images on her profile, and the image she has of herself (as indicated how she grabs her upper body). This suggests the images Jen took of her body in the past have not ceased to matter, but instead continue to happen (Coleman, 2009).

Jen's Instagram profile can be seen as one reason why these images continue to happen (Coleman, 2009). For example, during the interview Jen scrolled through her profile to show me when she "was super happy, [as] this is when I was training loads and felt really good about myself", showing posts that were heavily oriented around images of her smaller body. This builds upon the argument made in the previous chapter, showing that within the fitspo assemblage, it is not just *images* that are affective, but also *profiles* through becoming digital archives that enable images to accumulate affect through their visible storage (Pybus, 2015). Consequently, this demonstrates it is not possible to determine in advance the intensity of an image, and how it may shape the capacities of Jen's body. Relying on observational data alone, or an analysis of the final image Jen selected through the photo-taking exercise, would suggest the image increases the capacities of Jen's body as evidenced through her confident demeanour. Instead, taking the data together shows the intensity of images are fashioned through experiences specific to that encounter (Coleman, 2009) – here, this is mediated by embodied histories that continue to happen *through* Jen's Instagram profile, as the relationship Jen once had with her body qualifies her present relationship.

The Instagram application, then, is once again significant within the fitspo assemblage to think about how surveillance becomes intensified. Here, the coming together of profiles, images of Jen's body, and her awareness that her (real or imagined) audience can also see these images enables Jen to scrutinise herself in relation to her abilities to transform her body in alignment with fitspo ideals (the shift towards feeling 'blockier'). These intangible, digital elements of the fitspo assemblage can be understood as contributing to a greater intensification of

surveillance through enabling Jen to both scrutinise herself, and able to be (potentially) scrutinised by other women through technologically-mediated ways. This is seemingly underwritten by the postfeminist gaze in how bodily display to oneself and others is perceived by Jen as a marker of worth (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018), to the point where sharing images of her smaller body is recounted fondly in contrast to the less favourable way images of her body at present are discussed.

Embodied histories can further be seen shaping how bodies can become in ways that are not linear or static:

> Lauren: If you took a photo of yourself and it was a bad image, how would that make you feel, does it last?
> Megan: Erm, I think it depends on my mood that day. Like I think it can affect me, like "oh that's a bad photo", but other times it can be like "do I actually look like that?" sorta thing, and it can really bother me. But I think that depends what, how I've woken up that morning, and how I'm feeling about myself anyway. I kinda have crap self-confidence, so yeah if I sorta am not really ok and I see something like that, I just think for God's sake, what the hell […]
> Lauren: What about any of these ones that you took?
> Megan: Like, I don't like the ones facing the front so like these two…I'm not really keen [pauses]. I feel like quite big.
> Lauren: Is that not the point?
> Megan: Not big in the right places.

Megan's emotive reply can be understood as highlighting variation in how images endure, where my first question proceeds Megan describing her process to get a good image of herself (including posing to showcase specific body parts). Leaving the latter half of Megan's response for now, Megan suggests that images have the capacity to affect her body depending on her "mood that day". This suggests images are not felt as intense because they are unequivocally bad (Coleman, 2009), but are felt through varying intensities that are qualified by Megan's embodied history. For example, the different intensities of images are outlined by Megan in that she may brush it off, or they may prompt her to question her ability to 'know' her body, relating to whether or not she looks big in the 'right' places (mapping onto concerns regarding fat – see below -, and muscularity in Chapter 5). This analysis supports Anna Hickey-Moody and Peta Malin's argument that "there are only bodies that are produced through their contexts and connections with the world" (2006, p.4). That is, Megan and Jen evidence the continuous becoming of their own bodies through noting that how they come to know them does not exist prior to the contexts (embodied histories) and connections (between images, Instagram and their bodies) of the fitspo assemblage.

Research suggesting that viewing fitspo images causes particular effects like low self-esteem and body satisfaction give a sense of such experiences as stable and ongoing, and do not account for the varying durations of images understood

through Coleman's (2009) work, and the data above. For example, while Jen articulates a range of sad affects, she also peppers her speech with laughter, and Megan relates her experience of an image to her mood that day. This suggests that while bodies can become fixed through their relations, this should not be considered permanent (Coleman, 2009; Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose, 2011), where the intensity of an image does not guarantee it will stay (Coleman, 2009). This is important as it challenges modes of analysis that are dependent on a cause-and-effect model, as while specific images may heighten how Megan and Jen experience their bodies, they are not the origin of these feelings. Instead, I have shown the intensity and duration of images are qualified by their embodied histories, shaped by the fitspo assemblage in how it provides a space for these images to be seen and remembered. Next, I show how these often more specifically coalesce around anxieties around fatness through images being felt as sites of intensity due to how they show the women how they 'actually' look.

6.3.2 "Do I actually look like that?"

I now want to build on Megan's question of "do I actually look like that?" to think about how bodies become through images that enable 'new' visibilities and knowledges of bodies:

> Jessie: When I look at myself in the mirror, usually like, when I was taking that photo today, I'm looking at myself front on. Like, I don't think that I always notice it, but I look at myself in the way that I like to be seen, if that makes sense. I'm standing front on, I'm wearing clothes that I think flatter me. Photos tend to be like, either someone says "stand like this", or someone catches you off guard or whatever, and I'm like that is not the angle I see myself from, holy shit I look like that. Or that time in the mirror in New York, I was like completely naked because I'm about to get in the shower, and I caught a glimpse of myself at the wrong angle and I was like fucking hell, and I think it's because I know I look like that, but when I look at myself I don't look like that.

The intensity of Jessie's encounter with specific images (a glimpse in the mirror while on holiday in New York, following a period of not maintaining her weight loss diet within which she used Instagram to document each meal she ate) is demonstrably visceral and charged, productive of tears and emotive language. Jessie's experience, and Megan's above that confront her question to know her own body, cannot *only* be understood as shaped through images that endure in relation to their embodied histories. That is, they suggest that particular images endure because they rupture how the women *thought* they knew their bodies. These images can be seen, then, as the actualization of a virtual body. As explored in Chapter 3, thinking about the actual-virtual in relation to the *affects* of images enables an analysis that refuses the idea of images-as-representation, but instead as potentials that have yet to be actualised (Colebrook, 2002). These concepts enable us to push beyond what Megan and Jessie's images 'actually' show us

(whether or not they 'actually' look bad), but instead to think about what these images *do* as potential – and how they may instigate specific ways of living through their actualisation (Coleman, 2009; 2015).

Following this, every image of Megan and Jessie can be considered a potential for their body to become actual (Coleman, 2009; 2015). Clearly, the virtual that becomes actual here is not one that prompts joy in Megan nor Jessie, through producing a *"different perspective"* on how they imagined their body to look that stands opposed to the luminous body in Chapter 5. Notably, in referencing the talk between the young girls she interviewed, Coleman suggests that "[t]here is no knowledge of how a body 'actually' looked behind the knowledge of how it looked at the precise moment of the photograph" (2009, p.92). However, in this instance, the women *do* have knowledges of what they imagine their body to look like, which is troubled when they view these images. Consequently, the data illustrates that the images become felt with greater intensity because they have materialised a body *they had not anticipated*, making actual new ways of perceiving their bodies.

It is notable that the potentials of their bodies are collapsed *through* the actualisation of a 'fat' body (or at least, what is perceived as fat). Despite not meeting normative visual criteria of 'fatness', Megan and Jessie's responses are shot through with anxiety as images are seen to actualise the possibilities of their bodies as 'fatter' than they anticipated. Such anxiety can also be seen through Jen's movements to position her body as smaller, and the way she grabbed the skin around her upper body to explain her posing choices. This data raises three questions: why does the actualisation of 'fat' become experienced as something life-destroying, rather than life-affirming (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004); what does this suggest about the *patterning* of affective responses to images (Wetherell, 2012); and how do virtual images become lived out in ways that extensively organise a body's potential to become (Coleman, 2015)?

While discussing individual experiences of intensity, these intensities cannot be divorced from their broader sociocultural context. To draw on Coleman (2015), that these images are productive of distress, sadness and frustration can be understood as productive of, and informed by, a sociocultural setting that situates the experience of 'fat' as bad through culturally-learned knowledges of what fat is 'known' to mean (Murray, 2005). Research has demonstrated that this is most often terms of negative and exclusionary associations (Evans and Colls, 2009). Thus, from Megan and Jessie tracing the actualisation of their bodies through images, we can also witness the actualisation of a hierarchy of bodies that designates fat as bad, and slim as good. The women's articulations suggests these affective responses are not dependent on the presence of fat, but on what Kyrölä describes as fat as "abstract yet material, present yet always looming" (2014, p.57). That these images endure must be accounted for in relation to how (virtual) fat is able to mobilise such strong affect, shaping how the women perceive their bodies even when such knowledges are unfounded. In this sense, such images can be understood as *fixing* the bodies of the women as the becomings of their bodies are

oriented through fat "as an object of fear that has to be carried around and fought…taking away from the possibilities of feeling and living the body" (Kyrölä, 2014, p.56).

This adds weight to my argument relating to the *intensified* surveillance within the fitspo assemblage, here directed towards the *potential* of fat. The images discussed here can be understod as enabling and encouraging continuous surveillance of the women's bodies, monitoring images *just in case* fat becomes actual. Importantly, the fitspo assemblage does not *cause* this, but through the archival nature of the Instagram profile, the ability to easily take photos, make visible images of one's body and monitor specific body parts (Chapter 5), the luminous standards invested in collectively (Chapter 5), and the broader sociocultural perceptions of fat, this assemblage *enables* this intense surveillance through these varied elements. Next, I build on this discussion through continuing to consider what these individual fears can do through their repitition through varied encounters within the fitspo assemblage.

6.4 Viewing images, 'feeling' fat

Tania: Two months ago I went through a period, and this was like after I cleaned out my Instagram, but I had a period where I was fat. I just felt fat, I would wake up every single day and cry and feel fat. I never trained in leggings, just trackies [jogging trousers and a jacket] for a month straight just because I felt fat. And I'd kept somebody, a couple of people, on my Instagram who I probably shouldn't have done, but I was kind of. [Pause]. I don't know, it's hard to explain why I kept them on there, I felt like I was gaining something from them. But I had a binge and purge relapse, and that's what made me feel fat, and it all stemmed from this one picture that I saw on Instagram. And it's crazy just to talk about it now, and like, I binge and purge and felt fat cos somebody posted a picture on Instagram but its. [Pause]. It's crazy how much it affects you.

Megan: The other day, I remember like saying out loud "this is not a good account for me to be scrolling through", because I'm already that way inclined. I've already like. [Pause]. I went away at the weekend, so I literally barely touched a vegetable all weekend and that doesn't happen very often, but like I think I kinda forget that, that's not me normally[2]. It's a one off but other people do that day in day out. And it's kinda like, actually I can do that, I train and I eat well like most of the time. But yeah, and I was feeling a bit bleh, and I was like scrolling through and seeing loads of people, and I remember like, it's good that I did realise that, that this is not good for me.
Lauren: Why is it not good?

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[2] Megan is explaining that she ate lots of 'unhealthy' food over the weekend, and barely any vegetables.

Megan: They were just posting like standard really good physiques and like. [Pause]. I clearly don't look like that at the minute, or I certainly don't feel like I look like that. I probably don't even look too different, maybe a bit more bloated than usual, but in your head you're literally like, you're a balloon compared to what you normally look like. Which is probably not even, like to a lay person, like someone else wouldn't even notice, but in your head you've eaten two days of being bad or whatever. But it's literally like [pauses] it feels like everything you've done over the last two years have gone to shit.

Tania and Megan highlight that the relations between their bodies and the images they view of others in the fitspo assemblage can be (though are not always) marked by *feeling* bloated or fat. On the one hand, this in some way points towards a causal relationship between images and bodies. That is, like the individuals with eating disorders in Su Holmes' study, Megan and Tania make "fleeting references to what they saw as triggering media encounters… [and describe] practices that were implicitly framed as protective measures in this regard" (Holmes, 2018, p.156). However, following Holmes, this analysis overlooks *what else* shapes the experiences Megan and Tania recount. Thus, rather than suggesting these images *cause* "feeling fat", I instead want to consider why *these* images become felt more intensely, and thus endure (Coleman, 2009).

Throughout the interview, Tania explained her experiences of sensitivity in engaging with particular images over the course of her weight loss, such as before-and-after images shared with the #BBG[3] (Bikini Body Guide) hashtag, and images of slim, toned and curvy women. However, rather than suggesting images of particular bodies *cause* these feelings due to their content, Tania demonstrates these encounters enable a specific becoming of her body *in relation to* her embodied history. Through this past *and* present, the intensity with which she experiences a specific image of someone else fixes the capacities of her body, demonstrated as Tania recounts instances of binging (uncontrollably eating point of fullness), purging (purposefully expelling food, often through vomiting and/or laxatives), being reduced to tears, and feeling limited in her clothing choices.

Similarly, Megan demonstrates the content of an image (someone with a good physique) is experienced intensely through feeling bloated *in that moment*, following a period away from training and dieting. Equally, Megan notes that she is "already that way inclined", referring to her history of disordered eating that she disclosed. This suggests Megan is more sensitive to some images of "good physiques" due to her tumultuous relationship with her body, where she is already oriented towards some images in ways that other bodies may not be (Ahmed, 2010). This image is intense, then, as it is not only felt alongside the recent past (the weekend), but in relation to a two year period of (in Megan's words) disordered dieting and exercise. Thus, rather than being separate to their bodies, in these examples, images become one way for the women to know their bodies

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[3] Made popular by Australian fitness influencer Kayla Itsines.

alongside other (past) knowledges of their body (Coleman, 2009). Notably, we also learn that Tania and Megan are unable to express why they did not unfollow particular accounts despite knowing they should have done. This suggests that the (no doubt well-meaning) advice raised in the Introduction and Chapter 2 to simply unfollow or avoid accounts that could cause distress lack an awareness of the conflicting experiences of engaging with social media.

Importantly, to think *only* of Tania and Megan's responses in terms of their individual experiences erases the way that, in their descriptions of feeling fat or bloated, fat stands in as a bodily tissue *and* "imbued with a set of emotional cultural meanings" (Hardy, 2013, p.8). Consequently, to do so may overlook how the affects of particular images contributes to the folding out and *affective embedding* of bodily hierarchies through the fitspo assemblage. Against widespread medicalisation discourses regarding obesity in both media and policy documents (see Evans (2006), Murray (2008), Lupton (2018)), there exists a body of literature focusing on the feelings associated with fat (Nichter, 2000; Colls, 2007; Evans, 2010; Hardy, 2013; Windram-Geddes, 2013). As Mimi Nichter (2000) notes, 'feeling fat' is rarely an observation on one's weight, but a way to convey a range of negative experiences such as feeling sluggish and dissatisfied with one's body. Similarly, Rachel Colls suggests that such associations come to fruition from "moral and aesthetic judgements that are made concerning what a fat body 'represents', such as laziness, a lack of control, ugliness and asexuality" (2007, p.354). While it is not possible to argue exactly what Megan or Tania mean in conveying feelings fat or bloated, their responses make implicit that feeling fat is not positive.

Through this, the becomings of Megan and Tania's bodies become retrenched along molar lines of power as their experiences of *feeling* fat shape the capacities of their bodies through individualistic discourses regarding weight, food and exercise. This retrenchment further takes place through their demarcation of fatness as an object that can be battled through exercise and food restriction, illustrating the pervasive nature of narratives that support the 'obesity epidemic' (Windram-Geddes, 2013). Within the fitspo assemblage, these individualising narratives exist alongside the images of "good physiques", as in viewing such images, Megan and Tania confront the virtual possibilities of their bodies – of gaining weight due to not eating well, as weight gain is commonly understood as caused by poor dietary choices (Evans, 2006). Irrespective of whether or not weight gain materialises, this encounter within the fitspo assemblage between images, embodied histories and such narratives *fix* their bodies as 'too big', demonstrating how fat is (and becomes) underwritten by negative perceptions.

I argue it is not 'ideal' portrayals of bodies that shape the intensity with which images become felt per se, but how these are linked to *fears* over becoming fat. Building on Claire Hemmings, Karen Throsby (2015) argues that fat bodies are so overassociated with affect that "they themselves are the object of affective transfer" (Hemmings, in Throsby, 2015, p.777), that evoke various affects within others. Extending this, the data here shows that *potential* fat bodies become an

object of affective transfer. Here, the (perceived) risk of 'feeling' or 'being' a fat body looms through viewing images of "good physiques", perhaps due to images of 'good physiques' being known as successful in their dietary and exercise choices (Chapter 5), in contrast to the women's reflections on their own choices. Images, then, must be understood in relation to *what else* they exist alongside and through. That is, it is unlikely that such images would become felt in these ways if there were not *already* particular moral narratives 'sticking' to specific bodies (Ahmed, 2004). Here, it is the bodies of 'ideal' physiques that evoke fear, as they stand as "powerful in their success in the war against let-go and lack of discipline" (Winch, 2016, p.905). Megan and Tania illustrate their responses are not due to something innate to images of 'ideal' physiques, but linked to how these images are understood alongside "particular readings of bodies [that] (re)produce ideas about (im)morality" (Evans, 2006, p.259): namely, the (potential) fat body as a site of anxiety, and as lacking discipline and health.

Ultimately, this has implications beyond individual experiences, as these affects position the fat body as a threat. The fitspo assemblage is crucial to considering how this may happen through the repetition and extensive organization of the affects' of these images. As Cameron Duff (2014) notes, the concept of assemblage is useful to consider how social bodies are created. He argues the social body:

> is enacted in assemblages which collect or enfold bodies, forces, affects and relations… [T]he social must therefore be understood as a *flux of relational forces* that affect diverse bodies, objects, ideas and processes, temporarily folding these forces in the creation of a discrete mass (Duff, 2014, p.102, emphasis in original).

From this argument, the social is composed of and through assemblages which fold in and affect different bodies (the bodies of the women here), different objects (non-human bodies such as images), ideas (perceptions of 'fat') and processes (of which there are multiple here: scrolling through Instagram, taking images, restrictive dieting, and so on). The fitspo assemblage is thus one assemblage through which this happens, as particular bodies hang together and affect one another in different ways. What is at stake here is how this affect ebbs and leaks out, contributing to a cultural climate where not only do the affects of images contribute to the becoming of individual bodies, but also the *social* body, whereby fat bodies are devalued, excluded and limited in how they can be known.

6.5 Race and the 'Instagram Body'

The purpose of this section is twofold. First, I take forward the argument that encounters between images and bodies make visible that affect "display[s] strong pushes for pattern" (Wetherell, 2012, p.13), through a consideration of racialising processes. Second, in keeping with the underlying claim of this thesis that the fitspo assemblage *intensifies* experiences of surveillance, I demonstrate this in relation to how race becomes another element to be considered in tandem with the broader bodily surveillance aims discussed already. I argue images become felt

with greater intensity as affect moves between images of the 'Instagram body' and women of colour's bodies, thinking through Sara Ahmed's (2004) work to explore how affect 'sticks' to particular bodies. Through this, I show that images do not affect all bodies homogenously, and thus should not be analysed as such.

Black women's bodies, in particular their bottoms, have faced a fetishizing gaze historically and in contemporary Western culture (Hobson, 2003; Schultz, 2005; Parasecoli, 2007; Sastre, 2014a; hooks, 2015; Tate, 2015). Janell Hobson (2003) suggests this fetishizing gaze can be traced back to Saartje Baartman, who in 1810 was taken to London from South Africa to display her 'strange' body, perceived as such due to her large bottom and breasts. Hobson argues Baartman's treatment as the "Hottentot Venus" portrayed her body as grotesque and excessive, producing notions of a superior white beauty through racialised forms of embodiment. While some research argues that Anglo-white beauty norms continue to be fixed and dominant in defining beauty (Hunter, 2005), others have argued "this fixity is challenged by ideas of 'racial mobility' and racial crossing, hybridity and ambiguity" (Ringrose et al., 2019, p.79; Sastre, 2014a; Appleford, 2016). This was echoed within the data:

> Jen: There's that Instagram body, bum, little waist, big boobs, which is slightly racist because [pauses]. The body that people are going for are black women's bodies, that they've been told are not good for years, and now it's fashionable.

Like the young women of colour in Katherine Appleford's (2016) study, both Jen's depiction above and the data explored in the previous chapter attests to the hybrid nature of the 'ideal' body. That is, this 'Instagram body' is understood through attributes such as slimness *and* curves, particularly having a bigger bottom, which have been historically associated with white women (Bordo, 2003; Hunter, 2005) and black women (Hobson, 2003; Parasecoli, 2007; Sastre, 2014a; Tate, 2015), respectively. Jen demonstrates that rather than a fixed separation of racialised beauty standards, what is *"fashionable"* is a mix of different racially coded attributes, similar to other studies about race and normative body standards (Appleford, 2016; Ringrose et al, 2019; Butler, 2013). However, while this 'Instagram body' could be seen as enabling new imaginings of bodies that are not divided along molar, raced lines, Jen articulates the features that are *"fashionable"* are those that have been, and still are, derided when associated with women of colour whilst praised amongst white women (Hobson, 2003; Schultz, 2005; Tate, 2015). Next, I examine how some of the women of colour in this study discussed images of the 'Instagram body', in so doing asking what these images can do.

6.5.1 "Tiny little waist with a really big bum"

> Eryn: You've got the issue of the whole big black bum thing, and everyone wanting that, but like apart from that I don't really know. I, I think the thing is, like, I can think of one woman, and I can't remember what she's called, and she's on Instagram and she's got your typical

over exaggerated tiny little waist with a really big bum, and that's what
everyone thinks that they [black women] should look like. And in a
black person, they think they all have really big hips, and like small
waist, and that's just not how it is. And I feel like, for me, I know I'm
mixed race, but like I've a very athletic build, so it kind of puts me out of
it in a way because I'm never gonna look like that.

From Eryn we learn that bottoms are highly charged sites of affective investment,
evident across the data (Chapter 5, 7). While Eryn echoes similar descriptions to
Jen of the 'Instagram body', the affects of this body, and in particular, these body
parts, can be seen as 'sticking' more due to Eryn identifying as a mixed-race woman
with an "athletic" build (perceived as such due to her slender frame and visible
muscle tone). Eryn's experiences find similarities with the multiracial women in
Gabrielle Gonzales' (2019) study, whereby stereotypes of Mexican women as
curvaceous and white women as slim within either/or frameworks contributed to
ambivalence and confusion amongst women of both backgrounds. To understand
why and how this may happen, Ahmed's (2004) work enables an analysis that not
only addresses how affects move across and between bodies (and here, through
the fitspo assemblage), but also how they may *saturate* particular bodies. For
example, Eryn does not necessarily express being unhappy with her own body
because of the repetition of this 'Instagram body' (the content of the image), but
due to this image as felt alongside the *associations* of racialized bodies by others
that stick to her body. This is indicative of Ahmed's (2004) argument that affect
does not reside *in* a body, but becomes felt and recognised as it passes between
bodies – Eryn's body, the 'Instagram body' and Eryn's perception of the gaze of
others. As Ahmed (2004) argues, the historical positioning of bodies is crucial to
acknowledge how affects stick to bodies – as black women have long been
associated with curvaceous figures, Eryn's body becomes fixed as the surface of her
body is materialised *differently* through the looks of others that attempt to relate
her to the 'Instagram body'. This suggests that, similar to the young women in
Ringrose et al.'s (2019) study, having a straight and slim body does not translate
into 'sexiness' as easily for women of colour compared to white women, which
Eryn links to stereotypical associations between black women's bodies and curves.

While Jen acknowledges this 'Instagram body', it is not described as experienced
intensely. As discussed above, images become felt with greater intensity when they
are set apart from other images (Coleman, 2009) – for example, when they are
connected to embodied histories. While Jen can recognize the prevalence of
particular body types in the fitspo assemblage, she cannot connect this to her own
experiences, suggesting the affects of these images do not stick in the same way as
for Eryn. Thus, the potential affects of these images are acknowledged, but do not
materialise Jen's body in a way that produces her as different to this 'Instagram
body', or unable to benefit from it. From these two encounters, we learn that
images do not affect all bodies equally – bodies have different capacities to affect
and be affected (Deleuze, 1988). There is no straight forward relationship between
how images are viewed and how they affect bodies within the fitspo assemblage,

as here it is evident this is mediated by racial histories, and being looked upon by others. Because "the big mobile bottom is both already known and an expectation for Black women's bodies" (Tate, 2015, p.57), Eryn's body becomes fixed through the histories of bodies that have been affected before, gaining momentum through the bodies of women who have been looked at in similar ways (Ahmed, 2004). Consequently, these images fix the capacities of Eryn's body, as she articulates that how she understands her body through this image is related to how she is known by others as adjacent to "*the* Black woman's body" (Tate, 2015, p.1, emphasis in original), suggesting her self-surveillance is marked by the perceptions she has of how *others* recognize her body through a racialized and molar lens.

6.5.2 "Thin white bodies"

The discussion so far has pointed to how affects may 'stick' to particular bodies through racial histories, felt through images and the looks of others. While the 'Instagram body' was highlighted as part of this circulation of affect, some were more specific in noting the commonality of whiteness and thinness of bodies when I asked what bodies they often saw when scrolling through Instagram:

> Salma: I rarely see many coloured women in any [media], not just [here], I think yeah. So like Asian [women] you don't really see. [Pause]. It separates into another thing. It's not just about looking good, but oh, I also think 'I need to look lighter', yeah, so that's another thing to worry about.

> Artika: Thin bodies that like, maybe there's like, usually they've got quite developed glutes because they've been training for some time, but thin white bodies with good bums.
> Lauren: How does that make you feel, seeing that?
> Artika: Kind of shitty a lot of the time, but then it's kind of, it's [pause]. I see thin bodies all the time whether I'm on social media or not. I see it when I step outside.

Akin to studies of thinspo images, Salma and Artika point to the "centrality of white femininity" (Cobb, 2016, 2020, p.91; Schott, 2017) within the fitspo assemblage. For Gemma Cobb and Nicole Schott, their analyses of thinspo content leads them to argue that the whiteness of thinspo spaces is profoundly exclusionary for women of colour as white bodies are situated as the norm. Through this, they argue that white bodies thus become associated with the normative ideals of femininity thinspo seeks to uphold; being slender, respectable and in control. However, Salma and Artika offer nuance to this argument; rather than positioning images of white bodies as always already exclusionary, how these images are *felt* is connected to their experiences prior to seeing these images. Both women point to the recurrence of these body types as not something particular to fitspo, but instead as an *intensification* of what they already see. Rather than women stepping in and out of online/offline networks, then, the fitspo assemblage the images circulate through are meshed with understandings of race and body size through

non-digital encounters (Handyside and Ringrose, 2017). From this we learn that Instagram cannot be conceived of as separate to offline spaces, but instead as a space that can intensify the affects of *already existing* power dynamics and hierarchies (Ringrose, 2011). While the feelings of racial exclusion and difference the women articulate are not specific to fitspo images, Artika and Salma point to an intensification of, as Artika puts it, feeling "kind of shitty", fixing their bodies as this repetition becomes felt alongside the marginalization they have experienced in other contexts.

This data could be understood in relation to how Salma and Artika engage with the fitspo assemblage. A user's Instagram feed is navigated through touching the screen and scrolling through images, meaning that engaging with Instagram is a highly embodied and intimate practice (Paasonen, 2018), dependent on closeness and touch. Rather than walking past bodies in the street ("I see it when I step outside"), or flicking through images in magazines ("I rarely see many coloured women in [media]"), such images are physically held and touched. Within the fitspo assemblage, these images can be liked, commented on or shared, and are scrolled through regularly, suggesting our connections to media technologies are "near-constant [and] prosthetic" (Paasonen et al., 2015, p.2; Paasonen, 2018). When contrasted to their experiences, for example, in the street, the way these images are engaged with may account for why such images may amplify feelings of difference as they are touched and viewed through their Instagram feeds.

Other scholars have also pointed towards the repetition of images of white bodies within fitspo images (Lucas and Hodler, 2018; Maddox, 2019). In analysing images tagged with #StrongIsTheNewSkinny on different platforms, Jessica Maddox (2019) argues this repetition must be understood as exclusionary towards women of colour. Tying #StrongIsTheNewSkinny to the postfeminist sensibilities such as empowerment through the body and displaying the worked upon body, Maddox argues that women of colour are disadvantaged here as white women are positioned as the ideal subjects of postfeminism who can glean this empowerment (see also, McRobbie (2009)). For example, contrasting portrayals of Serena Williams[4] in these tagged images in comparison to Ronda Rousey[5], Maddox highlights that Williams' body is portrayed as masculine and excessively muscular, rather than able to glean confidence and power through her body like Rousey. Due to the rare incorporation, and even less rare positive incorporations, of images of women of colour, Maddox suggests of #StrongIsTheNewSkinny that "while hashtags can connect…they can also be replete with contradictions, [and] exclusionary politics" (Maddox, 2019, p.19)[6].

While acknowledging the marginalization that Maddox highlights, what Salma and Artika's responses suggest is that to speak *only* of their exclusion from these digital

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[4] A black tennis player.
[5] A white mixed martial arts fighter.
[6] See Chapter 8.

communities due to the repetition of images of white bodies may overlook the additional work that images do here. That is, while a concern with the physical appearance of the body is a central feature of a postfeminist media culture (Gill, 2007b), Salma and Artika highlight this concern is not experienced uniformly. Instead, Artika and Salma point to bodily concerns as *shaped* through engaging with images of repeated whiteness, as surveillance of their bodies becomes not only predicated on, for example, muscularity, but also skin colour (Hunter, 2005; Tate, 2009); as Salma notes, skin colour becomes "another thing to worry about". This suggests that speaking of the homogenous effects that images have (for example, exclusion or poor body image) risks erasing how images become felt in ways that are fashioned through individual memories, and collective histories of racialised bodies.

Expanding this argument to include Eryn above, these findings are indicative of Jess Butler's (2013) argument that we should not assume *a priori* that postfeminism, the sensibilities of which have been argued to be prominent within fitspo communities in Chapter 5, is primarily exclusionary towards women of colour. As she writes of examples of participants in *America's Next Top Model,* and rappers such as Nicki Minaj, postfeminism "*includes* (albeit in specific and limited ways) non-white…subjects" (2013, p.49, emphasis in original). While I have argued that Artika, Salma and Eryn may at times feel peripheral due to the prominence of white bodies and normative perceptions of raced bodies within the fitspo assemblage, they are not *excluded* from being encouraged to enact self-surveillance, nor from gaining empowerment through their bodies. Rather, this surveillance and bodily preoccupation takes on an additional, and I argue, more intense form, as it is not *only* concerned with, for example, the cultivation of specific muscle groups (Chapter 5), but is interwoven with racially specific experiences of embodiment that mediate the affects that images can have. This data thus provides evidence of the "micro complexities of girls' engagements with the contemporary 'postfeminist masquerade'" (Renold and Ringrose, 2008, p.324). Here, engagements with the work expected to be done *to* the body to improve its appearance as part of the 'postfeminist masquerade' are materialized within the fitspo assemblage not only in relation to specific body parts, but for some, also in relation to race.

Thus, to address only the effects of images within pre-defined measurements such as body image, body satisfaction or even exclusion cannot grasp the complex becomings of bodies, as becomings here are shaped by both individual encounters with images in the fitspo assemblage, and the *location* of the women (Braidotti, 2002). Through acknowledging this, it becomes possible through the discussions with Eryn, Artika and Salma to suggest that affect may not move entirely autonomously, as the way images affect here are organised through molar lines of power such as racial exclusion, comparison and colourism. Rather than highlighting these becomings of bodies as due to something innate to images, the data suggests that the fitspo assemblage is a 'folding in' of the repetition of such images *in conjunction with* experiences in 'offline' spaces that shape the intensity of how

images are felt. Moreover, Eryn, Artika and Salma all make reference to a process of gazing in how they understand their bodies in relation to the 'Instagram body' – the gaze from others, or the gaze directed at themselves. Conceptualising this gaze in relation to a somewhat abstract postfeminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018) may not go far enough, as it cannot account for the *additional* and *specific* ways regulatory gazes may be shaped through processes of racialisation. Rather, to draw on Donna Haraway (1988), the women's experience of this gaze can be characterised as a gaze from a more specific 'somewhere'. That is, the gazing that Artika, Eryn and Salma direct towards their own bodies, the bodies of others and the perceptions they have of the gazes from others, is shaped by their own embodied and historically situated position, thus contributing to the becomings that are possible for their bodies (Braidotti, 2002).

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that fitspo images cannot be understood as having any straightforward 'effect' on women. While acknowledging that images can be productive of affect that may fix the capacities of bodies, I have argued images are not the sole cause of this, through considering how and why *particular bodies* become fixed through their relations with *particular images.* To say that fitspo images themselves cause body dissatisfaction, for example, is to overlook the three key arguments I have outlined in this chapter. First, that images have *intensities of affect* (Coleman, 2009). Second, that the fitspo assemblage intensifies surveillance for some in specific ways, particularly in relation to *potential* body fat, and normative perceptions and experiences of racialised bodies. Third, that there is a need to acknowledge the cultural, social and political climate to address what the patterning of affect can *do* in relation to knowledges about, and the becomings of, individual *and* social bodies.

Drawing on Coleman (2009), I have illustrated that the affects of images vary in their intensity. These varied intensities have been shown to fix the capacities of bodies through the movement and accumulation of affect, contributing to the becoming of bodies through considerations of bodies as lacking, inadequate or with distaste. While individual encounters, I have stressed that the *repetition* of these affects within the fitspo assemblage can be understood as both informed by (folding in) and mapping onto (folding out) social perceptions of fatness, the prominence of white bodies and racialized beauty standards, and embodied histories of disordered eating. For example, it is notable that within section 6.3 and 6.4, the data discussed revolved around the discussion of the 'Instagram body' in some shape or form. However, the way images of the 'Instagram body' became felt, the affective capacities of such images, varied between and amongst women of colour and white women. Speaking of the 'effects' that images have on women's bodies, then, risks overlooking the varied and complex relations that enable bodies to become in different ways. While it is beyond the remit or scope of this chapter to generalize about these findings, they suggest treading with care when mapping

the relations between images and bodies so as to avoid flattening out these differences. This analysis is important, then, as it demonstrates how affects are both distributed and felt unequally, rather than entirely random or homogenously, thus working through bodies to materialize them in different ways (Coleman, 2015).

Despite this variance, I have highlighted one commonality uniting many of these encounters as feeling/'being' fat, underwritten by a fear of fatness. I have shown that, in the fitspo assemblage, bodies become fixed through their relations with images when they are experienced through these anxieties. In this way, bodies become unable to expand their potential, but become constrained through visceral bouts of tears, and at times immobilising preoccupations with bodily appearance. Notably, this fear of fatness amongst the women can be seen as dovetailing with the individualizing narratives of health and weight discussed in Chapter 5. This is important as it demonstrates the wider context of weight surveillance whereby perceptions of fatness are propped up by pathological responses to, for example, body image concerns, and individual health narratives, thus masking the 'stickiness' of fat bodies as sites of fear and anxiety. Affects, then, are not only *individually* felt, but "shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time… [in so doing contributing towards] orientations towards and away from others" (Ahmed, 2004, p.4).

Building on this, one key issue here is that it is not only the bodies of these women that become fixed, but that bodies more broadly risk becoming known through these binaries. From these encounters within the fitspo assemblage it is possible to extrapolate that the repetition of these affects continue to produce 'knowledges' about states of embodiment that can be stigmatizing and exclusionary, contributing to the orientations away and toward certain bodies that Ahmed highlights. Ultimately, given the persistent association between slim bodies as moral, productive and desirable, and fat bodies as immoral, lazy and asexual (Colls, 2007; LeBesco, 2011), it is unlikely that such 'sticky' experiences would persist should these molar binaries cease to carry weight.

I have also examined the affective relations between images and racialized bodies, as another example of the way affect can become "very densely knotted" (Wetherell, 2012, p.14). On the one hand, the 'Instagram body' does seem to point to the hybridity and changing nature of ideas of beauty, which could potentially enable women of colour appropriating "'negative stereotypes' to either assert control over the[ir] representation or at least reap the benefits of it" (hooks, 2015, p.65). However, as I have shown here, and further discuss in Chapter 8, Eryn, Artika and Salma suggest it is not women of colour who *are* reaping the benefits of this. In addition to the cultivation of a toned, curvy body, images of bodies in the fitspo assemblage are marked by a repetition of whiteness, whilst still embodying some racial ambiguity with regards to stereotypical body types. Thus, I have argued that the affects of these images can 'stick' more for women of colour in two ways:

through histories of stereotypes of racialised bodies, and through such images being felt *alongside* previous memories of feeling racially different.

Through this, I have shown that images are not experienced evenly by bodies, and nor do bodies become homogenously through their relations with the fitspo assemblage, but are in some instances shaped by histories of exclusion, and knowledges surrounding what particular, racialized bodies 'should' look like. Rather than a molecular line of flight away from molar configurations of bodies through hybridity, the data attests to such configurations becoming *doubly* retrenched[7] as the women of colour highlight feelings of marginalization through bodily surveillance, *in addition to* the surveillance they undergo as part of looking to change their body shape. Thus, while demonstrating evidence for the postfeminist gaze in the previous chapter, here I have argued that it is crucial to acknowledge how this gaze may be mediated by experiences of racialised bodies.

In what follows, I continue to focus on the pervasiveness of images of the body I the fitspo assemblage. However, I next address how images of bodies are mobilised in ways that designate boundaries around the acceptability of particular images, as the women navigate these boundaries in tandem with desires to become visible, and Instagram's unknowable algorithmic processes.

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[7] Though as I show in Chapter 8, these becomings do not necessarily endure, and ruptures are possible.

Chapter 7 Becoming visible: algorithms, bodies and moral boundaries

7.1 Introduction

In the Introduction, I highlighted Amy Dobson's (2015) argument that it is crucial to *slow down* when discussing images of women's bodies that are affectively *heated up,* as signalled through the vociferous debate they engender. For example, scholars have argued it is common to position women who share images of their bodies online as *either* victims *or* empowered through the images they share (Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013; Dobson, 2015; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015; Renold and Ringrose, 2017). This chapter considers such images that are *particularly* heated up within the fitspo assemblage – images of women's bodies that are not necessarily linked to demonstrating exercise or physical progress. Following Dobson's heed to *slow down*, I use this chapter to explore how *Instagram as an algorithmic platform* adds an added layer of complexity in how women consume, navigate and produce fitspo images, and engage with other users. I argue that the women must not only navigate the competing demands that scholars have highlighted that expect women to be visible in appropriate ways (Gill, 2008b; Attwood, 2006; McRobbie, 2009; Riley and Evans, 2015), but *also* Instagram's algorithmic systems and norms within fitspo communities, as they attempt to become visible within the fitspo assemblage.

In slowing down, I argue that what fitspo images do here is twofold. First, they enable bodies to become visible through Instagram's largely unknowable algorithms, through evoking a 'picture-perfect' aesthetic. To be clear, my description of content as 'picture-perfect' is not to objectively describe content *as* perfect, but to encapsulate how these images were discussed by the women, relating to portraying the 'ideal' body and consumer lifestyle. Second, they are used to draw boundaries regarding acceptable visibility, intensifying the surveillance experienced within the fitspo assemblage through producing limits to be measured against that go beyond muscle groups. To argue this, I consider the 'Other girls' narrative frequently raised, illustrating how the coming together of images, algorithms, and such ideals within the fitspo assemblage enable some bodies to become enhanced through *correctly* displaying their bodies, whilst others are fixed as inappropriately sexualized, and lacking purpose. Moreover, I explore the boundary women must navigate in relation to receiving unsolicited sexual attention from men to consider how women's bodies can become in this space. In this chapter, then, I consider the postfeminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018) in relation to how this gaze shared amongst women is felt through

regulatory class and sexuality ideals, *in addition* to how the gaze of Instagram's algorithms and from men further factors into the surveillance the women are subjected too. Crucially, I further this concept to centre the argument that it is not only the gazes of other human bodies that are affective, through demonstrating the affective nature of the gaze felt in relation to Instagram's algorithmic processes. That is, I explore the women's desires to be gazed upon by these algorithmic processes, and their knowledges surrounding appropriate displays, that both shape the kinds of images the women share, and feed into how their bodies can become.

In thinking about how women use images of their bodies to gain visibility through Instagram's algorithms, I situate this within Sarah Banet-Weiser's (2018) concept of an '*economy of visibility*'. Exploring the growth of popular feminism and popular misogyny, Banet-Weiser defines an economy of visibility as "a media landscape that is many things at once: a technological and economic context devoted to the accumulation of views, clicks, [and] 'likes'" (2018, p.2), where some images and practices become visible whilst others are rendered invisible. For example, as popular feminism (described in terms of feminism that encourages specific political action such as empowerment through one's body) gains prominence through networked visibility, so too do forms of misogyny become mobilized in retaliation (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Considering the fitspo assemblage in relation to an economy of visibility is useful for multiple reasons. First, it highlights the role that networked technologies play in this competition to be visible, as every like and comment contributes to algorithms understanding content as 'trending' or 'relevant' (Gillespie, 2014). Second, it enables interrogating *who* and *what* becomes elevated as most popular. Third, it retains a focus on the *doings* and *processes* of becoming visible. Through this, while considering how algorithms and this economy of visibility may shape what is and is not seen, I continue to retain a focus on what *women do with images,* here in relation to Instagram's algorithmic processes, their perceptions of these, and their desires to become appropriately visible. In so doing, this chapter continues to demonstrate that images (and social media more broadly) cannot be conceptualised as having uni-directional, singular effects on the viewer, and that it is crucial to go beyond content analysis of fitspo images. Thinking *only* of effects overlooks the active role that women themselves play in producing and sharing images, and minimizes how images are used within the fitspo assemblage to mobilise a moralising framework regarding women's bodily displays. Such an argument then would overlook my argument here that demonstrates how images shape what bodies can become, where here such images intensify experiences of surveillance in relation normative ideals of class, gender and feminine sexuality.

I begin by outlining key literature about algorithms to make evident my conceptualisation of social media's algorithmic systems. I then explore how the prominence of 'picture-perfect' images amongst popular influencers were perceived by the women in this study, before demonstrating how this shaped how

they shared images of their bodies. I next address how *some* images of bodies become understood as acceptable whilst others are repudiated, and demonstrate how attention from men becomes another gaze to navigate. I conclude by arguing that images shared within the fitspo assemblage are mediated by both algorithmic processes and a desire to be seen in the *right* way, which conditions how bodies can become through gendering and classing judgements.

7.1.1 Algorithms

Algorithms are a "key logic governing the flows of information on which we depend" (Gillespie, 2014, p.167), and the social spaces we inhabit (Bucher, 2018). Put simply, they can be described as "as a recipe, understood as a step-by-step guide that prescribes how to obtain a certain goal, given specific parameters" (Bucher, 2018, p.21). Despite the myth of objectivity and neutrality that surrounds algorithms in popular discourse (Gillespie, 2014; Bucher, 2018), algorithms are contextual, guided by culture, politics, and particular knowledges (Kitchin, 2017). Critical scholars of algorithms argue the power of algorithms cannot be reduced to their code, but must be understood relationally (Kitchin, 2017; Willson, 2017; Bucher, 2018; van der Nagel, 2018). This involves exploring how they are "embedded in wider socio-technical assemblages", including the values of the developers, the software it will be implemented into, and how users interact with it (Kitchin, 2017, p.14). Despite this, algorithms can be difficult to understand relationally due being kept opaque by the platforms that use them (Dourish, 2016; Kitchin, 2017; Willson, 2017), due to their profit-generating means through data collection and advertising (Dourish, 2016). This is despite the profound shaping aspects they have been argued to have on our lives. This includes accessing news (Gillespie, 2017; Rieder et al., 2018), in marketing (Cheney-Lippold, 2011) and in homeland security measures (Amoore, 2009a; 2009b). While their opacity has been discussed in relation to algorithms being 'black-boxed' (Pasquale, 2015), Tarleton Gillespie (2013) suggests that this does not mean we should think about algorithms as stable and unsusceptible to change by users. Instead, he suggests that we view the mechanisms of algorithms as both "obscured *and* malleable" (Gillespie, 2014, p.178), as hidden from view but still able to be *affected* by users.

In March 2016, Instagram introduced algorithmic personalization on user's feeds. Rather than showing posts chronologically, posts were ordered based on a hidden metric system. In a press release, Instagram stated:

> To improve your experience, your feed will soon be ordered to show the moments we believe you will care about the most. The order of photos and videos in your feed will be based on the likelihood you'll be interested in the content, your relationship with the person posting and the timeliness of the post (Instagram, 2016b, no page).

Because of the vague factors Instagram suggests shapes what users see, users are left to experiment to see what will work. For example, journalist Josh Constine (2018) defines interest as how far Instagram predicts you care about a post, where

caring is based on engagement (for example, likes and comments) with content in the past. While this does not offer a clear guideline, it suggests the more particular images are engaged with, the more they will appear.

By way of example, on the Instagram profile for this research I engaged exclusively with fitspo accounts, which meant my Explore page consisted entirely of other fitness accounts. Instagram's algorithmic systems recognized I had an interest in fitness content, and based on this, recommended similar content. Thus, the algorithm made a series of decisions based on what it *anticipated* I would like to see, shaping what I was *able* to see. Algorithms, then, are *productive,* in that they not only collect and sort information, but also make possible particular ways of seeing (Beer, 2009; Amoore, 2009a; Kitchin, 2017; Willson, 2017). This demonstrates that algorithms should not be studied for the 'effect' they have on users, but for how users and algorithms are shaped by one another (Gillespie, 2014; Just and Latzer, 2017; Bucher, 2018). Thus, this chapter relies on an understanding of algorithms as being "emergent and constantly unfolding" (Kitchin, 2017, p.21), rather than fixed and static.

The malleable nature of algorithms has led to what Taina Bucher terms the production of an algorithmic imaginary amongst users, defined as "ways of thinking about what algorithms are, what they should be and how they function" (Bucher, 2017, p.30). Studies have highlighted that users generate ideas pertaining to how to gain engagement (Eslami et al., 2016; Bucher, 2017; Skrubbeltrang et al., 2017; Cotter, 2019; O'Meara, 2019; Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020), content moderation (Myers West, 2018), and when they are deemed *not* functional – for example, when users fail to see posts from their friends (Bucher, 2017; Skrubbeltrang et al., 2017). Described by some researchers as folk theories (Eslami et al., 2016; Skrubbeltrang et al., 2017; Myers West, 2018), this concept acknowledges how users come together to produce knowledge about algorithms, but fails to capture the "productive and affective power that these imaginings have" (Bucher, 2017, p.41). As Bucher (2017) notes, whether or not an algorithm works in the way users perceive is often less important than how this imaginary shapes how users engage with platforms. Next, I examine how the women in this research imagined Instagram's algorithm to work.

7.2 'Picture-perfect'

Despite Instagram's vague statements about their algorithms, many women suggested that receiving greater engagement could contribute to becoming seen, similar to findings from other studies that have explored how users negotiate Instagram's algorithmic processes (Cotter, 2019; O'Meara, 2019; Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020). One of the most common aspects of the algorithmic imaginary shared amongst the women was that sharing images of one's body was one key way to gain engagement and become more visible. Interestingly, this idea reflects the engagement I received on the research profile. The examples below show two pictures: the first shows a pile of books and a list, while the second shows myself in

leggings and a sports bra while competing at a sporting competition. They received 48 and 111 likes, respectively:

Figure 4 Image of books, taken from @lrmresearch

Figure 5 Image of researcher, taken from @lrmresearch

The data suggests that the women's algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2017), namely the idea that bodies receive greater engagement, was partially rooted in the kinds of content popular accounts were sharing. For example, many women noted (though not without critique) that images that focused on showcasing an "Instagram body" (Chapter 5, 6) and luxurious lifestyle were commonly shared by influencers, evoking a 'picture-perfect' aesthetic:

> Aimee: I just think why on earth do these girls just love them so much, and just defend anything these girls do? And I just think, yeah.
> Lauren: Why do you think it is, where does this support come from?
> Aimee: I think it's just their body image.
> Lauren: Do you think?
> Aimee: Yeah, they've got like the dream body at the moment so girls see them and think 'I wanna be exactly like her'. And they obviously live

lifestyles where they're YouTubers and that's their job, and it probably seems all glamorous, and they get sent loads of things and like their YouTube videos, they just buy loads of clothes from ASOS and do a haul[1].

Aimee's description of the popularity of these accounts gives a sense of them as sites of affective investment for their followers. Aimee highlights this in two ways: through hauls, and their bodies. However, this does not necessarily account for why *these* women are so popular, as there are a wealth of celebrities who could fit this aspirational bill. That these women are so highly invested in could be understood through their position as influencers, who are typically positioned as more intimate and engaging than 'traditional' celebrities (Senft, 2008; Abidin, 2015; Duffy and Pruchniewska, 2017). This could suggest why fitspo influencers gain the support Aimee highlights, through being aspirational and (perceived as) more accessible. Aimee's discussion of the images influencers share is important as she demonstrates Alice Marwick's (2015) argument that celebrity is something that people *do* on social media, through coveting particular aesthetics. Consequently, it follows that fitspo influencers that have gained a sizeable following would share content born out of the aesthetic that helped them grow to fame in the first instance – a toned, slim body, and excessive visible consumption.

Due to their association with influencers, such images of bodies are understood as crucial in becoming visible in the fitspo assemblage, illustrating the productive nature of the algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2017):

> Lauren: Why do you think Instagram has that then, that kind of perfect, 'picture-perfect' [content]?
> Eryn: Because it sells. That's how people make money, not very many people's accounts, as bad as it is, you could be a really good personal trainer and post good work out videos but if you don't look the part of Instagram, you're not gonna make money from it. Because people [pause]. Sex sells, doesn't it, at the end of the day. And if you look good and people find you attractive, it will make money. That's not just Instagram, that's TV, that's magazines. It's just the way life.

Eryn and Aimee describe the hierarchal nature of becoming a popular, visible account. For example, based on Chapter 5 and 6, looking "the part of Instagram" is likely to be a white, toned young woman. This demonstrates how an economy of visibility structures what kind of bodies and lifestyles can be seen, obscuring the relations of inequality that mean some people are able to position themselves as aspirational. As Brooke Duffy and Erin Hund (2015) note, while the growth of women influencers may read as empowering due to more successful self-employed women, it is crucial to acknowledge the social inequalities reproduced through social media careers. Duffy and Hund highlight the exclusion of racialised and/or fat

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[1] A 'haul' is a video to show what you have bought (or been gifted).

people within these careers, and the economic and social capital required to be an influencer, something that Aimee and Eryn allude to. Moreover, Aimee and Eryn's responses evade the meritocratic ideals that were emphasized so heavily Chapter 5, suggesting that becoming visible requires looking a particular way because "sex sells". Rosalind Gill (2007b) argues that multiple contradictions hold together postfeminist media culture, and this analysis demonstrates how these contradictions become lived out in the women's social media practices. For example, here the women challenge the idea that hard-work is more important than aesthetics in the fitspo assemblage, as appearance becomes positioned as crucial to become visible (and by extension, successful).

This data is important to open the analysis within this chapter, as both Eryn and Aimee demonstrate that algorithms do not *determine* which content becomes most visible, but instead *heighten* it depending on how others interact with it. This circular nature means that images that receive greater interest are more likely to be amplified, leading to 'picture-perfect' content becoming heightened in this economy of visibility as women who desire to become visible share these images to be seen (as also evidenced by my own use of images). However, as I show below, women sharing images of their bodies is never straightforward. While images of bodies are touted as a key way to become seen through the women's algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2017), the women also navigated and enacted a regulatory framework, partially shaped through the postfeminist gaze, that demarcated boundaries around acceptable ways to become visible.

7.3 Becoming visible

> Tania: [Having a big bum] is part of the trend, and part of society, and Instagram now. And that is why my pictures have changed now, from more just flexing, showing a bicep and shoulder, to now trying to get more of a booty pop because [pause]. A) I get more engagement on my post when I post a booty picture, and B) it makes me feel a bit better about myself. Because I know that other people are then gonna [pause]. It's really fucked up, it shouldn't be like that at all.

Tania demonstrates the contradictions embedded within the practices of sharing images of bodies within the fitspo assemblage, illustrating how an analysis of these selfies cannot be explained through ideas of victimisation and/or empowerment. Here, prioritising the "and…and" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) can acknowledge the complexity of Tania's digital media production to understand how she navigates competing demands and desires (Dobson, 2015). Returning to the competing demands faced by women below, dismissing these women as cultural dupes who are sexualising themselves would, for example, overlook the pleasure that Tania gleans through receiving engagement, something echoed in empirical work on selfies (Tiidenberg and Gómez-Cruz, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2018). Further, it would overlook the knowledges drawn upon to become visible successfully here (Abidin, 2016a; Cotter, 2019). Crystal Abidin (2016a) suggests we should reframe the labour

involved in social media production to understand how producing selfies is dependent on tacit labour, through a range of (often under-visibilized) strategies such as make-up, lighting, and posturing. Through Tania, we can extend this concept of tacit labour to include knowledge about how Instagram's algorithms are perceived to work and the perceptions of what the (real or imagined) audience may engage with – in this case, knowing to emphasise some body parts over other.

Through this, we learn that the visibility of specific body parts factors into producing and sharing images. Tania's descriptions of how and why she takes these images evidences the fitspo assemblage as affective and relational: for example, as the process of becoming visible is shaped through taking images-Tania's body-Instagram's algorithms-the (real or imagined) audience. Such encounters shape Tania's capacities to act as she shifts from sharing images of her arms to showing "more of a booty pop", as her knowledge of her audience and Instagram's algorithmic processes entangle with her practices of image taking. Consequently, as a personal trainer (PT), Tania may benefit from attracting more clients (as Eryn suggests, you have to "look the part"), which may lead to increased economic revenue. Further, we learn it is not only images, but also the (real or imagined) audience that can shape how Tania's body can become. Crucially, the capacities of Tania's body are enhanced through being circulated in a digital community that has been demonstrated to value particular bodily displays, as it is audience engagement that enables Tania to both feel better and (potentially) become visible. This suggests the affective capacities of images cannot be understood outside of the image context – for example, it is unlikely that sharing these images within other digital communities would garner the same benefit (see, for example, the kinds of bodily displays that are valued within pro-ana communities (Gerrard, 2018; Cobb, 2020), or NSFW Tumblr communities (Tiidenberg, 2016)).

Thus, while women's bodies are positioned as a source of capital in postfeminist culture (Gill, 2007b; 2017; McRobbie, 2009; Elias et al., 2017), Tania shows it is not just *bodies* that are a source of capital, but specific *body parts*. Accordingly, images must be curated around emphasizing particular body parts to become visible. This can be understood through what Nicholas Carah and Dobson term body heat – the labour of "(1) producing, maintaining and digitally mediating a body that conforms to 'heterosexy' visual codes, and (2) using a hot body to affect other bodies" (Carah and Dobson, 2016, p.1, references omitted). Here, Tania shares her labour-intensive, worked upon "booty" through taking and sharing images on Instagram. Rather than emanating through the whole body, body heat becomes particularly intensified through the "booty": a site that Tania has invested labour into, that has the capacity to affect other bodies to turn towards her image. This is particularly notable as it becomes possible to see different kinds of work coinciding here in relation to what images of 'booties' can do. That is, in Chapter 5 images of glutes were foregrounded as affective (or as sites of body heat) due to their association with either hard work and therefore deserving such muscle groups, *or* a lack of hard work and therefore being undeserving. Here, such images are affective because of how they expand Tania's possibilities to be seen, through the

engagement she receives from others. Focusing only on what these images are of, then, may miss the subtle, competing things that images can do.

Crucially, one reason Tania is able to affect other bodies to gaze upon her can be linked to the prominence of 'picture-perfect' images discussed above, where those who desire to become visible may emulate similar images to those shared by influencers, and that have received good engagement previously. Being aware of the fitspo assemblage's specific economy of visibility, in terms of the need to generate engagement to be seen, and the kinds of images that are more likely to be elevated then others, may shape how Tania shares particular images. It is not a one-off, then, that an image focusing on specific body parts becomes made visible. Instead, it is the affective flows between images, likes and algorithmic decisions that enable particular body parts to gain currency over others (Ringrose et al, 2013) within the fitspo assemblage, as the algorithms recognize higher engagement and make such images more visible (Carah and Dobson, 2016; see also, Banet-Weiser, 2018). However, these desires and attempts to become visible are not a free-for-all, and without risk; rather, such practices exist alongside and through range of moral norms around what is and is not appropriate, shaped in part by the postfeminist gaze.

7.3.1 Self-optimization through moral boundaries

Sophie Bishop (2018a) describes the decisions involved in producing content as a process of self-optimization, whereby if users "desire visibility then they ultimately are pushed towards complicity" (2018a, p.73) with visibility algorithms. In her study of YouTube vloggers, Bishop notes vloggers undertake time-consuming labour to become seen through the algorithm, leading vloggers (consciously or unconsciously) to adopt particular styles of vlogging. In this section, I want to add that while these women may have been "pushed towards complicity" to become visible, I demonstrate that the women do not only self-optimize in relation to Instagram's algorithmic processes, but also in relation to sociocultural gendering and classing norms regarding the acceptable visibility of one's body. Here, the postfeminist gaze is particularly evident, as I illustrate that these women are posting with the judgemental looks of others in mind. I demonstrate that sharing images of their bodies required particular narratives to justify and/or explain their images, including building a business and sharing particular messages. Through this, I argue that what images of women's bodies can do within the fitspo assemblage is enable how bodies can become through molar binaries, as *either* agentic and empowered *or* excessive and self-objectifying.

Two common moral boundaries drawn by the women were relating to building economic and business acumen, particularly amongst PTs, and sharing information of various kinds with their followers. I asked Emma what she gained from sharing images of her body, given her critiques towards others that do so:

> Emma: Apart from boosting my business, no I don't get anything from myself. […] This is the thing, I'm in a happy committed relationship and

> I'll get some weird person message me something creepy and I'm just
> like…really? Is it worth it just to get a bit of business?
> Lauren: Is it?
> Emma: Exactly. Sometimes I'm like [pause]. But then I panic anyway, in
> my own business that I'm one person, and that's it, if I don't go to work
> then that's it, nobody else will. So if I don't go to work, I'll be on
> Instagram trying to post something, or trying to make something. […]
> Right now I don't have a voice, [you don't] until you get some sort of
> capacity. If I could get my followers up to [where I had] some sort of
> voice I'd change it completely, I would literally just be like no.

Emma demonstrates that sharing images of her body is linked to a process of algorithmic self-optimization (Bishop, 2018a), underwritten by the desire to develop her business as a self-employed PT. Duffy and Pruchniewska (2017) argue that 'compulsory visibility' is keenly felt amongst self-employed women, where building their career requires a willingness to make themselves visible. They note this is often in accordance with traditional femininity – for example, with a polished appearance or cultivating (perceived) intimate relationships through responding to audience comments. Emma describes this 'compulsory visibility' as a trade-off – while it enables her to become visible, this is enacted through posting images she suggests she does not want to do, as she risks receiving comments from men (7.5). Thus, while Emma demonstrates Bishop's (2018a) argument relating to self-optimization, we learn that there are additional elements underwriting this process of self-optimization: first, that women must navigate their professional and relationship values when sharing images on Instagram; second, that women walk a fine line where they are simultaneously expected to be on show, but not *too* on show (Evans and Riley, 2015); and third, some attempts to be visible are more permissible than others.

In addition to business advancement, others utilised images of their bodies to share information and/or meaningful messages. Sam described one purpose of her Instagram account as challenging the stigma surrounding mental health, motivated by her research and work within the mental health sector, which she did through the captions that accompanied images of her body:

> Sam: My favourite things [to post are] not really so much to do with the
> pictures, it's more to do with the captions. So, my favourite thing to
> post is sharing something that I'm really passionate about. So, obviously
> I'll get a good pictures to go with it so it attracts people to read it, and
> I'll try and usually these ones, that do quite well, are like something like
> this [Sam shows me a full length image of her body in gym wear].

As part of the media-go along, while Sam was speaking she showed me the images that she would share on her Instagram. Most often, these were images of her in gym wear, accompanied by lengthy captions that were often unrelated to the image. This was not an uncommon finding: many women described using their captions as a space to write about issues important to them (Chapter 5, 8), or to share information more generally:

> Elle: Like the selfie, sometimes it feels nice but sometimes it doesn't feel [more] relevant than having, like, a [yoga] pose that I might be able to talk about, or at the very least it gives me a pretty photo for some more useful information underneath. I feel like, it's a bit more eye-catching.

While Elle explained in the go-along that she touched upon issues such as mental health, as a self-employed yoga instructor and someone keen to become popular within the health and wellness sector, Elle predominantly used her images that she took of herself to add information about yoga, or about what she termed 'evidence based' approaches to health. As with Sam and Emma, such images are explicitly named as able to grab the attention of the viewer, reminiscent of media campaigns that foreground women's bodies for similar purposes (Gill, 2007a).

I have grouped these examples together, as in vocalizing their motivations behind sharing these images, Emma, Elle and Sam suggest that sharing images of their bodies *requires* justification. Similar to the images of weight gain in Chapter 5, this demonstrates that some images cannot be left to speak for themselves. Importantly, it would be erroneous, and against the reflexive position I took in Chapter 4, to overlook that this could be due to my presence as an interviewer. As Coleman and Ringrose illustrate, "social scientists are themselves entangled within the assemblages they seek to study… [and] are thus one point of the relations within an assemblage" (2013a, p.6). While I do not subscribe to broader social discourses that often condemn women who share images of their bodies as being 'overly' sexual, attention-seeking or victimised (Dobson, 2015), this is not something the women were necessarily aware of. For this reason, there is a chance such justifications arose due to their perceptions of my own values surrounding women who share images of their bodies online, illustrating how my presence as a researcher is, to reference Coleman and Ringrose, one of many points in this fitspo assemblage. Nevertheless, such justifications also demonstrate that while becoming visible through body-focused images in the fitspo assemblage is a means to build engagement and be amplified by Instagram's algorithms, only *some* bodies can become enhanced through this.

Drawing on Angela McRobbie's (2009) argument that there is a simultaneous championing *and* disavowal of feminism in a postfeminist culture, these justifications work to take into account the idea that women sharing images of their bodies is bad, *whilst at the same time* protecting themselves as someone who does so to neutralize their actions. This enables women that partake in 'compulsory visibility' for particular reasons to distinguish themselves from women who do so for other reasons. This illustrates the importance of researching images not (only) for their content, but in relation to the productive capacities they have. Here, what images *do* is enable Emma, Elle and Sam to know their bodies as different to 'Other girls', as known through moralising frameworks. For example, the relations between Emma's body, images, her (real or imagined) audience and the algorithm enable Emma to understand herself as a self-made, entrepreneurial woman who is drawing on her resources to get ahead, without being associated with those who

choose to become visible for the 'wrong' reasons; for example, as I explore in 7.4, to gain sexual attention from others. Thus, in addition to demonstrating the importance of not being positioned as vain or image-obsessed whilst still making an effort with one's appearance (Bordo, 2003; Jones, 2008; Elias et al., 2017), the women's inclusion of justifications suggests there is risk of being *shamed* by others within the fitspo assemblage for sharing images of their bodies without a legitimated purpose. Echoing the negotiations of cosmetic surgery patients in situating themselves as savvy and aware in contrast to those positioned as undergoing surgery for superficial reasons (Blum, 2005; Pitts-Taylor, 2007; Jones, 2008), what is *different* here is that how bodies become known are related to all-too-familiar cultural discourses *in addition to* Instagram's unknown algorithms.

Such justifications above are also brimming with elements of the postfeminist gaze. In their discussion of the postfeminist gaze, Riley et al. argue that

> the process by which women know if they are successful or not is through judgement and comparison to other women. Thus, women must continuously scrutinise themselves and others to assess how well they are doing (Riley et al., 2016, p.107).

Here, the way Emma, Sam and Elle discuss their images can be seen as stemming from looks that compare their bodily display to the bodies of other women, where this assessment on "how well they are doing" takes a moral undertone. That is, the women use their gaze to demarcate themselves from women who share their bodies to gain attention for the 'wrong' reasons. Through this we see one of postfeminism's stark contradictions, in that as women are increasingly made visible as confident, sexually desiring and active subjects, they come under scrutiny to ensure they are not being too excessive (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2008; Dobson, 2015). This postfeminist gaze, then, can be understood as mediating how the women define the boundaries of acceptable femininity through the looks they direct to one another's images. Thinking in terms of the fitspo assemblage means it is possible to trace how this particular coming together of bodies has enabled this postfeminist gaze to thrive, rather than thinking of this in terms of isolated elements. That is, on a platform driven by aesthetic-appeal and algorithmic processes (Leaver et al., 2020), within a digital community concerned with women's bodies and visibility desires, and through the specific sociocultural context in which fitspo content has grown, it is perhaps little wonder that this plays out in *some* images of bodies being more acceptable than others, as known through judgement and comparative gazes.

Thus, through the fitspo assemblage it is possible to see how this postfeminist gaze works through modes of inclusion that allow *some* processes of self-optimization over others, endowing some bodies with the capacity to be understood as acceptable when explanations (that align with specific moral boundaries) are given to support their images. Consequently, while this demonstrates Rebecca Coleman's (2009) argument that images are one way through which bodies become known, I want to add to this to suggest that here bodies become known through images vis-

à-vis the moralising boundaries that are drawn through them. Crucially, if the capacities of *some* bodies are enhanced through these images, then it follows that *some* images are not. Next, I expand on this to address how images of bodies were used to *exclude* and *fix* the bodies of 'Other girls', through positioning them as overly sexual and shameless in their visibility. Rather than oppositional, the articulations of femininity enabled through the fitspo assemblage discussed above and below should be seen as dependent on one another, as these boundaries are not clear breaks but are slippery, contradictory and prone to change. Drawing on Anita Harris (2012), in sharing images of their body, the women are always risking moving from the 'Can-Do' girl who makes rational choices in displaying her body, to the 'At-Risk' girl who is vulgar and objectified due to her visibility, hence requiring adequate justification or face the threat of becoming known and gazed upon as the Other girl.

7.4 Other girls

While scholars have argued images of women's bodies (and their self-imaging practices in particular) are met with critique and judgement (Nurka, 2014; Dobson, 2015), here I demonstrate the role that the women in this study play in articulating this judgement through gendering and sexualising norms of body regulation via the figure of the Other girl. In her work on women's Tumblr meme blogs, Akane Kanai describes the Other girl as "a figure against which the self is defined across luminous domains of appearance, and sexuality" (2019, p.100). This Other girl oscillates between ever-changing characteristics, such as the girl who is unrelatable due to her 'effortlessly' skinny body, or the girl who flirts with other people's boyfriends. The figure of the Other girl is a subject of discipline, simultaneously "everyone and no one…[a] stand-in for an overgeneralised excessive femininity that must be repudiated" (Kanai, 2019, p.105). However, within the fitspo assemblage this figure has one more crucial function: the perceived shamelessness of the Other girl is used to buffer the women from the critical gaze of others when they share images of their bodies, as flows of affect materialise the surface of some bodies differently (Ahmed, 2004). Consequently, in allowing the women to position one another within a strict (and contradictory) regulatory framework, images here are *productive* in how they are used by the women to draw boundaries of acceptability around images. Having shown how women enhance the capacities of their own bodies through attaching moral narratives to their images through the postfeminist gaze, I next address how the bodies of Other girls are fixed through a strict, binary framework that shapes, and is shaped by, normative ideals of class, gender and sexuality.

7.4.1 "Why is she half naked?"

One way images of Other girls were discussed was in relation to their perceived excessive self-sexualisation. Below, Emma is scrolling through images on the Explore page within the media go-along:

> Emma: There we go, a bum, another bum, half naked person. See, like this stuff [a woman doing gymnastics in swim wear] like this, but even then. If I go onto [redacted profile]. Erm, even then, like why is she doing it in a swimming costume? Do you know what I mean, like why is she half naked to do all this?

Emma suggests there are 'right' and 'wrong' ways to display the exercising body, where once again bottoms are read onto as a site of meaning and are particularly affective. In asking "why is she doing it?", Emma positions herself outside of these images, framing these images as lacking purpose beyond being sexual. While class is not explicitly mentioned by Emma, working class women's bodies have historically been tied to an excessive form of sexuality (Skeggs, 1997; Harris, 2012). Consequently, Emma's discussion of women's bodies cannot be divorced from considerations of class and respectability, as "bodies are the physical sites where the relations of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied" (Skeggs, 1997, p.82). Emma's definitions of images of other women "through inappropriateness" (Skeggs, 1997, p.108) could be seen as defending herself from being understood as too sexual, and lacking respectability. Here, what images (of exposed glutes) do, then, is twofold: they demarcate the bodies of Other girls as unacceptable, and mark Emma's own body as acceptable. Both of these images are dependent on one another, as *some* bodies are only able to become known through positive moral narratives if Other women are derided for their "half-naked" bodies.

Some women were more explicit regarding the inappropriateness of sexual images:

> Helen: I do not like seeing photos of women where they are very sexual, I really don't, and I don't know why that is. It's not because, because, in one way I feel like women should be able to own their sexuality, whether that's online or in person. If you feel like a sexual person and you wanna have sexual content, I have no problem with it theoretically, but I don't wanna see it. Because, I don't know why, it just makes me uncomfortable. [pause]. I think maybe because you don't, I don't know whether the reason the person is putting it up is because that's what they think they're worth it, or whether because [pause]. It's kind of like the argument of like, if you are a stripper is it you are using your natural abilities to like [pause], like laugh at men and be like "I can do whatever I want" and you're taking back your control as a woman, or are you being manipulated and used by men for only sexual [reasons]?

Helen draws on dualistic conceptions of agency to think about the images that other women share on Instagram, namely the victim/empowered binary that scholars argue is channelled through contemporary discussions on the (perceived) sexualisation of young women (Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Dobson, 2015). This conception of agency sidesteps the complexities and tensions inherent to image production in postfeminist digital cultures (Dobson, 2015; Kanai, 2019), and here, enables some bodies to be buffered from being

perceived as sexual and shameless *if* there is a clear, rationally informed choice for doing so – for example, sharing messages about mental health, or building one's business. In tandem with the justifications above, this highlights what Riley and colleagues (2016) term the regulatory capacities of the postfeminist gaze. The gaze the women share with others then can be seen as shaped through these strict boundaries that serve to class and sexualise others when particular reasons for sharing images of their bodies are given. Bodies who are deemed on the 'wrong' side of these boundaries thus become fixed through molar power relations, as images here become not only ways to understand one's *own* body, but become ways of identifying (and buffering oneself from) the abject qualities of *Other* bodies (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008).

This data is important as it echoes studies that demonstrate the *active* role that women play in positioning some bodies outside of a framework of acceptability and respectability (Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013; Riley and Evans, 2015; Mainardi, 2018). For example, Arianna Mainardi (2018) highlights that, amongst Italian schoolgirls, peers who shared images of their cleavage would be deemed as vulgar through being perceived as desiring attention from others through profile pictures they uploaded to Facebook. Similarly, Emma and Helen's responses are indicative of an unmistakable hierarchy of images of bodies, where particular women are excluded from being able to be understood as acceptable due to the perceived limits they have crossed as images become involved in processes of classing, gendering and sexualising Other girls. Thus, rather than being positioned as victims of the *effects* of images, the data demonstrates the women produce, engage with and demarcate images in ways that *invest* and *produce* some bodies as worthy, some as not, within the fitspo assemblage's economy of visibility.

7.4.2 Passive visibility

Boundaries were further drawn around acceptable bodily displays in relation to how *helpful* and *active* images of bodies were perceived to be:

> Lauren: What are you doing that's different?
> Eryn: Most of the photos I get people to take of me because I, I prefer to have a photo of me working out because that's what the point of my Instagram is. So like photos, a lot of my photos are to do with me actually doing the workout because that's the point of my account, a lot of videos. Like a video, I want to show people what to do. If I do take a selfie I just do like a peace sign or a smile because it's just a very relaxed smile. I'm not trying to show off my muscles to people, or show them look I think my body's great. Because sometimes I think sometimes it does inspire people, but if you're not showing people the reason behind, like if your account is filled with selfies and pictures of your body and no explanation as to how you got there, how is that any use to anyone?

While Dobson argues that amongst the young Australian girls she interviewed, images of bodies "function chiefly as signals of desire to initiate sexual interaction or gain sexual attention" (2015, p.91), Eryn complicates this. Here, images function in multiple different ways which are bound to questions of morality, as Eryn articulates that bodies that only focus on appearance are perceived as overly sexual and unhelpful, as opposed to bodies *in motion* that are deemed acceptable. Through stipulating a *new* binary relating to perceptions of helpfulness (similar to Elle and Sam), Eryn demonstrates that images can gain value outside of the sexualising framework Dobson describes. These binaries, and those echoed through this chapter enable Eryn to understand her own body as different to those who are perceived as primarily using their bodies to *only* gain sexual attention. The values attached to particular images, then, become a buffer from the critical gaze of the (real or imagined) audience: it is not possible to be known as the Other girl, as Eryn's images serve a purpose *beyond* only display.

Notions of acceptable bodily display are consequently "born through this solidification of differences" (Tiidenberg, 2016, p.1570), as despite the content of the images seeming similar, the perceived value they bring to (real or imagined) audiences becomes one way to draw boundaries between images that are, and are not, acceptable. In demarcating images according to their perceived values, it becomes possible for some images to be protected from accusations of being excessively sexual and/or lacking a purpose beyond aesthetics, or desiring attention. This analysis provides evidence for the inseparability of neoliberal values from postfeminist sentiments, as worth becomes connected to not only physical appearance, but through market logics of worth and value (Elias et al., 2017; Gill, 2017; Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Consequently, the postfeminist gaze enacted here by the women through looking at and perceiving the images of other women's bodies is not *only* based on how well others meet normative visual criteria in the fitspo assemblage, but also how far they are understood within neoliberal values of productivity.

Thus, the Other girl within this data can be understood as a "recognizable figure: the figure of the constitutive moral limit in proximity" (Skeggs, 2005, p.970). That is, the Other girls the women speak of are familiar to them, in that they are not a strange unknown but someone who exists closely alongside them. For example, these Other girls are recognizable to the women I spoke to through their own practices, as they all share images of their bodies within the fitspo assemblage. The Other girl exists as a moral limit as she is a way to provide "collective reassurance" (Skeggs, 2005, p.970) that the images the women here share are different, in that they do not cross this moral limit by sharing them in the same way that Other girls do. This moral limit can be understood as a molar segmentation of power, produced through the various elements of the fitspo assemblage: for example, the images the women take, an economy of visibility that shapes the popularity of some images, and how other women's images are gazed upon through rigid binaries that articulate processes of classing, gendering and sexualising. Through

this, images are affective in terms of how they tie particular bodies to shame, bringing the Other girl "into existence as a felt community" (Ahmed, 2004, p.101).

Consequently, while Dobson (2014) argues that performative shamelessness by young women online can be used to shield the self from contemporary understandings of femininity as damaged, here shame (whether perceived as a lack of shame, or as evidence of shamelessness) that becomes directed at others through the postfeminist gaze shapes both what bodies can *do,* and how bodies are grouped together (Ahmed, 2004). This illustrates Skeggs' argument that shame is key in how "women [to] come to recognize" (1997, p.123) themselves and others. This has two implications. First, that it is crucial the figure of the Other girl is kept in proximity: it is through her devaluation that other bodies become known as acceptable through the images they share to become self-optimized within the fitspo assemblage's economy of visibility. Second, that experiences of surveillance become intensified through this, as the women must measure up their images in relation moralising boundaries, always being conscious of what is and is not acceptable as their own gaze and the perceived gaze of the (real or imagined) audience is shot through with notions of class, gender, sexuality and usefulness.

7.5 Navigating men

The final boundary I explore that the women expressed that they navigated through becoming visible is that of receiving unsolicited sexual and/or vitriolic responses from men:

> Helen: I'd rather people think that I am cute than sexy, I don't want people to be messaging me stuff about my body because it makes me uncomfortable.
> Lauren: Like unsolicited pics?
> Helen: Yes, or dick pics. I got someone's account taken down the other day. He, he sent me a pornographic picture of women like squirting and I didn't ask for it, and I don't want it.

> Sarah: A man messaged me saying 'why did you do that thing with your feet" when I walk out [of the squat rack], and I'm fannying [slang for messing] around trying to find the right position for my feet. And he was like, being really, really unnecessary. I told him where to go, and it got really nasty, and I shared it on social media, and loads of people reported his page. It didn't get taken down though.
> Lauren: Did it not?
> Sarah: He was being homophobic, calling me a fat lesbian who couldn't get any lads, blah blah blah. He went from criticizing my technique, to criticizing my sexuality.

Unfortunately, the kinds of responses above were not uncommon within the data. Such responses demonstrate that harassment from men online cannot (and should not) be attributed to the women's behaviours, where Helen and Sarah illustrate that simply just being visible on Instagram attracted this unwanted attention. That

women are facing harassment from men in digital spaces is not new, and has been consistently demonstrated in the literature (Megarry, 2014; Vitak et al., 2017; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2018; Marwick and Caplan, 2018). For example, Banet-Weiser (2018) highlights that as women have become more visible on social media, in terms of popular feminist movements, this has also resulted in an increase in what she terms popular misogyny through a mobilization of misogyny across the very platforms that enabled such popular feminism to thrive. What Sarah and Helen illustrate is that, in relation to the postfeminist gaze, the gaze (and actions) of men are also important within the fitspo assemblage. Notably, Sarah and Helen denote their significance in terms of how such responses are felt as something that can be regulatory and symbolically violent through their affects.

There are different ways the women attempt to navigate this: while Helen highlights that such responses from men are deeply affective in how they literally constrain her body in how she feels willing to take and share images, Sarah points to speaking back against such responses. However, the most common strategy highlighted by the women to navigate this unsolicited attention was ignoring it:

> Lauren (Interviewer) (LI): What about general likes and commenting do you tend to [get a lot]?
> Lauren: If it's not about PT, it's just a creeper
> (LI): Sorry?
> Lauren: If it's not someone messaging me for PT, it's just someone creeping
> […]
> (LI): Do you find you get a lot of messages off guys even though you try to aim your content at women?
> Lauren: Yeah, but I don't even give it a response
> (LI): Do you not?
> Lauren: No I just ignore it [laughs].

> Pippa: I just don't respond, and I always tell my partner. So, I got, erm, a picture of a really private part sent through but luckily […] we could just see the blurred outline.

To be sure, in arguing this harassment is prominent within digital spaces, I follow Banet-Weiser (2018) in noting that this is not a problem only isolated *to* the digital, or *caused* by it, but that which manifests across and outside digital spaces. What is notable here is that the data demonstrates the economies of visibility these young women circulate in within the fitspo assemblage is *mediated* by this circulation of misogyny, enabled through the affordances of Instagram in terms of: direct messaging; public profiles that can receive comments from others; and, as the women implicitly suggest through the extent of harassment they face, a lack of robust moderation policies. This is not to blame technology nor Instagram more specifically for *causing* this harassment, but instead to ask two related questions: one, are content moderation policies able to effectively challenge the vitriol that

women face on platforms that enable and are dependent on users sharing their images; and two, what can be done about the sociocultural conditions that position this as something that seems inherently *normalized* amongst the women? These questions are important so as not to position harassment as the *fault* of the women, or as in some way deserved due to sharing images of themselves on Instagram, akin to commonsense advice in some media outlets such as those that encourage women to 'not feed the troll' to minimize the harms experienced (for discussions of such advice, see Lumsden and Morgan (2017)).

While research has demonstrated a range of moderation strategies on social media, driven by algorithms (Binns et al., 2017; Gerrard, 2018) and users paid to do so (Roberts, 2016), the data suggests that such policies are not necessarily successful in tackling this harassment. While social media researcher Ysabel Gerrard (2018) has pointed to the publicized and vocal policing of pro-eating disorder content on platforms such as Instagram, she suggests that content moderation decisions are often in response to public pressures to do so, and are often left vague:

> [s]ocial media companies encourage their users to share content about themselves but downplay decisions about how they moderate problematic posts [or comments] and why they choose to do so (Gerrard, 2018, p.4492).

While addressing a different kind of content, the lack of clarity coupled with an emphasis on *some* forms of content or posts being demarcated as in need of moderating Gerrard highlights is important. Clearly, the data produced for this thesis cannot necessarily resolve the issues raised in this section. However, when taking such data on board in conjunction with the research above that highlights the disproportionate vitriol women face online, in addition to research that has highlighted that images such as nude women and/or binary individuals are often heavily censored by moderation platforms (Olszanowski, 2014; Holowka, 2018b), *and* the broader sociocultural norms that position and expect women's bodies to be on display (Gill, 2007b; McRobbie, 2009; Nurka, 2014), it does suggest that it is important to think about what kinds of becomings the fitspo assemblage enables here. That is, the coming together of various immaterial, technical and material elements may result in the *fixing* of women's bodies through the production of a space where the visibility of women's content is intimately linked to the profits that platforms reap (Arcy, 2016) is perhaps not matched by an imperative of care – from both other users and moderation policies.

7.6 Conclusion

In her study of Italian schoolgirls that explores similar mechanisms of demarcation to that discussed here in relation to 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' bodily displays through social media, Mainardi argues that in:

> condemning girls who pursue popularity by displaying their body in sexy poses, one fails to interrogate the power relations that structure the

context within which this equation becomes possible and that benefit
from it (Mainardi, 2018, p.196).

Following this, in this chapter I have not looked to condemn the women who share images of their bodies, nor to condemn those who critique other women for doing so. Instead, I have looked to pull together arguments that denote images, social media and algorithms as affective; the double-bind women face in being visible, though not *excessively* so through notions of the postfeminist gaze; and the logics of Instagram and economies of visibility to explore how some forms of visibility become valued over others. This chapter therefore builds upon my argument woven through previous chapters that the fitspo assemblage enables an intensified form of surveillance through continually measuring up the visibility of one's body against desires to be visible and the 'right' way to do so, experienced through considerations of the (real or imagined) audience through the persistence of the postfeminist gaze.

Moreover, this chapter has continued to build upon Coleman's (2009) work through asking *what images of women's bodies do* when they are shared within the fitspo assemblage through specifically acknowledging the *algorithmic systems* and *cultural values* that reward particular behaviours. That is, while Coleman (2009) suggests that images are crucial tools in understanding bodies, I have argued this must be taken into account *in relation to* the platform and community in which these images circulate. For example, to draw on Bucher (2018), *if* images of the 'Instagram body' receives more likes, *then* they are featured more prominently on the explore page, and the top of one's feed. This results in particular images becoming more visible, with users who wish to gain visibility more likely to mirror aspects of these images, which continues to amplify them. Consequently, the 'picture-perfect' content they produce and share in an attempt to become visible results in an elevation of particular content, at the expense of crowding out other content.

I have thus demonstrated that how bodies can become in these spaces is mediated by: the empowerment attributed to women who *become* visible (here, for example, for those women who are able to use images of their body to build their PT businesses, or popular influencers); moral narratives regarding the *right* way to be visible; and the circulation of misogyny as part of a sociocultural context where women's bodies are perceived as open to judgement from men. Notably, while Banet-Weiser notes that within an economy of visibility, "for some images and practices to become visible, others must be rendered invisible" (2018, p.11), the data here suggests otherwise. Rather than other images being rendered invisible, bodies are made visible through becoming knowable *in specific ways.* In particular, I have conceptualised this in relation to the postfeminist gaze, where gazing upon women's bodies, and their own bodies, actualizes molar configurations of power, demonstrating this economy of visibility exists within a contested terrain regarding acceptable/unacceptable binaries that work to gender, class and sexualise particular bodies, as women seek to become visible whilst attempting to protect

themselves from repudiation from others for sharing images of themselves. Through this, I have illustrated how shame circulates and attaches to some bodies through these regulatory frameworks in the fitspo assemblage.

However, I have shown that Other girls are not only fixed through these sexualising, gendering and classing processes. That is, through the Other girl, what the fitspo assemblage *does* here is provide another measurement for women to be monitored against. As particular bodily displays are capitalized on through being rewarded by platform logics and becoming algorithmically recognizable (Gillespie, 2017), the affective figure of the Other girl is derided for failing to navigate the affordances of the platform and values of the community correctly. Such 'knowledges' regarding the right way to share images give greater weight to the affective investment into some bodies (and body parts) over others as some women are perceived to have fallen short on multiple fronts and legitimating their position in this contradictory hierarchy.

Consequently, in addition to highlighting the prevalence of harassment received from men, this chapter has demonstrated how *women themselves* figure as key actors in regulating the inclusion, exclusion and acceptability of particular bodies. Rather than a passive audience, the women in this study actively reproduce the idea that "sexual agency and desire for girls, in short, remains socially illegitimate" (Dobson, 2015, p.78), despite the agentic sexuality displayed in the media (Gill, 2008b). Thus, rather than images having a given *effect*, images here are drawn upon to know their own bodies and the bodies of others, through a postfeminist gaze that is shaped by moralising narratives. The dual and simplistic narratives that suggest that young women are only ever *either* empowered *or* passive victims of images cannot take hold here. Instead, I argue that images of women's bodies are a disputed space with regards to morality, where whether they become visible and, with it, acceptable is mediated by a range of material, cultural and affective elements. This demonstrates the importance of engaging with images beyond (only) their content, and instead of considering the ways they are produced and engaged with by young women. In the next chapter, I continue to explore the varied ways women produce and engage with images in the fitspo assemblage, and what these images can do, through the (in some ways contradictory) prevalence of 'real' and 'authentic' images.

Chapter 8 Becoming real: authenticity, positivity and disruptive realness

8.1 Introduction

In Chapters 5 and 6 I offered partially diametrical analyses that contrasted affective experiences that enhanced and limited the becomings of bodies, respectively. Similarly, in this chapter I offer a contrast to Chapter 7's focus on 'picture-perfect' images, instead exploring the images the women in this study shared that could be understood as authentic or real[1]. As with 'picture-perfect' content, I argue the emphasis partially remains driven by desires to become visible in particular ways, continuing to be indicative of the entanglement of algorithmic platforms, users and economies of visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018) that shape what can be seen. However, what such images *also* do is enable the women to understand themselves in ways that were praised over the 'picture-perfect' content discussed previously. In what follows, I discuss how posts became demarcated *as* authentic, how the women navigated 'acceptable' authenticity, and what I term 'disruptive realness'. I use disruptive realness to encapsulate Instagram vs reality images, images of 'real' bodies, and those shared by women of colour to "take up space" (Artika). In prefacing realness with 'disruptive', I look to capture the political tone these posts held for the women. I argue that what 'real' images do is risk adding to the intensification of surveillance within the fitspo assemblage, directing women to measure themselves against being 'real' enough, and of what is appropriate to share, though I highlight the ruptures in this surveillance that are possible.

While in Chapter 2 I outlined how authenticity often guides the production of social media content, the trope of the authentic self is common to modern Western societies, emanating through mediums such as psy-knowledges (Rose, 1999), self-help literature (Hazleden, 2003; Illouz, 2008; Riley et al., 2019a), commercial branding (Hearn, 2008; Murtola and Fleming, 2011; Banet-Weiser, 2012; O'Neill et al., 2014), and makeover TV (Jones, 2008; Raisborough, 2011). Such mediums position authenticity as something interior that can be 'exposed' through purchasing specific brands or making over the physical body (which, paradoxically, requires curated labour in itself). The popularity of authenticity has led Sarah Banet-Weiser to argue that it can be perceived as:

> a symbolic construct that, even in a cynical age, continues to have
> cultural value in how we understand our moral frameworks and

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[1] Henceforth, when I refer to 'real' and/or 'authentic', I am referring to that which can be coded as real and/or authentic, rather than using this to designate what I think is 'actually' authentic.

ourselves, and more generally how we make decisions about how to live our lives (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p.5).

As concern circulates regarding the superficiality of life, authenticity becomes seen as a way to organize a more genuine life (Cederström, 2011; Banet-Weiser, 2012), and a mechanism to distinguish oneself from others (Allen and Mendick, 2013; Marwick, 2013). Collectively, what this literature demonstrates is that in studying authenticity it is important to acknowledge authenticity *not* as a static concept, but instead something that takes on different meanings within specific contexts; as a *practice* rather than something innate *to* a body; and in the instance of studies in Chapter 3, dependent on the affordances of platforms.

To be clear, in thinking about content in terms of 'becoming real', I am not suggesting that sharing images of one's everyday life, or those that try to trouble normative understandings of bodies are 'more' authentic than, for example, fitness videos (Chapter 5). Becoming real encapsulates how the *women* perceived their images, and the desires that drove sharing them; a way of troubling the 'picture-perfect' aesthetic (deemed inauthentic and curated) through producing images that they felt related to *their own* realities. Thus, rather than offering an answer for what authenticity *is*, I am more concerned with what authenticity *does* here. That is, what kinds of images are able to become *counted* and *made visible* as 'real' within the fitspo assemblage, and what affordances and platform vernaculars are required to do so (Gibbs et al., 2015).

I begin by articulating how the women defined authentic content, before considering how desires for authenticity were negotiated. First, I consider how Instagram Stories were used to convey authenticity through showing one's 'mundane', everyday life. Second, I explore the constraints shaping emotional displays, where desires to be authentic sat in tension with avoiding showing their "off days" (Elle). Next, I address posts that I categorise as disruptive realness, focusing first on Instagram versus reality photos and images of 'real' bodies, then those that focus on race and culture. Throughout, I reflect upon how desires to become real measure up against normative standards of beauty, considering who becomes counted as 'real' through the fitspo assemblage.

8.2 Desiring, defining and demarcating authenticity

Many women noted they desired to see more authentic content:

> Helen: I wanna see real people achieving real things, and not just showing you, like, a very doctored version of themselves, because the doctored version is just [pause]. I might as well follow a celebrity.

Helen demarcates 'picture-perfect' content from authentic content, and positions it as evoking something more realistic and akin to her lifestyle. Moreover, Helen articulates that users who share their life online are often perceived as more authentic than traditional celebrities (Marwick, 2013; Abidin, 2018), perhaps due to the intimate connections enabled by social media (Abidin, 2015). Already, Helen

demonstrates there are constraints that limit how authenticity can be understood (Hearn, 2008). These constraints were echoed by others:

> Eryn: These people look good on Instagram, but these people are being paid to sit there and be filmed and have expensive gym kit on and defined muscle, whereas I'm wearing gym kit with holes in and oil stains, and that's not a real way of living. I'd rather live my life in the real world.

> Elle: I still want it to look beautiful. I still, you know, want to have like this aspirational side to my account, but at the same time I don't want it to be overly curated. I don't want to be following these trends and making people feel like they have to follow these trends and spend all their money, I want it to have that feel of inspiring, but real and accessible.

Eryn and Elle articulate a fundamental tension in being authentic *and* emulating signs of perfection, defining authenticity through the mundane and every day. For example, Eryn defines authenticity through the incorporation of flaws to signal a deviation from a 'picture-perfect' aesthetic, raising questions regarding who may claim these 'flaws' as positive. Mimi Nichter's (2000) study of dieting amongst young girls explores how 'fat talk' is used as a form of sociality – a way to bond through highlighting their 'problem' areas and how 'fat' they feel. However, the girls that *were* fat were not able to draw upon 'fat talk' as sociality due to their weight. Similarly, while Eryn can utilise images of her worn gym kit to become perceived as authentic, this could be because she can demonstrate this as her *choice*, rather than circumstantial.

This points to the classed elements of authenticity, where being authentic is dependent on the know-how to emulate a 'real' aesthetic. Similarly, Elle compares the "real and accessible" content she seeks to produce with content that is "beautiful", associating authenticity with ideas of what is natural (or what can be perceived *as* natural). Eryn and Elle's ideas of being *too* curated are comparable to gendered and classed discussions around celebrities. Through focus groups with young people, Kim Allen and Heather Mendick (2013) highlight that WAGs (Wives and Girlfriends of footballers) and glamour models were often discussed in relation to their artificial aesthetic, including their cosmetic surgery and 'excessive' make-up. As with Eryn and Elle, Allen and Mendick argue that being understood as authentic requires knowledge around what constitutes artifice, where doing *too much* becomes read as tasteless. Following this, this data suggests authenticity is something you *do,* but also something you *do not* do. This supports Banet-Weiser's (2012) argument that *becoming* authentic involves navigating a moral framework to guide and make decisions – here, what content is produced and consumed.

Despite the demarcations made between authentic and 'picture-perfect' content, they shared similarities:

> Jen: I started to post the bloating stuff like, this is what it looks like when you're posing versus unposed, this is what Instagram is really like,

> i.e a load of bullshit. It's not real life. I think I did an edited photo that
> was cool, I did one where I edited a photo and then did a swipe right, if
> I can find it.
> Lauren: How did your engagement change through posting that?
> Jen: Hugely like I am not joking, hugely […] people were like 'oh my god'
> and interested in that, but I think now there's a lot of that.

Jen demonstrates authentic content holds currency in Instagram's economy of visibility. For example, Jen suggests sharing this content is linked to her desire to be seen, as she 'knows' it is something her (real or imagined) audience wants to see; consequently, there are different elements at play shaping the kinds of content she feels able to share. In addition, pulling through my argument from the previous chapter, Jen highlights the encounters between users and images that resulted in the algorithm elevating certain content (Gillespie, 2014; Carah and Dobson, 2016; Just and Latzer, 2017; Bucher, 2018), noting her engagement changed significantly through posting these images, and there is now *"a lot of* [authentic content]*"*. As users begin to see one kind of content being engaged with, they may produce similar content (if they desire higher engagement). Returning to 'posed versus unposed' images in 8.4, I next highlight some of these encounters to illustrate instances of becoming real through the fitspo assemblage.

8.3 Negotiating authenticity

Through her ethnographic work of family influencers, Crystal Abidin argues that their enactment of authenticity can be understood as *calibrated amateurism.* Abidin defines this as:

> a practice and aesthetic in which actors in an attention economy labor specifically over crafting contrived authenticity that portrays the raw aesthetic of an amateur, whether or not they really are amateurs by status or practice, by relying on the performance ecology of appropriate platforms, affordances, tools, cultural vernacular, and social capital. When orchestrated conscientiously, calibrated amateurism may give the impression of spontaneity and unfilteredness despite the contrary reality (Abidin, 2017, p.7).

Taking this definition forward, in this section I consider how useful calibrated amateurism is in exploring how the women produce fitspo content to become real, acknowledging its limits to encapsulate how authenticity is done within the fitspo assemblage. Thus, I take up Abidin and Megan Brown's (2018) argument that it is crucial to provide specific accounts of the different digital cultures that have emerged across social media platforms, to illustrate their similarities *and* convergences.

8.3.1 Instagram Stories

Incorporated into Instagram in 2016, Stories enable users to upload an image or a video of up to 15 seconds, that disappear after 24 hours. A user's Story can be accessed in two ways – through clicking a user's profile picture, or along the top of

a user's feed. Newer Stories are displayed at the beginning of the horizontally scrollable list of Stories. Similar to arguments made by Kylie Cardell and colleagues (2017), Rachel Faleatua (2018), and Josie Reade (2020), Stories were deemed authentic by the women in this study through showing "that I'm being real" (Tania), often through giving something "more personal" (Pippa):

> Elle: Stories is a bit more of a behind the scenes thing, and I try and make it real time. Like, occasionally I will try and take a photo of, say, my breakfast and forget to post it, and I'll post it the next day on my Stories, but I try and make it clear if it's not instant. I mean, sometimes Stories you've got the advantage to share information, you can make those little templates and things which obviously takes a little bit longer, but for me the Stories is a little bit more informal. It's a kind of less of a filter, because you're posting it fairly instantly you have less time to edit it, even if you've edited it a little bit to make it look more interesting, but that helps me to be more authentic, and also get more information out there. Because, you know, if I'm eating the same porridge three days in a row I won't put it on my actual feed, but it's also something to put on my Stories.

Like Reade's study of Australian women who share fitspo content, Elle demonstrates that Stories can capture "the banality of everyday life…to achieve visual perceptions of authenticity" (Reade, 2020, p.12). However, unlike Reade's participants, Elle demonstrates what Abidin (2017) would term the *calibrated* aspect of her Stories. Becoming real is not the *exposure* of Elle's interior self, but is enabled through using Stories to display something that 'counts' as authentic. This calibration demonstrates that becoming real requires the know-how to *use* Stories the right way, and the knowledge of what is perceived *as* authentic (Abidin, 2017). While Abidin (2017) notes family influencers may share the school run to demonstrate 'behind the scenes', fitspo communities have developed their *own* knowledges regarding what constitutes a look 'backstage'. For example, images of 'healthy' food or the 'mundane' aspects of life such as "walking the dog" (Aimee) or "a quick gym selfie" (Artika) were deemed 'behind the scenes', demonstrating that Stories require knowledge to *do* authenticity properly.

This collective repurposing of Stories is indicative of what Martin Gibbs and colleagues term *platform vernacular.* As discussed in Chapter 2, platform vernacular encapsulates the mediated practices and communicative habits that "emerge from the ongoing interactions between platforms and users" (Gibbs et al., 2015, p.257). Considering becoming real through Stories as a platform vernacular is useful in two ways. First, it demonstrates how Stories are utilised beyond their intended means. While Stories is described as a "feature that lets you share all the moments of your day" (Instagram, 2016a), I have demonstrated only *some* moments are shared, and this requires planning (or calibration), knowledge and awareness to become real successfully. Second, it foregrounds the importance of the (real or imagined audience) in becoming real through Stories. As Gibbs et al. note, platform vernaculars do not take hold in isolation, but require the coming

together of content, technological features and communicated habits. Here, becoming real through takes place through the relations *between* users, audience perceptions, and Instagram's affordances.

As with previous chapters, (real or imagined) audiences can affect other bodies; here, this audience shapes what is and is not possible for bodies, for the images the women can share. What this analysis adds is a demonstration that audiences, nor Instagram, do not have homogenous *effects*. Just as images cannot seen as acting universally on (or with) a body, so too are other bodies capable of different affects, as "the corporeal link and connect with other flows…different bodily and technological multiplicities are elaborated" (Currier, 2003, p.331). For example, Elle's perception of her *audience's* understanding of authenticity shapes *how* she is able to become real – Elle suggests if her Stories were a highlight reel, this would not be intelligible to others as authentic. Thus, it is these "fluctuating and altering dynamics of affect [that] give shape to online connections" (Paasonen et al., 2015, p.1), and the coming together of different matter and intensities, Stories, audiences, and knowledges that enables Elle's body to become real within the fitspo assemblage.

In addition to requiring labour to maintain, the transient nature of Stories shapes how and why they are used to become real:

> Lauren: What distinguishes what you put on your story to what you put on your feed?
> Lianna: My Story is much more personal, cos it is just 24 hours. Because it goes away erm, it's I show more of my personality on my Story than on my feed. My feed is much more like factual, and yeah my Story is more personal. It's like 'this is what I'm doing today', it's a bit more, I dunno, I swear more on my Story, I'm a bit more relaxed on my Story so yeah
> Lauren: Why do you think that is? [..]
> Lianna: For engagement yeah, 'cos it gets people [thinking] 'oh yeah, that account'. If you haven't posted for a while you're still on their feed at the top.
>
>
> Tania: [Stories are] a way to keep your engagement up, and then that obviously then brings traffic to your feed.

Here, Lianna and Tania use Stories to capture a glance from their audience to generate attention (Zulli, 2017), to disturb the user's endless scrolling, and be noticed by Instagram's visibility algorithms. Thus, despite their transience, Stories can be deemed affective through how they may produce movement between bodies (Wetherell, 2012) - they prompt users to remember certain profiles, bringing the audience and Lianna and Tania's profiles into relation with one another. Tania and Lianna demonstrate the affective nature of Stories in how bodies may be moved from scrolling through their feed, to clicking on new Stories, which may then push this movement to their profiles. Nathan Jurgenson suggests

of applications like Snapchat that "unlike a paper photo that fades slowly over the years, the temporary photo disappears suddenly. Given only a peek, you look hard" (Jurgenson, 2013). Perhaps, then, because of the risk of the Story slipping from sight, users feel more compelled to view the image there and then. Clearly, Lianna and Tania are aware of the weight Stories hold, as they incorporate them into their content production to become visible *and* real.

If Stories are affective in their productive flows from feeds to profiles, this does not explain why 'personal' content is more likely to be shared here, as opposed to hard work (Chapter 5) or 'picture-perfect' selfies (Chapter 7). Studies about Snapchat illustrate that amongst young people at school, transient images are used to maintain intimacy and navigate sexual relationships amongst peers (Handyside and Ringrose, 2017; Kofoed, 2018). In contrast, here ephemeral images are used to give a (specific) snapshot of one's day to maintain visibility and to become authentic, *without* disturbing the women's profiles:

> Lily: On my feed I always put the best of myself, and then on Instagram Stories I just put my reality
> Lauren: Why do you think that is?
> Lily: Um, I don't know I just I feel like. I don't have much, 'oh yeah this morning I was at the gym', um. I don't know, I just feel like this is gonna stay there forever, and Instagram Story will go.

While the fitspo users Reade interviewed also demarcated content shared on their Story and profile, this was described in relation to "digital risk…in discussions about 'over sharing' and 'data permanency'" (2020, p.12). Although Lily expresses concerns about content that will "stay there forever", this is due to *wanting* her successes and "best" content to be permanent, in contrast to ephemeral Stories that illustrate personal life "*because* it goes away" (Lianna, emphasis added). This suggests that showing 'behind the scenes' is shared *due* to Stories' 24-hour affective temporality, as they temporarily enable bodies to become real *in conjunction with* the images on the women's profiles. That is, it is the juxtaposition of the two and their different temporal capacities that shapes how Lily and Lianna know their bodies; and, perhaps more importantly, how their *audiences* can know their bodies. Thus, while Lily and Lianna suggest that authentic Stories are crucial to build engagement and add dimension to one's profile, they are crucial *because* they disappear. This suggests images take on different capacities as a consequence of their temporality – illustrated by the women here, and by Zoe (Chapter 5) who curated some Stories of her upper body as a permanent highlight, marking these images of worthy of enduring. Despite their different uses, this data demonstrates it is the *temporal conditions* of Stories that underlines their use.

8.3.2 Emotional management

If becoming real within the fitspo assemblage requires curated Stories, this suggests becoming real does not stretch to including *all* aspects of the women's lives. Notably, being authentic did not stretch to displaying negative emotions:

Jessie: I've been like, 'oh yeah, today has been a great day' [in a post], and I know for a fine fact I ate like, three chocolate bars at lunch time and didn't tell anyone
Lauren: Why would you say it's been a good day then?
Jessie: Ooh, I suppose, I don't know you know. I think it's kind of like, erm. I dunno, there's kind of like pride in being able to be like 'I've got my shit together, come on everyone'. I feel like accountable to people, like, 'we've all got this, see I'm having a great day, you're having a great day, we're all doing fine'. Whereas inside I'm like, 'this has been the worst day of my life, I've eaten 3 chocolate bars I'm sitting in my bed crying'.

Salma: I want to be a positive page, and I think sometimes too many lows can look, a bit like 'oh this is a negative page, I don't wanna follow it'.

Reanne: If I feel crap, I don't wanna share that to the world.

Collectively, the women articulate that the fitspo assemblage conditions an intensified form of surveillance, as "[n]o longer is it enough to work on and discipline the body…the beautiful body must be accompanied by a beautiful mind" (Gill and Elias, 2014, p.185). The women outline the self-monitoring involved in posting images, as desiring to become real sits in tension with not wanting to be seen as negative. This is reflective of Rosalind Gill and Akane Kanai's argument that the intersections between neoliberalism and postfeminism produce "new modalities of feeling" (2018, p.321) for women. Like those discussed in Chapter 5, such modalities favour feelings that centre on happiness and having a 'positive mental attitude', whilst looking unfavourably upon 'killjoys' (Ahmed, 2017) who display anger and sadness (Blackman, 2004; Gill, 2017; Dobson, 2019), and can be understood through the broader push towards the display and acquisition of happiness in contemporary Western societies (Ahmed, 2010; Binkley, 2011). While the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience is still captured through postfeminist concerns, here this is oriented towards the display of particular 'modalities of feeling'; or, as Akane Kanai (2019) terms it in her study of Tumblr blogs, 'feeling rules'.

Drawing on Arlie Hochschild, Kanai (2019) argues that 'feeling rules' shape "what is required and constrained in" (2019, p.7) Tumblr meme blogs, through which the self becomes "modulated, moderated and managed in order to delivery satisfying and relatable moments within particular gendered terms" (2019, p.7). Kanai illustrates how feeling rules moderate the content of such blogs, where negative affects such as frustration and disappointment are shared through humour to evoke "an overall sense of wellbeing" (2019, p.31). One common example of this was humourous posts about 'failing' dieting by eating sugary snacks. For Kanai, these posts "*take into account* such burdens rather than being overwhelmed by

them" (2019, p.31, emphasis in original) through feeling rules that govern what can be shared to gain support, and provide a sense of belonging with others.

The feeling rules articulated by Salma, Jessie and Reanne deviate from research that illustrates how negative emotional states are incorporated into women's social media content. For example, Amy Dobson's (2015) analysis of the autobiographical information shared by young women on MySpace found that women listed negative character traits alongside more positive characteristics, suggesting this enables women to present themselves as open and transparent, rather than filtered and fake. Similarly, Rachel Berryman and Misha Kavka (2018), Sophie Bishop (2018) and Dobson (2015) illustrate the productivity of negative affect amongst YouTubers, where "the mediated tears, sobs and struggles of these young female vloggers [are transformed] into affirmations of authenticity...[through] ties of intimacy with followers" (Berryman and Kavka, 2018, p.85). Conceptualising this as affective labour, Berryman and Kavka argue that "the more negative the personal experience exposed, the more 'real' it is taken to be'" (2018, p.90), demonstrating the different processes underlying becoming real in different digital spaces.

Comparing Salma, Jessie and Reanne with these studies suggests that *platform vernaculars*, and the platform itself, may structure 'feeling rules'. For example, while videos about anxiety may not be monetized by YouTubers, or may be demonetized by YouTube, "these videos often acquire a higher than average percentage of views" (Bishop, 2018, p.96) which could provide economic revenue through building a bigger audience. In contrast, Instagram is positioned by the women as a place where they should not share *all* emotional experiences, echoing Sophie Waterloo (2018) and colleagues' survey of young Dutch social media users who suggested Instagram was the least appropriate platform to express sadness. Similarly, while Kanai highlights that the blogs she researched operate through relatable humour to increase their chances of being reblogged, this thesis so far has demonstrated the importance of *aesthetics* to build engagement in the fitspo assemblage. While arguing that Instagram does not have one fixed aesthetic, Tama Leaver and colleagues suggest this does not stop the stereotype of Instagram as being "highly polished and curated" (Leaver et al., 2020, p.16; Chapter 7), associated with consumer and aspirational aesthetics (Abidin, 2014; Marwick, 2015; Leaver et al., 2020; Chapter 7). This could explain why the women feel less inclined to post negative content, perhaps linked to the women's investment in certain bodies as luminous, hardworking and resilient (Chapter 5).

Thus, while it is important to acknowledge new modalities of feeling for women, contrasting the studies of different feeling rules and emotional displays on social media with the data above demonstrates it is crucial to consider how these manifest within specific digital spaces. The 'feeling rules' here draw the line at sharing negative experiences of one's day, such as going 'off-diet' or having a bad workout session, despite acknowledging authenticity through displaying intimacy and 'behind the scenes'. Unlike studies above, Jessie, Salma and Reanne

demonstrate negative emotions are not used to forge connections with others. Instead, these feelings are kept to themselves because they *do not want to make this visible to others*, demonstrating that becoming real within the fitspo assemblage is just as much as what is made visible to the (real or imagined) audience as what is not.

Through this, I am not suggesting the women *should* share their lows to 'truly' become real. Instead, I am suggesting that, rather than arguing authenticity is something innate, becoming real within the fitspo assemblage is dependent on a specific mobilisation of authenticity that requires the navigation of: specific 'feeling rules' (Kanai, 2019); platform vernaculars that compose values within digital communities and platform affordances (Gibbs et al., 2015); and the broader cultural moment in which social media content production takes place. In sum, this analysis demonstrates that digital spaces are not separate to 'face-to-face' sociality, but are actively formed *through* one another (Kember and Zylinksa, 2012; Paasonen et al., 2015; Chapter 3).

8.4 Disruptive realness

In this section I address 'disruptive realness', defined as posts shared to trouble the perceived artifice of 'picture-perfect' Instagram through sharing images of 'real' bodies. Like the images of family influencers produced through calibrated amateurism (Abidin, 2017), such images are a set of practices and aesthetics that use Instagram's affordances and fitspo's vernacular to become visible, but here are specifically underwritten by political aims. To explore this, I consider 'Instagram versus reality' images, and images used by women of colour to "take up space". I am not looking to judge the images shared in the preceding chapters and those below as better or worse, or more or less political. Instead, I am interested in what such images *do* when they are produced and circulated through the fitspo assemblage. In this sense, I am taking the lead from youth sociologist Anita Harris:

> to consider the ways that many young women currently use technology, and then to reflect on what might be political about these uses, rather than to designate political uses of technology and look for young women within these (Harris, 2008, p.482).

8.4.1 Instagram vs reality: sharing real bodies

Instagram versus reality images were commonly discussed within interviews. Sharing characteristics with before-and-after images, the 'Instagram' image displays a posed body that fits the 'Instagram body' (Chapter 5 and 7), while the 'reality' image shows the curated nature of the first. This could involve showing a 'bad' angle, grabbing body fat, or showing stretch marks. The women largely praised these images:

> Tania: [They are] my inspo [inspiration], and they post a photo like that like okay, so you do have rolls. You know like, and I don't know why I need to see a picture of their rolls to be like, okay you have rolls,

because everybody does if they sit down, it's like you have skin […] it is normal and everybody has it.

Tania positions Instagram versus reality images as *innately* authentic in the same way (some) reality TV celebrities are touted for their realness through evoking normality (Collins, 2008; Allen and Mendick, 2013). Similar to advertising strategies like Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaigns (Murray, 2013), Tania understands 'normal' bodies through what Jessica Ringrose and Laura Harvey (2015) term an 'affective investment' in particular body parts. In their study of teenage sexting, they argue that as images of bodies are shared amongst teenagers, body parts become charged sites of affect – for example, women's breasts were invested in as a site of sexual intentionality. Here, a soft stomach becomes *invested* in as a site of realness for Tania: where previously she may have considered herself different for her "rolls", these images allow her to understand her body, and her body worries, as normal and comparable to others. What is further notable here is how images of rolls and/or soft stomachs, often shown via wearing underwear or minimal clothing, are invested in as real in contrast to the images discussed in Chapter 7 that *also* showed women in minimal clothing. This continues to suggest that the representational qualities of an image (what is *in* the image) are less important than how images become invested in, felt and act as social agents through their relations with other bodies in the fitspo assemblage. These images are near identical with regards to what is *in* them, but become understood in ways that map onto molar aggregations of '(not) respectable' and 'real' bodies.

Many women suggested they shared images of their 'real' bodies:

> Lianna: I labelled it as a real physique update. So it had me relaxed, it had me posing, and it had me showing that I could grab places, and I had fat on my stomach and I had fat on the back of my legs. And it was, I don't know it just hit several audiences well so I think that's why it went [well].
> Lauren: Why, why did you do that the grabbing of your tummy, of your arms, of your legs? When you say real physique update, how is the picture that you took earlier not a real physique update?
> Lianna: Cos it's posed, and it's not like, you know, moving images are very different to still image. So that one you see me moving, you see me turning, you see me trying to pose and like what I would do to make myself look a certain way, but then compare it to then hunched and different, or just relaxed in general, not sucking my stomach in.
> Lauren: Why do you think they do so well? […]
> Lianna: I mean, one, fitness accounts get a lot of perverts [laughs] so one, that. But two, I feel like people can relate to it, and it makes them feel a bit better. Like scrolling through these constant pictures, girls in bikinis, girls on holidays, influencers in quotation marks [laughs]. Erm, like looking at them, that's what they do for a living is look good, so then when you see something like that, it's a bit more like, okay. That makes you feel a little bit less shit.

> Kay: I know I have quite a lean physique for the norm, so I'll say like this is how I look, but just remember I kind of show it and tweak it to show the angles, to make it like a before and after. Um like [inaudible], so it's like, you know being in photos that's how I look like, but then I'll put like a caption, like, 'just remember when you see me it's like that you know, people do angles lighting it's all kind of put together'. And it's interesting that I get, um a lot of [women] […] say, 'thanks for reminding me'. It's so easy to forget that sometimes, you get so consumed in it, and you're not aware, and they start comparing themselves, and it's just like you kind of almost get lost. It's like a little bubble [laughs].

These 'real' body images can be perceived as an example of body positivity, a movement that originated in the 1960s (Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015) that has become popular through marketing campaigns (Murray, 2013) and social media (Sastre, 2014b; Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Cohen et al., 2019a, 2019b; Tiggemann and Zinoviev, 2019; Morris, 2019; Webb et al., 2019). Body positivity movements are "centred in encouraging critical debate about dominant understandings of gender in visual representation", challenging normative assumptions of bodies (Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015, p.454). Lianna and Kay articulate these sentiments through positioning their images as attempts to disrupt normative understandings of gendered bodies within the "little bubble" of fitspo communities as *always* looking toned, through images that show them grabbing their stomach fat, or the labour of taking images. Tapping into the broader pressures women face regarding aesthetic perfection (McRobbie, 2015), Lianna and Kay communicate these images as *affective* for their audiences, as bodies are perceived as turning towards them to seek comfort from the otherwise relentless 'picture-perfect' images (Chapter 7) viewed scrolling through the Instagram feed.

While some scholars have framed digital body positivity as being beneficial for women's bodily appreciation and satisfaction (Cohen et al., 2019a, 2019b; Tiggemann and Zinoviev, 2019), the data supports taking a more critical view. Firstly, in positioning their 'real' images as affective in how they can enhance the capacities of their audiences' bodies, Lianna and Kay weight ideas of the natural over the (visibly) curated, leaning into molar ideas of class and femininity (Skeggs, 1997; Allen and Mendick, 2013). Notably, Lianna and Kay's description of the practices behind these images suggest a similar level of curation to the images of "girls on holiday". However, like Stories, they demonstrate that *some* forms of curation are accepted as authentic rather than artificial, made intelligible through collective investments through hashtag trends, likes and engagement.

Second, despite seeking to disrupt 'artifice' and normative body standards, Lianna and Kay suggest that becoming real and "'body positive' [must be]…captured and recorded in particular ways" (Sastre, 2014b, p.936; see also, Caldeira et al., 2020). That is, becoming real here is enacted through displaying one's body and bodily 'imperfections', akin to what Rosalind Gill and Ana Elias (2014) have termed 'Love

Your Body' (LYB) discourses, and the kinds of popular feminist campaigns Banet-Weiser (2018) has highlighted such as #ThisGirlCan. To recap from the previous chapter, popular feminism has been defined as an individualised feminism that becomes particularly notable in postfeminist media's economy of visibility, as it is compatible with market logics, and can be easily viewed and shared (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Lianna and Kay's images work in similar ways to these examples, in that they can be seen as having "a profound affective force for women" (Gill and Elias, 2014, p.180) through flipping dominant narratives of detestation towards body parts, and instead encouraging that women love them. Like Banet-Weiser's (2018) example, such images work to grasp a wide range of viewers affectively through their take up of specific hashtags (#instagramvsreality), and affectively engaging with women through emotive imagery. However, the way these images do this is through continuing to centre a normative body: Lianna and Kay highlight that their bodies align with the norms they seek to trouble, and they must undergo a laborious process to try to demarcate themselves from this.

This has two implications. One, these images add to an abundance of images that focus on and make visible 'picture-perfect' bodies even when trying to disrupt them. Two, like the examples of popular feminism that Banet-Weiser (2018) highlights, such images *still* retain a focus *on the body* as a site of empowerment. Both of these implications ultimately shape the ways in which the capacities of bodies can be enhanced through the fitspo assemblage. Like Sofia Caldeira and Sander De Ridder's (2017) analysis of the images on the @effyourbeautystandards Instagram, Lianna and Kay's images become knowable through the postfeminist gaze of the (real or imagined) audience, that equates displaying one's appearance to other women to glean empowerment and confidence. Such empowerment comes from sharing and/or engaging with images that publically disclose the body as lacking, where *through* doing so it becomes possible to become confident and loveable (Sastre, 2014b). There is still an element of regulation here then, as Lianna and Kay describe monitoring their 'flaws' (whether body parts or being 'too' curated) in relation to how *others* may perceive them as 'real' or not. In addition to being implicated within the directions that bodies can become, what such images also do is thus add to the intensified surveillance within the fitspo assemblage, as the imposition to love one's flaws adds a *new* measure to be evaluated against (Gill and Elias, 2014).

Clearly, there is benefit to be had in attempting to disrupt "the exclusionary normative portrait of femininity" (Caldeira et al., 2018). For example, research demonstrates the utility of such spaces within what has been termed the 'fatosphere' (Lupton, 2017), such as fashion blogs (Connell, 2012; Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015), websites to discuss personal experiences of structural oppressions (Afful and Ricciardelli, 2015; Dickins et al., 2016), and mediums that purposefully share images of fat, queer and/or disabled bodies outside of mainstream representations (Kent, 2001; Kargbo, 2013; Webb et al., 2017; Pratt, 2018; Hynnä and Kyrölä, 2019). However, as Samantha Murray notes (2008), imploring women to *choose* to love their bodies (here, through engaging with and

sharing images of 'real' bodies rather than women who look good "for a living") positions appearance concerns in relation to the individual, and as a simple, linear choice to be made to overcome. Murray argues this overlooks the persistence of fatphobia, and cultural norms that espouse the happiness gained through diets and transformations (see also, Banet-Weiser, 2015; Gill and Elias, 2014; Gill and Orgad, 2015). Akin to the reverse before-and-after images in Chapter 5, these Instagram vs reality images retain a popular feminist logic through centring a mode of politics that focuses on the visibility of specific bodies (here, often white, cis-gendered and normatively attractive women), eroding the capability for structural critique due to a focus on individualist responses and market logics (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Moreover, such images overlook the often complex experiences women have when engaging with images that I have outlined throughout this thesis, where 'choosing' to engage with other images often does not work in practice, and does not erase the complicated relationship women have with their bodies *external* to engaging with images.

Some women questioned whether these images could achieve their aims:

> Grace: I saw one once, it was absolutely ludicrous. She was stood in front of the mirror, sort of like hunched over a little bit, and she was literally grabbing skin. She obviously had very good abs, and she was grabbing her skin and I was like 'are you joking? How is this helpful to anybody?' And saying like, 'oh yeah, look at me guys I have rolls too'. And it's like no, you have skin.

For Grace, 'real' body images do not enable a radical reimagining of bodies, echoing a handful of other women who critiqued these images for their tendency to foreground slim women. Akin to fat activist bloggers who highlight the limitations of body positivity through centring privileged bodies (Rutter, 2017; Brown, 2019) , Grace suggests these images do little to disrupt bodily norms by overlooking those who have historically been systematically marginalized, such as fat (LeBesco, 2011; Kyrölä, 2014; Lupton, 2018) and/or disabled women (Rice, 2014). While such images may enable Kay, Lianna and some of their audiences to become through a deterritorialization of normative body standards, it is clear this becoming is not open to all, highlighting the importance of accounting for how the location of a given becoming can shape its direction (Braidotti, 1994; 2002). Grace moreover articulates that images do not have a singular effect on the body but affect bodies differently (Coleman, 2009): here, such images may enhance the bodies of women who identify visually with Lianna and Kay, but risk fixing those who may not share their embodied experiences, making becoming real accessible for some but not all.

Considering the data above with Grace's critical response, this suggests that sharing these Instagram vs reality images, or images of real bodies, could be understood as an *obstruction* of a line of flight away from normative body standards, through a process of reterritorialization. To recap from Chapter 5, these obstructions may work to block molecular flows of becoming and recuperate this

into molar and segmented forms of power (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). That is, while images of 'real' bodies have the potential to reimagine bodies outside of exclusionary norms through being more reflective of women's varied bodily realities, offering a deterritorialization of molar bodily standards, the data demonstrates becoming real through sharing these images becomes reterritorialized in two ways. First, through expanding the postfeminist gaze through encouraging women to *look* for flaws on their bodies and other women's bodies, and accept (some) of them in order to gain recognition through their appearance (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018). Second, retaining a focus on the body that does little to "dismantle or reimagine" feminine bodies (Sastre, 2014b; Webb et al., 2017, 2019; Cohen et al., 2019b; Hynnä and Kyrölä, 2019, p.9).

8.4.2 Taking space

A second example of disruptive realness can be seen amongst women of colour who shared images of their bodies to diversify the images they saw. In exploring videos of black girl thinspiration on YouTube, Nicole Schott (2017) argues that such videos and the comments that engage with demonstrate "the pursuit of thinness is actually a journey in which these women are trying to achieve the status and privilege granted to whiteness" (2017, p.1035). Schott suggests that this content is engaged with amongst black thinspo users to demarcate from the body of the racialized other with curves, instead engaging with images of slender, black women to demonstrate a closeness to white, middle-class femininity. In contrast, I argue the images discussed below do something different. Rather than seeking to ascribe to binary notions of racialized bodies, their images are used to disrupt these binaries through becoming sites of affective investments to offer alternative configurations of racialized bodies:

> Artika: Because I've put them [images] on a social media platform and I've had people, like, no one's, very few people have actually sort of said 'you're ugly, I shouldn't be seeing your photo'. It's, it's encouraged me and in a way, and it's gonna sound really terrible, but because within the UK the, the conventional standards of beauty is, like, be a thin white woman. […] at the start I worried about making other people uncomfortable, because I take up space. And to be told that I had the right to take up space, it's very freeing.

For Artika, becoming real is enabled through disrupting the prominence of white bodies in fitspo spaces (Lucas and Hodler, 2018; Maddox, 2019), and Western, racialized beauty norms (Tate, 2015). Artika's talk can be understood through race scholar Kristen Warner's arguments that sharing digital "content is a necessary act of agency for women of colour, who strive for visibility" (2015, p.34), exemplified by the take-up of #BlackLivesMatter amongst black feminists (Williams, 2015; Jackson, 2016). Sharing such images enables Artika to become through challenging "the dearth of diverse images" in the fitspo assemblage, nurturing herself through doing so (Sobande, 2017, p.656). Thus, rather than being narcissistic (Weiser, 2015; Moon et al., 2016; Barry et al., 2017), Aritka offers an alternative perspective on

selfies through enabling her to bypass "the traditional gatekeepers of visibility" (Tiidenberg, 2018, p.81) as she describes becoming visible, despite acknowledging her body may be perceived through racialized beauty standards. Notably, this is not straightforward: in prefacing herself with "I know this sounds really terrible", Artika hints at discomfort in acknowledging that she gains affirmation through visibility. This is significant because this suggests that while women are supposed to take concern for their appearance, this ought to be done privately to reduce the risk of being dismissed as frivolous or obsessive (Elias et al., 2017).

This caveat is also significant as Artika hints at how her experiences of becoming visible within the fitspo assemblage are different to the experiences discussed in the previous chapter. For example, Artika highlights how the presence *and* absence of specific engagement with her images shapes how her body is able to become. That is, Artika's images enhance the capacities of her body towards becoming real when they garner positive engagement, *in addition to* the absence of (excessive) negative comments, which Artika frames in relation to "conventional standards of beauty" within the UK (see also, Chapter 6). This suggests that becoming visible through sharing images within the fitspo assemblage, and the feelings associated with this, may be shaped through race and body size. For example, while I evidenced the broader risk of gendered vitriol from men in response to the images the women shared in Chapter 7, Artika here suggests that the risks of becoming visible may *also* be shaped by racialized standards of beauty, and those related to body size (see also, Banet-Weiser, 2018). Ultimately, through requiring the responses of others, Artika's "selfies call out to others…reaching for multiple, difficult at times, impossible receptions and connections" (Driver, 2018, p.64), where it is *through* this specific balance of connections with others that Artika's body becomes enhanced. Through acknowledging this, it is possible to see that the becoming of Artika's body traverses online and offline boundaries, as this disruptive realness brings together the tangible (taking images) and digital (likes and comments that may or may not be reflective and productive of unequal normative bodily standards) that affirms Artika's body as able to take up space.

Some women described becoming real through sharing images that enabled them to take up space in ways that disrupted gendered, cultural norms. For example, Happie notes that she tags her videos with #IndianGirlLifts in response to gendered perceptions of gym use in Indian cultures:

> Happie: I remember saying to my cousin, because he's a body builder, I was like 'can I go to the gym with you?', and he just looked like shocked and appalled. He was like 'you can't, you just can't, I would get in so much trouble if I took you', I was like, 'oh okay'. I didn't think of anything at the time, and now I'm like I should have been allowed to go [...]
> Lauren: Do you still post on it [#IndianGirlLifts]?
> Happie: I still use it, but it's every time I put a video up that hashtag is added
> Lauren: Do you ever like click on it and look through?
> Happie: Yeah
> Lauren: How do you feel when you do that?

Happie: Um, I feel good when I see more people have started using it.

Happie describes using #IndianGirlLifts "to produce and connect individual stories…[through] online telling and connecting" (Clark, 2016, p.789). Hashtags have been dismissed by some as indulgent and unlikely to result in social transformation (Shulman, 2004), with Henrik Christensen (2011) noting this is often framed as 'slacktivism' to illustrate a (perceived) lack of effort. Challenging this, feminist scholars have highlighted the utility of the digital (such as hashtags) in "disseminating feminist ideas…connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge" (Harris, 2012; Keller, 2012; Portwood-Stacer and Berridge, 2014; Williams, 2015; Baer, 2016, p.18; Clark, 2016; Caldeira et al., 2018; Keller et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). Through Happie's awareness of experiences of gendered, cultural norms shaping the possibilities of her body, #IndianGirlLifts becomes a way to challenge this, demonstrating to *other* women in similar circumstances that going to the gym and lifting weights is possible. Becoming real for Happie involves coordinating such feelings together by tagging her videos, using hashtags to create "a present that is at once live and immediate and on-going and unfinished" (Coleman, 2018, p.613) for herself and others.

The data suggests that for such hashtags to *be* affective in disrupting molar stabilisations of power requires a *collective* investment, making #IndianGirlLifts a becoming itself *and* driver of other becomings. As Rachel Kuo notes of her study of #Asian4BlackLives content:

> [t]he logic of revealing and 'outing' in making oneself seen—this shift from the seemingly invisible to visible—depends on the singular confession as a reaching towards community. The selfies produce a 'we' through exposure and repetition—communicating a feeling of community (Kuo, 2018, p.50).

It is *through* the production of a 'we' that enables the becoming of bodies, as others participate by tagging their own content. Lines of flight emerge as #IndianGirlLifts circulates, as while a significantly less mainstream and used hashtag than #instagramvsreality, Happie notes #IndianGirlLifts has circulated globally. By making Happie and others visible in ways that challenge exercise norms within some South Asian families and communities (Green and Singleton, 2007), #IndianGirlLifts enables the becoming of *other* bodies through staking out a collective. #IndianGirlLifts, then, could be framed through what Zizzi Papacharissi terms affective publics, that are "activated and sustained by feelings of belonging and solidarity, however fleeting those feelings may be" (2014, p.9).

Such publics are affective through what they can do, in terms of the way bodies are encouraged to move, feel and act differently (Papacharissi, 2014):

> Kay: I just posted like, um, uh, like, in terms of me doing my first ever cleans[2], and then now seeing the progress, and saying like, it takes

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[2] A clean is one of the three Olympic lifts.

time, if you put the work in and you will get there. And an Asian girl got back to me, and she's like 'oh my god, it's so nice to see an Asian woman being strong'. Because back where I'm, where I am at home, everyone's like, 'whoa you're like [muscly]'. A lot of guys are kind of, not intimidated, but they think I'm very muscular, when I'm probably not more than the average.

The perceptions of Kay's images can be understood through disruptive realness, as Kay contrasts the supportive responses she receives from other women compared to the reactions she has received from some men when in Japan. This collective perception can be understood through Sara Ahmed's (2004) argument that it is through *shared* emotions that bodies are formed, as the emotions shared amongst Kay's followers, or the women that tag #IndianGirlLifts, form *new* bodily boundaries. Through carving a space through their digital activity, Happie, Kay and their audiences can become real in ways that materialize and make visible their realities as Asian women who lift weights. In this way, Happie and Kay's content are "affective gestures…that pluralize, organize, and disrupt conversations" (Papacharissi, 2014, p.28). While these may be temporary – a short-lived hashtag, or one-off comment – they are still "part of the cartographies of what mediated bodies can do" (Parikka, 2018, p.62), shaping how bodies become through digital and physical spaces.

Clearly, in these examples the women are still using their "appearance as a vehicle to recognition" (Riley et al., 2016, p.212) through using their images of their bodies. However, these examples are not marked through measuring women against heteronormative, hyperfeminine and hypersexualized criteria (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018). Rather, sharing these images of their bodies here is to make themselves intelligible to others in ways that go beyond the molar and binary gazes they have felt subjected to from others – for example, in relation to cultural norms. Thus, while the (real or imagined) audience still retains elements of the postfeminist gaze here, the affects of this gaze stretches beyond regulatory forms of power and offers the potential for more molecular flows of becoming through the creation of these affective publics (Papacharissi, 2014). Nevertheless, such becomings were not always straight-forward.

8.4.3 "I feel conflicted"

In analysing how women responded to images tagged with #enhancementfree to indicate a lack of editing, Marika Tiggeman and Ksenia Zionoviev suggest "women should be encouraged to post more natural and enhancement-free images" (2019, p.136). Extrapolating from this, we could understand that women should post more images of diverse and/or 'flawed' bodies to counter the negative 'effects' of fitspiration. Not only do such arguments put the onus on women by suggesting that they should share specific images to change how they feel (8.4.1), this ignores the complex relations between women's bodies, images and Instagram. That is, women who desired to share more 'real' images of their bodies did not suggest this was easy:

> Jen: I'm like 'if you're bigger or fatter, or whatever, but you feel good does it matter, […] you feel good about yourself, and you're enjoying working out what is the problem'. There isn't a problem. So that's what I try and tell my clients, but trying to tell it to yourself is a very different thing. And at the minute, I don't feel good about my body, which changes how I pose, and changes what I post on Instagram. As you can see, it's all big jumpers and stuff.

Jen demonstrates that despite her best intentions to promote and share images of diverse bodies, this does not erase the enduring affects of her weight gain that limits her capacity to act and feel. Here, Jen describes a longstanding tension experienced by feminist scholars who grapple with both "[c]ritiquing thinness and wanting to be thin" (Throsby and Gimlin, 2010, p.105). As many have noted, awareness of structural oppressions that can shape experiences of embodiment does not ease the weight of such feelings (Stinson, 2001; Bordo, 2003; Murray, 2005; Heyes, 2007; Bahra, 2018; Fox, 2018; Morris, 2019). Rather, Jen suggests this can add *more* to grapple with, as tensions between longing to challenge these ideas and her bodily perceptions may contribute to guilt and confusion.

Similarly, Artika battled with materialising her reality to herself and others as someone "in the gym weight training" who has "backrolls*"* with desires to change her appearance. This shaped her capacities for action when taking images:

> Artika: I do try to avoid like projecting a look where I've got, like, rolls all over the place. […] And like, things like my hair sort of cooperating in a way that conforms to white standards of beauty, and it can be voluminous and full and rich and whatever, but it still has to look like it moves in the way that white hair does.

This is not to suggest that Artika is straightforwardly seeking to emulate racialized beauty standards, but instead to acknowledge that beauty, body perception and behaviours can sit in tension (Heyes, 2007; Tate, 2009). As Majida Karbo argues, "[t]he move from abjection to 'acceptance' is never smooth...[as] [a]ll bodies are invested with cultural meanings" (2013, p.170). Simply *desiring* to become real through making oneself visible in ways that challenge the perceived artifice of 'picture-perfect' does not exist in a vacuum, as Artika and Jen demonstrate that race and weight affectively endure in how they shape the possibilities of acting with and knowing their bodies. Instead, becoming real (and whether or not they feel at ease with this) takes place through the fitspo assemblage, mediated by Instagram's features, fitspo's platform vernaculars *and* perceptions of weight and race that circulate within Western sociocultural contexts.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued there are different enactments involved in processes of becoming real, played out through an understanding of authenticity as "a localized, temporally situated social construct that varies widely based on community" (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p.124). For example, while Stories were used by the

women to demonstrate authenticity through sharing snapshots of their everyday life, desires to be authentic were still constrained by normative displays of emotion. Notably, notions of acceptability often stretched in relation to how the women perceived their (real or imagined) audience's ideas about authenticity. I argued this can be understood as shaped through the postfeminist gaze, as the women demonstrated both measuring themselves, and being conscious of being measured by others, illustrating how the fitspo assemblage is productive of a more intensified surveillance.

Another process of becoming real lay in what I termed disruptive realness, defined as images used by the women to challenge the artifice of fitspo cultures on Instagram to more accurately materialise their realities. In discussing these, this was not to suggest that images that do not foreground questions of race and/or size politics are less authentic, but to consider how authenticity and artifice are deployed and understood in the fitspo assemblage. Ultimately, such images prompt considerations regarding who *gets* to be counted as real, how this is done, and which 'realness' becomes popular. Thus, although fitspo communities have been challenged for their perpetuation of homogenous bodies in relation to size and race, this does not mean that some women are not utilising Instagram to challenge this – but nor does it mean that all are successful.

In the context of Instagram versus reality images, I illustrated that the affective intensities of images of 'real' bodies were experienced through centring privileged bodies. These images required a simultaneous display and disavowal of bodily 'flaws', instead positioning these images as ways that the women, and their audiences, were able to 'choose' to love (perceived) imperfections such as loose skin. Here, the enactment of the postfeminist gaze both upon their own bodies, and in relation to their perceptions of their (real or imagined) audience's gaze, continues to position women's appearance as a marker of their value. However, in this instance, the very features that have historically been situated as in need of 'fixing' are now the very features that women are expected to choose to love. This gaze is *still* regulatory, then, as becoming real here is mediated by being able to display loving one's body and 'exposing' the artifice that goes into taking aesthetically pleasing images to others.

In contrast, in the examples in 8.4., I argued that the (real or imagined) audience cannot *only* be understood in relation to the postfeminist gaze. Rather, the gaze of other, similar women is not perceived as regulatory but affirmatively, as these looks come together with the affective hashtags, images and captions within the fitspo assemblage to enable alternative becomings. However, how radical this becoming is may still be blocked by the fitspo assemblage, as Artika, Happie and Kay's images were still driven first and foremost by bodily visibility, as Instagram's captions limit the ability for lengthy, nuanced discussion. As with the Instagram versus reality images, becoming real here may overlook the tensions inherent to desiring to challenge normative body standards whilst still feeling embedded within desires to make oneself visible to be heard.

Arguably, a more politically productive form of disruptive realness could steer away from only imploring women to engage with images of 'diverse' or 'flawed' bodies, as I have demonstrated that engaging with these does not lead to a straightforward acceptance of one's body, and may work to intensify women's surveillance of their bodies through new means. Instead, we could look to ways of articulating these tensions, illuminating the structural factors that shape what counts as 'loveable' imperfections, or on the relations of power that shape economies of visibility that uplift some women, and occlude others (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Ultimately, becoming real within the fitspo assemblage continues to situate particular forms of visibility as valuable, as the data demonstrated the women seek affirmation through being visible in specific ways, whereby *some* forms of realness are elevated through trending hashtags, knowledge of popular content and audience engagement. The coming together of bodies, images, platform vernaculars, platform affordances, desires for visibility and sociocultural understandings of bodies thus entrenches the 'right' way to become real through carefully managing the display of 'everyday' life, and through marking particular bodies as examples of realness through their repetition, elevation and engagement. Thus, how far such "imagistic and interactive practices…[can] produce a distinctively different mediascape" (Nakamura, 2008) through more molecular flows of becoming when circulated through fitspo communities that have been shown to often embed and affectively tie bodies to molar figurations, and enable intensified forms of surveillance, is open for debate.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an overview of the key arguments and contributions of this research. This thesis has explored how women produce, consume and circulate fitspo imagery on Instagram, taking the lead from Rebecca Coleman (2009; 2015) to ask what fitspo images on Instagram can do for how women's bodies can become. To recap on my research questions, this thesis looked to explore:

1) How, and in what ways, do the features of Instagram shape surveillance practices?
2) In what ways are bodies able to become through the fitspo assemblage?
   a) How are the capacities of bodies enhanced?
   b) How are the capacities of bodies limited?
3) What does this mean in relation to how the young women in this study are able to understand their own bodies, and the bodies of others?

Like Rachel O'Neill's consideration of wellness culture, the above questions have sought to puncture "easy dismissals of complex cultural phenomena, refusing to allow superficial readings to preside in place of detailed explorations" (2020b, p.633) through speaking back to predominant research and perspectives that currently frame fitspo images. Consequently, through this thesis I have provided answers to these questions through offering a more nuanced, contextual analyses of these images through an onto-epistemological understanding that has considered: images and Instagram as *affective*; women as actively engaged with the production and consumption of images; and what the fitspo assemblage can do in enhancing and/or limiting the capacities of bodies, through acknowledging and going beyond dieting, exercise and normative bodily standards.

I begin this concluding chapter by offering an overview of some of the limitations of these research in light of the completion of the research. I then turn to highlighting four key arguments and contributions of this research. My first argument resonates most closely with the literature I discussed in Chapter 3 relating to images and affect, articulating the importance of moving away from cause and effect analyses of images through highlighting the differential and complex ways various images become engaged with by different women, and at different times. Second, I argue for the importance of considering affects and assemblages when studying images, social media and bodies through the concept of the fitspo assemblage, enabling a consideration of the entanglement of the digital and non-digital, rather than as separate. The third argument I address suggests that it is not only images that are affective, but so too are the (real or imagined) audience in how they shape or

constrain the capacities of bodies. Finally, I highlight my argument that the fitspo assemblage enables and produces an increasing intensity of surveillance through the various elements that hang together through this, particularly Instagram's affordances.

In the last section of this chapter, I reflect upon this thesis as a whole in ways similar to my ruminations of the fitspo assemblage, by asking what does this thesis *do* for studies of affect, social media, images and bodies more broadly. I push my discussion of my key arguments further by addressing what the implications they have. I suggest that what this thesis does is demonstrate the utility of concepts such as affect, assemblage and becoming to more adequately capture the experience of images and social media. As part of this, what this thesis has done is contribute to feminist scholarship that has foregrounded the way affect does necessarily not move in ways that are autonomous, but moves in ways that are saturated with power relations, and (re)productive of inequalities. Specifically, I contribute to this literature by taking heed of the way elements of the fitspo assemblage are experienced are often linked to *already felt* social inequalities and binary machines, and how these leads to such relations of power becoming further embedded. Finally, I argue what this thesis does moving forward is offer a reflection on the kinds of advice offered to rectify the 'effects' on women's bodies following engagement with fitspo images, and how these could be modified so as to be more productive in light of the findings here.

9.2 Research limitations

While successful in my aim of producing research that acknowledges the iterative nature of notions of digital and 'face-to-face' communications, and considers the varied affects that images and social media can have through their relations with bodies, there are still some ways this study could have been enhanced, and that could be taken further. For example, while a handful of women noted that they had previously lost a not insignificant amount of weight, only one woman identified and presented visually as a fat woman. Given that one key argument throughout this thesis is that the affects of the fitspo assemblage are varied, it follows that the experiences of fat women are likely to have been different again within a digital community so intensely preoccupied with fat loss. Consequently, through broadening my sampling strategy to include women outside of a narrow range of body types, this thesis could have been better able to consider more varied and alternative becomings.

In addition, this thesis could have benefitted from a consideration of how experiences of disability may intersect with the fitspo assemblage. This is something I tried to do while recruiting, and while a handful of women who identified as disabled did respond, it was not possible to meet them due to either time constraints on their behalf, or lack of geographical proximity. However, as not all disabilities are visible, and nor are experiences of disability necessarily shared on Instagram, this was a difficult thing to achieve when recruiting. Moreover, this was

also not helped by the lack of diversity within fitspo communities more generally – as echoed commonly by the women who did participate when I asked them if there was anything they would like to see more of on their Instagram feed. Ultimately, these changes would not make a more 'representative' sample per se, but such sampling strategies would have enabled me to consider further the different ways bodies can become through the fitspo assemblage. Collectively, the additional understandings these elements could have contributed would be worthwhile to take up in future research, in order to offer a fuller and more wide-ranging analysis.

This thesis may have also benefitted from a closer analyses of the posts discussed in the media go-along, such as the hashtags used, likes and comments received and the caption itself, rather than referring to my interview notes, or comments made by myself or the women in the interviews. Ultimately, I stand by my decision to incorporate social media into the interview method itself as opposed to, for example, utilise digital ethnography, as this enabled me to produce data that aligned closer with my research questions. However, I could have more systematically detailed elements of the posts that were being discussed so as to avoid vague comments relating to a "high" number of likes, or paid closer attention to the amount of followers different users have, for example. Having incorporated a more systematic approach with regards to digital ethnography or analysing the posts and profiles discussed within the media go-along could have contributed a greater understanding of the *doings* of sharing and creating Instagram posts amongst different users (with different numbers of followers), rather than only images. Again, taking this approach could be useful in future research, in order to ascertain whether one's actual engagement with others (in terms of comments, likes, followers and so on) shapes the way the fitspo assemblage is felt, and the kinds of understandings that may be gleaned about women's bodies.

9.3 Key arguments and contributions

9.3.1 From cause and effect to the affects of/in the fitspo assemblage

As noted above, my second and third research questions speak to the desire to understand how women's bodies *become* and are *understood* through the fitspo assemblage. In the Introduction and in Chapter 2, I traced the prevalence of media effects analyses of fitspo images and social media, and sought to position this thesis in response to the prevalence of individualizing perspectives on fitspo images in the media, and of experimental, survey-led and content analyses research of fitspo imagery. While I conceded these methods may be practical due to temporal and economic constraints, I argued that they are ultimately limited in how they can consider the complexity of women's engagements with fitspo images.

To support this argument, I considered research that had sought to study fitspo imagery in a more nuanced way, being attentive to questions of affect and the kinds of values embedded within fitspo communities, though acknowledging that

the majority of these still neglected to engage with women who participate in fitspo communities, the practices of taking images, and using Instagram. Following this, I took a step back from fitspo images, and explored ways feminist scholarship has approached dieting, exercise and bodily surveillance, key features of fitspo communities. Adding to this, I explored more broadly how social media had been researched, discussed and navigated by scholars to outline alternative themes and methods that could be important in analysing social media. This breadth of literature gave me the perspectives and tools required to analyse social media images in ways that were attentive to the affordances of social media, and cognizant of the social context of their use, to understand more fully the experiences of engaging with fitspo communities.

Pushing this further, in Chapter 3 I outlined the theoretical perspectives and conceptual vocabulary required to continue moving away from questions of cause and effect. Coupling this with an immanent methodology that looked to flatten the position of bodies, images and Instagram (Chapter 4), I staked my claim to being able to explore fitspo images and Instagram *differently,* in ways that were open to the multiple, varied affects that images could have on women's bodies, outlining the practical means of doing so in order to effectively answer my research questions. Through this, I was able to build upon the arguments of others that women must not only be considered as social media consumers, but also producers (Dobson, 2015; Kanai, 2019). Throughout these chapters, I argued that not only are linear, cause-and-effect analyses of images and Instagram limited in the depth and complexity of their argument, such arguments: neglect the context in which women engage with fitspo and Instagram; assume images to be homogenous in their effects; and lack the methodological tools to explore fitspo images in more suitable, nuanced means.

Across the 4 analyses chapters, the data produced for this thesis demonstrated that these cause and effect models cannot capture: what engaging with fitspo images *does;* what it *feels* like; and how this can *vary* for individual women, between women and across time. Consequently, one of the key arguments this thesis makes lies in highlighting the varied ways that bodies are able to become through their entanglement in the fitspo assemblage (RQ1). In Chapter 5, I drew upon Angela McRobbie's (2009) reading of the Deleuzian concept of luminosity to consider how the display of particular images (such as bodily transformations, toned abdominals, and exercise videos) enabled some women to become invested in as luminous figures within the fitspo assemblage. Studying what is *in* the image, or the linear effect of an image, would have neglected to highlight the active process of taking multiple images, careful image selection and writing captions for the women to become invested in, demonstrating that images do not speak for themselves but must be curated to be known in particular ways.

In Chapter 6, I continued to outline the multiple affects that images and Instagram can have through their relations with other bodies, drawing upon Coleman's (2009) work to explore whether or not an image *endures* in its intensity is dependent on

the embodied histories of the woman who produces or consumes given images. In particular, I connected this to the women's disordered eating and exercise habits, their relations to a collective fear of fat, and understandings of their bodies felt through racializing processes (in relation to stereotypes of black women's bodies and/or the prominence of white bodies on Instagram). Through this, I argued that images do not have a singular, shared *effect* but instead are *affective* in how they contribute to shared ways of 'knowing' particular bodies through fears of fat and racialized hierarchies of beauty, constraining the capacities of bodies to act both on an individual and social level.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I demonstrated that thinking in terms of cause and effect in relation to body image, disordered eating and body satisfaction and so on, risks imposing a framework on what the given 'effects' of images may be preceding their encounters (see also, Coleman (2009)) . Through an inductive analysis of the data, in Chapter 7 I argued that what images do here is enable some women's bodies to become known as *appropriately* visible and respectable, whilst others are fixed through becoming known as *too* sexual. In Chapter 8, I suggested that Instagram Stories offer an ephemeral way to become known as authentic and 'real' without disturbing the success-based images on their profile. Further, I showed how women used images of their bodies (in the form of 'real' body images, and 'taking up space' images) as a form of 'disruptive realness', to disrupt the perceived artifice of Instagram. What images and Instagram can do, then, can be accounted for not *only* in terms of their relations to dieting, exercise and weight loss, but in relation to how women who are involved within the fitspo assemblage *perceive* and *acknowledge* what such images do. Moreover, what these analyses chapters further offered is an understanding of how images enhance and/or limit the capacities of bodies (RQ2), framing how the fitspo assemblage is productive of particular understandings of bodies through the kinds of images that are shared and the varied affects that stick to them (RQ3).

Consequently, one way this thesis contributes to challenging cause and effect analyses of fitspo images is in highlighting the way images of body parts become *invested in differently,* illustrating how young women are able to understand their own bodies, and the bodies of others (RQ3)*.* While in Chapter 5 and in the context of bodily transformations images of glutes were invested in as sites of hard-work and successful transformations, in Chapter 7 images of glutes were derided as sexual and lacking purpose. Similarly, while in Chapter 6 images of soft stomachs were experienced as *fixing* in how they constrained ways of knowing bodies outside of normative, regulatory molar binaries of toned/fat, good/bad, in Chapter 8 images of (some) soft stomachs enabled bodies to become known as empowered through their perceived 'realness'. Correlational, homogenous analyses of images risk overlooking such nuances and thus cannot account for these different investments, where instead such images of glutes may be read as examples of 'self-objectification' (see, for example, Talbot et al. (2017), Prichard et al. (2018), and Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2018)).

While Jessica Ringrose and colleagues (Ringrose and Harvey, 2015; Renold and Ringrose, 2017) note that images of bodies become invested in in ways that are demarcated by gender amongst young people at school, within this research I demonstrate that within the fitspo assemblage, body parts accrue currency differently *amongst* women, whose investment in body parts varied within different encounters. For example, while sometimes images of women in their underwear were perceived as too sexual (Chapter 7), at other times these images were understood as authentic and empowering (Chapter 8). Through this I inferred that images *cannot* have given effects on bodies due to their content, as how images are engaged with, and invested in, is wide-ranging. Through these examples, I have demonstrated that "an objective, external reading of what the image *is of* cannot capture the intensive experience of it" (Coleman, 2015, p.38, emphasis in original), where to understand how images *feel* and what they can *do* requires expanding analyses through the use of onto-epistemological methodologies and concepts that can trouble these linear, representational-focused arguments.

A second, though related, key contribution this thesis makes is through conceptualising fitspo communities, images, participants within fitspo communities, Instagram likes, comments and so on through *the fitspo assemblage* (RQ2). Building on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and feminist scholars who have advanced their work, across the four analyses chapters I have demonstrated it is crucial to acknowledge not only *images,* but *also* Instagram, and the host of immaterial, material, technological, social, cultural (and so on) elements that mediate what the fitspo assemblage. Crucially, I have taken heed from scholars who have considered the concept of the assemblage in their own work to propagate that what *comes together* in the assemblage is not a random assortment of bodies, but rather conditioned by specific sociocultural contexts (Ringrose, 2011; Duff, 2014; Buchanan, 2015, 2017; Renold and Ringrose, 2017). In considering the women's engagement with fitspo, I have not looked to compile a list of all possible things that compose an assemblage, but instead to pay attention to what the given elements of the fitspo assemblage make possible (Buchanan, 2017). For example, in Chapter 7, I demonstrated that what the fitspo assemblage can do (in relation to the reproduction of molar, regulatory notions of 'acceptable' visibility) is mediated by an already binary perspective regarding appropriate displays of sexuality and women's bodies within postfeminist media contexts (Renold and Ringrose, 2011, 2017; Ringrose and Barajas, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013; Dobson, 2015; Evans and Riley, 2015; Ringrose and Harvey, 2015). Further, I demonstrated that how the fitspo assemblage enabled this production of regulatory binaries also occurred through the affordances of Instagram, such as algorithmic personalization and the women's 'algorithmic imaginary' (Bucher, 2017). That is, these affordances shaped how they felt able to share particular images, that encouraged images to be shared in accordance with specific aesthetic norms to be engaged with.

Through conceptualising the fitspo assemblage, I have been able to consider the specific ways in which bodies are able to become in different encounters (RQ2).

This has enabled me to speak back and contribute to current scholarship on images, bodies and social media in three ways. First, I lend support to the scholars that have argued that social media and images are *affective* (Chapter 2, 3). In understanding affect in relation to a body's "capacity for affecting and being affected" (Deleuze, 1988, p.123), I have shown across all four analyses chapters the different ways bodies, images, and Instagram are capable of enhancing and constraining a body's capacity to act. Following Coleman (2009), I demonstrated the capacities of these elements to affect other bodies can vary in their intensity, with some images (such as those perceived by women with embodied histories of eating disorders in Chapter 6) leading to some bodies being experienced as more 'fixed' than others. Expanding my focus from *only* images, I have also outlined how Instagram's affordances can *also* be affective in terms of how they shape the capacities of bodies. For example, in Chapters 5, 7 and 8 I outlined that, despite being at least "partly 'virtual'" (Van Doorn, 2011, p.534) in their digital form, comments received from others accumulate affect in how bodies become known and understood. These too are multiple and varied in their intensities: while comments have the capacity to affirm and actualize bodies as able to 'take up space' (Chapter 8), or in terms of self-perception while looking to transform their bodies (Chapter 5), comments (from men in particular) can also be constraining in how images are taken or shared (Chapter 7). Through this I have argued that how bodies (broadly defined) in the fitspo assemblage can affect and be affected is not necessarily random, but embedded within relations of power (9.4).

Second, I have argued that the women themselves could be understood as aware of the *affects* of images and Instagram (though perhaps unlikely to phrase it in this way). The women demonstrate a desire to try to channel affect through their digital presence and the images they share, in aiming to move bodies to act in particular ways. Most commonly, this was related to desires to become visible and engaged with (Chapter 5, 7, 8): for example, using Instagram Stories to cut through the endless scrolling of their (real or imagined) audience and redirect bodies towards their profiles. This was also linked to different desires for visibility, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, where the women sought to become not just seen, but *invested* in as hardworking and deserving of their transformation through the images they shared. These arguments lends support to Crystal Abidin (2016a), Amy Dobson (2015) and Akane Kanai's (2019) argument that it is crucial to acknowledge the labour and knowledges involved in young women's social media content production, rather than being dismissive. Moreover, their awareness of these affects, or at the very least, their awareness of the entanglement of images, Instagram's affordances, of broader sociocultural discourses on gender and class and so on, is pertinent to considering how the women's bodies are enhanced (or not) through the fitspo assemblage (RQ2). That is, such data demonstrates that at times how bodies are able to become is dependent on a specific harnessing of affect by the women, through the inclusion of specific images (such as, for example, videos of exercise or before-and-after images in Chapter 5). Images, then, do not have linear effects on their viewers, but here are shown to be used *by*

women to shape their own bodily capacities. Nor do the affects that move through the fitspo assemblage come together entirely at random, but are at times directed and shaped through given agents within it (9.4).

Some scholars have argued for the utility of thinking through social media and 'face-to-face' spaces as iterative and folding into one another, rather than as separate binaries (Van Doorn, 2011; Kember and Zylinksa, 2012; Postill and Pink, 2012; Paasonen et al., 2015; Pink et al., 2016; Andreassen et al., 2018; Fullagar et al., 2018). Thus, through my third contribution to literature on social media, images and bodies, I add to this growing body of work through arguing that fitspo images and Instagram must not be divorced from their social context, nor practices of use, but must be understood in relation to one another through being embedded within specific contexts. For example, through foregrounding research methods that enabled me to understand the context in which images were taken (both training together and the image-taking exercise), in addition to the media go-along, I have questioned the utility of survey and experimental studies in being able to: (1) capture the complexity of women's engagement with fitspo images, and (2) grasp at the iterative nature of social media and 'face-to-face' realities. Through my chosen methods, then, I have been able to contextualize fitspo images through acknowledging: the social spaces where they are taken (such as in the gym through being physically present, or at home through being recounted in the interview); how the *affects* of the fitspo assemblage are mediated by personal histories and memories (Chapter 6); and explore how engaging with such images may be mediated by cultural values and narratives such as meritocracy (Chapter 5) and postfeminism (Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8). This has enabled me to provide a richer, more detailed account of fitspo images and Instagram in ways that do not reify an 'online/offline' binary, but instead look to challenge it to glean a fuller understanding of the (at times) contradictory and multifaceted implications behind, and motivations involved in, sharing and engaging with fitspo imagery – even when doing so can be at times troubling for the women involved (Chapters 6, 7, 8).

9.3.2 The (real or imagined) audience

A third contribution this thesis makes is in relation to understanding the affective capacities of the (real or imagined) audience. Taking seriously Deleuze and Guattari's invocation to maintain a focus on the 'and…and…and'" (1983, p.57), I looked to build upon Coleman (2009; 2015) to consider not only what *images* could do, but also Instagram's *affordances*. In so doing, I have sought to understand how such audiences may shape how bodies can become in tandem with the kinds of images that are shared (RQ2), in addition to how this audience may specifically shape the women's surveillance practices (RQ1). Thus, while others have acknowledged the affective capacities of algorithms (Carah and Dobson, 2016; Bucher, 2018), hashtags (Papacharissi, 2016; Rentschler, 2017; Keller et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2018; Fullagar et al., 2018), and comments (Van Doorn, 2011; Renold and Ringrose, 2017), in addition to these, I have turned my attention to

how the (real or imagined) audience may be affective – irrespective of whether or not audiences are engaging with the women's content.

This focus began through acknowledging the utility of the postfeminist gaze (Riley et al., 2016; Riley and Evans, 2018) in Chapter 2, to consider how the looks shared amongst and by women to both their own bodies and other bodies may be shaped through postfeminist sensibilities, and the affordances of Instagram. Riley and colleagues argue that this gaze is shaped through: women scrutinising "themselves and others for their ability to transform their bodies to meet cultural ideals, prioritising appearance as a vehicle to recognition" (Riley et al., 2016, p.212) that becomes directed towards the surveillance of the body; is marked by judgement and is regulatory; is ubiquitous; is enhanced through the affordances of social media (Riley and Evans, 2018); and is "structured within heteronormative sense making" (Riley et al., 2016, p.108). Across their studies, they suggest that there is little resistance or disengagement with this gaze, nor the association of women's appearance with their value.

While acknowledging the postfeminist gaze, I have argued that within the fitspo assemblage it is more pertinent to consider and foreground the affective capacities of the *real* or *imagined* audience. This (real or imagined) audience is not affective due to its size (for example, the number of people watching), or indeed, due to anyone watching at all. Instead, I argued that what matters is that there *might* be an audience, enabled through the *affordances* of the Instagram such as: its design for sociality and visibility through sharing images and the follower/following model; public profiles (which all of the women had), whereby anyone can see one's profile; and algorithmic personalization (Chapter 7), where those who desired to become visible in the fitspo assemblage had to be more mindful of what they shared to become seen. Thus, audiences do not have to be *actually* looking at other women, as I have demonstrated that the *potential* of surveillance is affective in how it shapes the kinds of images women share, and their motivations behind doing so (RQ1).

At this point it would be erroneous to overlook the similarities that exist between that of the (real or imagined) audience, and Michel Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon. For Foucault, the Panopticon exists as a machine that "produces homogenous effects of power" (1995, p.202) through its architectural features, as a combination of "bodies, surfaces, lights, [and] gazes" (1995, p.202). Envisioned by Jeremy Bentham, the Panopticon is a tower within the centre of a prison composed of windows marred by blinds and structures that enable the individual in the tower to observe the cells that surround the tower, but that obscure those within the cells to see the guard – or indeed, know if anyone is there at all. For Foucault, the Panopticon exists as a *disciplinary technology* that subjects the observed to "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1995, p.201), contributing to a continuous state of self-surveillance due to the threat of being watched, that he argues has been extrapolated into not only prisons but schools, workplaces and hospitals.

In both the Panopticon and the (real or imagined) audience, it becomes possible to see an internalisation of surveillance; whether the prisoner who thinks they are being watched, or someone curating the images they share through an awareness of their followers seeing the images that are shared. In both, power does not originate within a given person or a given feature, but is dispersed *through* the Panopticon machine or the fitspo assemblage-machine. However, it is in this dispersal of power that the differences can be seen between the two, and it is why the concept of the (real or imagined) audience is more apt to describe the intensified surveillance in the fitspo assemblage, rather than the Panopticon.

Foucault notes that the dispersal of power through the Panopticon means that "it does not matter who exercises power" (1995, p.202), only that the observed know they are being watched. Here, I have shown that it *does* matter who exercises power - that is, *who exercises surveillance matters*. Because the (real or imagined) audience are understood within the context of fitspo communities, it matters in how it contributes to particular images being shared over others; for example, those that show muscle progression, or 'hard work'. Relatedly, akin to other authors that have explored women's media production, I have demonstrated that women are putting *themselves* in the spotlight of this surveillance gaze through the fitspo assemblage (Winch, 2013; Nurka, 2014). This is not a gaze that is being experienced in ways that are forceful, and nor is the self-surveillance (in terms of moderating what is shared) that follows. The gaze of the (real or imagined) audience, unlike that of the Panopticon, is not *disciplinary,* but one marked by affective capacities that can build up bodies in particular ways (Braidotti 2002).

Finally, Foucault points to the homogeneity of this power that circulates through the disciplinary gaze of the Panopticon. In contrast, while I have linked the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience to that of the postfeminist gaze, I have also shown throughout the analyses chapters that the affective capacities of the (real or imagined) audience for the women in this research both affirms *and* exceeds the postfeminist gaze. Thus, unlike the gaze of the Panopticon, the power of this gaze is felt in ways that vary, both across and between women. This gaze does not, therefore, produce a homogenous mass of prisoners, or school children, for example, but rather enables varied and specific becomings of bodies that cannot be known in advance (Coleman, 2009).

To be clear, the postfeminist gaze is a central element of the gaze of the (real or imagined) audience. For example, across multiple chapters I demonstrated the persistence of this gaze factoring into the images they share, and the surveillance they enact upon their body. This is particularly pertinent in Chapter 5, in relation to the kinds of labour the women enact upon their bodies in relation to the 'Instagram body', and Chapter 6 when this gaze weighs upon the women as they judge and appraise their body for *not* meeting these standards. Similarly, across all four analysis chapters, the role that appearance plays as a marker of value and worth through the looks shared by and amongst women is evident, whether this is in relation to the luminous figure discussed in Chapter 5, not measuring up to the

'Instagram body' in Chapter 6, in relation to sexuality in Chapter 7, or in using images of their bodies to disrupt the 'picture-perfect' aesthetic of Instagram in Chapter 8. Perhaps most stark in Chapters 5 and 7 is the *regulatory* tone this gaze takes on *between* the women, as particular bodies become known and fixed through assessing the images that other women share; as lacking hard work or purpose, and/or being inappropriately sexual.

However, while acknowledging the utility of this concept, throughout the chapters I have demonstrated that the looks shared amongst women, towards their own bodies and others, is not *only* structured by heteronormative sense making, and nor is this gaze ubiquitous, felt equally, and without challenge. This further demonstrates my argument that it is more useful to consider the affective capacities of the (real or imagined) audience, rather than framing this through the disciplinary gaze of the Panopticon. For example, in Chapter 7, the looks shared amongst the women were certainly partially structured by heteronormative sense-making (in relation to perceptions of appropriate feminine sexuality), but were *additionally* structured by desires to become seen through Instagram's visibility algorithms, and their audiences, to elevate their engagement. Moreover, in Chapters 6 and 8, I outlined evidence of resistance to the postfeminist gaze in terms of critiquing the notion of one's appearance as a marker of worth (though how far this shaped the becomings of the women's bodies in light of this varied). Thus, in thinking about how bodies can become through the fitspo assemblage (RQ2), I have illustrated that while this is shaped at times through the postfeminist gaze that Riley and colleagues chart, at times this gaze exceeds a neat categorisation through this concept.

It is to this end, then, that I find the notion of the (real or imagined) audience more productive to consider the gazes shared amongst users, as it can encapsulate the relevant elements of the postfeminist gaze (in relation to assessing the labour women enact upon their bodies), while situating this specifically within the context of Instagram; a social, image-based application driven by desires to become visible, within a community with its own sets of norms and values. Moreover, acknowledging the surveillance of the (real or imagined) audience *beyond* the postfeminist gaze enables the addressing of the *other* elements of surveillance the women outline as experiencing within the fitspo assemblage (RQ1). Whether this (real or imagined) audience is their followers, potential future followers, or the women themselves in looking over their Instagram profiles, I have demonstrated the various forms of surveillance the women account for. Thus, the postfeminist gaze cannot capture the breadth, and as I argue, *intensity*, of surveillance that goes *beyond* the working on, and transformation of, the physical body. Nor can it, in isolation, account for the varying intensities and practices of surveillance that the women experience, undergo and enact that are enabled through the fitspo assemblage. Crucially, to retain a focus on the postfeminist gaze (and thus its focus on the physicality of the body, transforming this body, and measuring other women's bodies in relation to their body work) may neglect the *other forms of*

surveillance the fitspo assemblage enables, or the varying *intensities* with which these are felt.

9.3.3 The production of an intensified surveillance

Consequently, while the postfeminist gaze offers alternative ways of considering and conceptualising the surveillance women have been argued to direct to their bodies and the bodies of other women (Chapter 2), I have suggested it cannot account for the varied and specific experiences discussed in this thesis of the *intense* surveillance produced *through* the coming together of elements within the fitspo assemblage. Thus, the fourth key argument derived from this thesis is that, within the fitspo assemblage, Instagram's affordances shape surveillance practices through producing *new* forms of surveillance, in addition to moments of surveillance that become felt with greater intensity (RQ1). This surveillance includes, of course, surveillance directed towards the physicality of the body. However, I have argued it is also crucial to consider this surveillance in relation to: the focused investment in specific body parts; that which goes beyond only the physicality of the body (such as one's authenticity); and the affective capacities of this surveillance at its points of intensity (in terms of how bodies are experienced through enhanced and/or limited capacities).

First, this surveillance can be understood as more intense than the body surveillance explored by scholars in Chapter 2 regarding the shrinking of the body, in that it is not only directed towards the overall appearance of the physical body, but rather directed towards a minutiae of body parts: glutes, abdominals, back muscles, shoulder muscles and so on. This surveillance is therefore more intense as it encourages the appraisal of the body not as a whole, but in different body parts to be managed, laboured over and measured in relation to a given norm (the Instagram body). While this is a similar kind of separation of body parts that takes place in cosmetic surgery (Blum, 2005; Pitts-Taylor, 2007; Jones, 2008), what is different here is the participants largely espoused that working on one's body (through the management and surveillance of specific body parts) is praised by others as a worthwhile investment of one's time and energy rather than unnecessarily vain or self-obsessed, thereby legitimising this form of surveillance[1]. While this example of surveillance of specific body parts was particularly clear to see in Chapter 5 in relation to the undertaking of bodybuilding exercises and the imaging of specific body parts to be shared on Instagram, this can *also* be seen in the surveillance and regulation of the body parts of other women – most notably in relation to their glutes, in relation to whether these images were *too* sexual (Chapter 7), and soft stomachs, in relation to whether these could be made intelligible as authentic (Chapter 8).

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[1] This could be due to weight-training and muscle building being coded as a typically masculine activity and a sign of physical and inner strength (see, for example, Pronger, 2002; Maguire, 2008), whereas cosmetic surgery is often dismissed as feminine and vain.

Second, this surveillance can be understood as more intense as it is not *just* the appearance of the physical body that is subject to this surveillance. In addition to specific body parts, the women also articulated surveillance in relation to monitoring and managing their for example, emotional regulation (Chapter 5, 8), articulations of authenticity (Chapter 8), and acceptable forms of bodily display mediated by regulatory gendered and classed frameworks regarding sexuality and excessiveness (Chapter 7). I retain this focus on *intensity* because it highlights this surveillance as something viscerally felt in line with the theoretical position I have taken throughout this thesis, *in addition to* pushing our understanding of surveillance as that which goes beyond the management of the physical body as a whole. There is a continuation here of many of the key arguments that feminist scholars have historically raised (Chapter 2), but their difference lies in the extent and spread to which these are experienced. This is important, then, as it illustrates the specific role that the affordances of Instagram, or indeed other social media applications, may play in shaping, facilitating or intensifying these forms of surveillance. In addition, this focus on Instagram's affordances highlights how they may produce *different* forms of surveillance for women to measure themselves up against; for example, when entangled with ephemeral Instagram Stories (Chapter 8), or Instagram's visibility algorithms (Chapter 7).

Third, the surveillance enabled through the fitspo assemblage can be perceived theoretically as intense because it is *affective,* in that it enables particular ways of acting, enhancing or restricting specific capacities in ways that vary between bodies. For example, in Chapter 6 I traced the limiting capacities of the relations between the women of colour's bodies and surveillance as they become entangled with and productive of racialized beauty standards, experiences of feeling Othered *and* fitspo bodily norms of the 'Instagram body'. This can be contrasted to the more positive perceptions of surveillance and enhanced bodily capacities that some white women in Chapter 5 described in how such surveillance enabled them to understand their bodies in relation to luminous norms of self-confidence, esteem and hard work. In all of these, the (real or imagined) audience comes to figure as particularly important and affective, in how it not only *qualifies* the surveillance the women enact upon their bodies, but how the women go on to *share* (or not share) particular images. As I discuss in greater detail in 9.4, what is gained from theoretically conceptualising surveillance *as* intense means that it becomes possible to map out the different ways the surveillance produced *through* the fitspo assemblage is *not felt equally,* speaking directly to my second research question regarding the different ways women's bodies can become.

Thus, I have argued that the intensity of surveillance is *enabled and produced through the fitspo assemblage;* that is, it must be understood in relation Instagram's affordances (RQ1)*.* Consequently, Instagram is not just something humans use (Kember and Zylinksa, 2012), but something that can *do something with, through and alongside human bodies.* I have made this argument in different ways: for example, I have acknowledged the role of algorithms (or the perceptions of these algorithms) in intensifying surveillance through enabling women to

measure themselves up against the most successful and appropriate ways of becoming visible (Chapter 7); how Instagram Stories enables women to display (some of) the more 'intimate' and personal moments of their lives to others (Chapter 8); the (real or imagined) audience (Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8); and the archival functions of the Instagram profile that enable past images of a body to be easily compared to the present, in ways that can be affirming (Chapter 5) *and* limiting (Chapter 6).

In arguing this, this is *not* to be deterministic of the 'effects' of social media, but to acknowledge the iterative relations between bodies and social media, demonstrating these face-to-face/digital binaries do not hold. It is important to consider not just what *images* can 'do', then, but what a given technology's affordances can 'do' beyond the intended means of their developers when embedded within a given assemblage. Crucially, this is not to blame Instagram nor fitspo cultures for the intensified surveillance, nor the values that are uplifted through these communities, but to acknowledge that the fitspo assemblage *enables* the production of particular conditions of intensified surveillance *that women themselves are taking up.* It is fitspo *users* who are using the affordances of Instagram to show, for example, their muscle changes, or to convey particular characteristics such as resilience and positivity. This underscores the importance of acknowledging: women as *producers* of cultural content, as opposed to only consumers who are victims of the 'effects' of images (Dobson, 2015); platform affordances; and the community *and* socially shared values that enable particular values and practices to thrive.

9.4 Research implications and future research directions

To this point, I have outlined the four key arguments made in this thesis through attending to my research questions. Next, I address the implications of these arguments through two related points, through reference to the scholarly debates and arguments this thesis sits within.

One implication of this research is related to my foregrounding of the centrality of the concepts of affect, becoming and assemblage in studying (fitspo) images and social media. In particular, I have demonstrated that affect is not necessarily autonomous and free-floating in how it moves across, between and through bodies. I have demonstrated that whether or not affects 'stick' (Ahmed, 2004), whether or not they can 'endure' (Coleman, 2009), and what such affects can *do* (Coleman, 2009; 2015; Kyrölä, 2014) is intimately related to the bodies it passes through and the assemblages through which they circulate. In doing so, one implication of the arguments above is that I align myself with feminist scholars that argue affect does *not* move in ways that are entirely random (Ahmed, 2004; Hemmings, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Wetherell, 2012). Instead, I have offered two arguments to support this: first, that affect moves through the fitspo assemblage in ways that sticks to *particular* bodies, entrenching molar, binary forms of power *in addition to* embedding inequalities in new ways (Coleman, 2015). Second, that

affect is at times something that is purposefully *harnessed* by the women in the fitspo assemblage in order to move bodies to engage with their images.

For example, in Chapter 8 I explored Instagram vs reality photos, and images of 'real' bodies, that looked to disrupt the perceived artifice of Instagram and the dominance of 'picture-perfect' photos (Chapter 7). However, what I demonstrated such images do is afford *some* bodies who to some extent fit normative bodily standards (predominantly, though not exclusively, slim, toned and white women) to benefit from these images through becoming known as authentic. Thus such images (in conjunction with the likes received and the hashtags they are circulated through) affect *some* bodies, enhancing their capacities to act, whilst the bodies of those who are most often marginalized may not necessarily be able to claim these 'authentic' positions. For example, this was made evident through the way fat is demonized in Chapter 6, but *sometimes* some forms of fat, like soft stomachs on an otherwise toned, slim body, were praised in Chapter 8. Similarly, in Chapter 6, I demonstrated that experiences of feeling racially Othered still exists within the fitspo assemblage, but this takes place in *new ways* as the affects of the images that displayed a repetition of white bodies were shown to 'stick' to women of colour's bodies in ways that contributed to feeling marginalized. As this becomes compounded with feelings of difference through, for example, other media and face-to-face experiences, in addition to the intimate, physical nature of the women's engagements with such images, the fitspo assemblage can be understood as both productive of and produced by racial inequalities.

In Chapter 7, considering the way affect does not stick equally to or always flow autonomously between particular bodies enabled me to argue that there is a continued regulation of class, gender and sexuality through the images that women share online, and that these binaries become known through references to 'acceptable' forms of self-promotion in order to navigate changes to algorithmic personalization within the economy of visibility. These binaries are not new findings in themselves (see, for example, research by Riley and Evans (2015) that traces these binaries in relation to perceptions of sexuality amongst younger and older women). However, what is new is how I have illustrated that the way these affects travel, and the way they are mediated, occurs through the affordances of Instagram within the fitspo assemblage. Similarly, throughout Chapter 5 and 6 I demonstrated that affects circulate unequally in how images of slimmer bodies, or bodies perceived to be fat contribute to how body fat becomes culturally 'known' (Murray, 2008) as a poor marker of health through choice rhetoric, 'feeling fat', and through the luminosity of *some* bodies over others.

One further way this thesis has argued that affect cannot *only* be thought of as random is through demonstrating how the women in this research actively tried to harness and channel affect through the images they had taken and shared within the fitspo assemblage. This could be seen in Chapter 8 through reference to the use of Instagram Stories to act as a visual reminder of the women's profiles to their (real or imagined) audience, particularly if they had not posted on their profile for

some time. Through sharing Stories, these women hoped that this would forge relations with their viewers, encouraging a movement of bodies from clicking on a Story, to one's profile, to engaging with their posts. Similarly, images of bodies and in particular body parts such as abdominals or glutes were evidenced in in Chapters 5, 7 and 8 as sites of affective investment in different ways. Once again, throughout Chapter 7 images of body parts or bodies overall were shared to encourage the physical act of double tapping and liking from their (real or imagined) audience, whereas in Chapter 5, videos of *moving* and *exercising* bodies were shared in hopes of encouraging engagement but also because of the affective nature such images had for those who shared them. That is, videos of exercise were shared as they affirmed the women's bodies as luminous through tapping into narratives of meritocracy and hard work – and, hopefully, enabled others to recognise them as such too (Chapter 5).

It is these variances of affect, then, that *could* explain why it is so appealing for some women to participate within the fitspo assemblage despite the predominance of arguments regarding their negative 'effects'. The becomings of some bodies as enhanced, or the variance in the *duration* in the affects of images (in that they do not last forever), then, could begin to articulate why women are actively involved within the production, circulation and viewing of fitspo imagery *even when* it encourages and enables a more intensified form of surveillance. Because these affects can at times be enhancing, for example, through the production of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2014; Chapter 8), these may offset the affects of the fitspo assemblage that may fix bodies in temporary, though intense ways. It is impossible to argue with certainty *why* women participate in a digital community that intensifies both the breadth and depth of surveillance they experience, but acknowledging both the positive implications alongside the more negative implications may go some way in doing so (Heyes, 2007). It is unhelpful to dismiss these practices (whether through accusations of vanity, obsession or danger), as to do so overlooks what the varied affects of the fitspo assemblage can do; and consequently, where our political efforts should be directed in attempting to offset the ways molecular flows of becoming may be blocked.

The final implication the arguments in this thesis have is that they demonstrate that the practical measures encouraged from media-effects research, such as encouraging women to share 'unedited' photos of their bodies (Tiggemann and Zinoviev, 2019), removing certain images from platforms (Alberga et al., 2018), or encouraging women to avoid participating in particular digital communities in order to 'protect' them from specific images which are perceived as 'causing' bodily dissatisfaction, poor self-esteem and so on may be displaced[2] (Introduction). As Samantha Murray notes, such arguments may be inappropriate in how:

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[2] Thank you to Karen Throsby for helping me to formulate these ideas.

> 'seeing' differently can never simply be a case of changing one's mind, since perception is never simply a cognitive function that we as individuals have rational control over (Murray, 2008, p.87)

Through positioning the mind as something that is malleable through changing what kinds of images are viewed or shared online, such arguments risk overlooking the *pleasure* and *community* gleaned through participating in digital communities such as the fitspo assemblage. In addition, such advice overlooks the *rarely,* if ever, straight-forward relations women have to images; and indeed, speaking back to my second research question, the varied ways these relations change for individual women and between women through the way they become entangled with the fitspo assemblage.

To improve such advice and guidance, future research could look to incorporate more varying groups to offer a chance for reflection and comparison. Similarly, while there does exist some research focusing on men's participation in fitness spaces (Hakim, 2018), future research could go beyond studying women's participation in fitspo communities to explore any differences and/or continuations. Given the discussions of images used for political uses (Chapter 8), in conjunction with hashtags such as #TakeBackFitspo (Lucas and Hodler, 2018), it could also be worthwhile for future research to consider in more detail the growth of the (perceived) political implications of fitspo imagery, specifically that of Instagram versus reality images, and perhaps what alternative approaches could be taken. Similarly, while perhaps adjacent to fitspo content on Instagram, future research could acknowledge fitspo content in the context of the recent growth of 'wellness', to once again consider the continuations in these two similar digital communities, but also where they may stake their differences for how bodies can become. Such approaches could additionally be useful to avoid slipping into narratives that always already place women as being victimised and damaged through their consumption of images, acknowledging women as media producers and images as capable of instigating capacities beyond that which are limiting.

Finally, future research could look to build upon the complexity and contradictory feelings of engaging with fitspo imagery discussed here through setting up specific groups to engage with young people more broadly about their social media participation in ways that do not overstate the 'negative effects' of images. For example, through schools, youth centres, or charities, groups could hold discussions that, while acknowledging the lack of diversity in some digital communities, and the extent of digital editing and curated imagery, *also* looks to challenge some of the broader values on which things such as 'feeling fat' (Chapter 6), 'looking fitter' (Chapter 5) or being 'inappropriately sexual' (Chapter 7) are founded in ways that promotes dialogue, discussion and critical reflection. While it is clear that some of these conversations were being had on Instagram (Chapter 8), this must be matched by concerted efforts outside of a platform that ultimately thrives and profits off the visibility of normative bodies, moderation policies that police particular bodies, and that fail to protect visible women (Chapter 7).

The arguments and implications produced through this thesis are important, then, as they begin to hint at ways our relations to images could be changed. That is, my arguments demonstrate that "in order to know differently, we have to feel differently" (Hemmings, 2012, p.150), as the way such images are *affective* are not divorced from, but are rather actively informed by and reproduce broader sociocultural feelings that *already* demarcate value to particular bodies, becomings, and ways of living over others. How women come to and engage with the fitspo assemblage is *already informed* by these values, and thus while changing the kinds of images that are engaged with may have some positive implications in terms of, for example, widening the diversity of the kinds of bodies that can be seen, it does little to challenge the often deep-rooted and historical ways in which particular bodies are known (Ahmed, 2004; Murray, 2008). This suggests that work needs to be done to understand how and why we feel the way we do about particular bodies, how and why some bodies become 'sticky', using this knowledge to challenge the persistence of inequalities on a broader scale that does not pathologise nor put the onus entirely on the individual. Through attributing fault not to images but instead thinking about how the affects of images are embedded within their broader contexts and embodied histories of the viewer, it becomes possible to begin to radically shift the way we perceive and *feel* about images, rather than just removing them from sight, or replacing them with images that do little to decentre normative bodies (Chapter 8).

To conclude, in their collaborative analysis of their work conducted with school age children, Coleman and Ringrose advocate for the utility that thinking through gendered relations of power through the kinds of philosophical lens that Deleuze and Guattari can offer. They argue powerfully that "[w]hen social scientists find and map the capture, fixing and unfixing of the body and its machinic connections they offer hope and possibility for something different in the social" (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013b, p.142). In similar ways, then, this thesis has not looked to present a 'one-size-fits-all' solution here to the 'problem' of fitspo images, instead opting to map out the different becomings that have been made possible. However, as Deleuze and Guattari (2004) remind us, and as Coleman and Ringrose take up, while bodies may become fixed through molar, territorialized stratifications of power, there is always the potential to become otherwise through molecular lines of flight. Consequently, through having traced alternative ways to think *through* and *about* young women's engagements with fitspo imagery, being cognizant of images' sociocultural contexts, their visceral affects, their entanglements with bodily surveillance, and women's often contradictory and complex engagements with them, this thesis has offered a means to think about how it may be possible to feel and relate to images differently, adding to the manifold ways in which bodies can become.

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Appendix A Participant information

* denotes pseudonym

Aimee, 27, Sheffield, white/black Caribbean

Artika, 27, London, Sri Lankin Tamil

Beth, 20, Tamworth, White British

Charlotte, Leeds, White

Daria, 19, Leeds, White British

Elle, 23, York, White British

Emma, 25, Leeds, White-British

Eryn, 23, Manchester, Jamaican/English/Irish

Grace, 24, Leeds, White

Happie, 26, Newcastle upon Tyne, Indian

Helen, 26, Tamworth, White

Jen, 22, Leeds, White British

Jessie, 23, Darlington, White

Jodie, 22, Leeds, White

Kay, 28, Leeds, Japanese

Lauren, 24, York, White

Lianna, 20, Leeds, White British

Lily, 29, Leeds, Italian

Lorna, 22, Newcastle, White

Anna*, 25, Bradford, White

Megan, 23, Leeds, White British

Mollie, 20, Leeds, White

Nim, 21, Leeds, White

Pippa, 27, Leeds, White

Reanne, 27, Leeds, Mixed White and Black Caribbean

Salma, 19, Leeds, British-Asian

Sam, 25, Preston, White British

Sarah, 23, Newcastle, White

Tania, 23, York, White British

Zoe, 20, White British, Leeds

Appendix B Consent form

(in)visible Bodies, Images, Instagram: Exploring the Possibilities of Becoming Through Young Women's Production and Circulation of Health and Fitness Related Image Content[1]

The following consent form has been issued to you in order to help you decide how far you consent to participate in this research project. There are two sections to this form. This is quite a long form, so I advise setting some time aside to read through it thoroughly.

Section 1 asks you to note your consent to your images being used 1) in analysis 2) in the research interviews 3) in the thesis and 4) in any research outputs (this could take the form of but is not limited to journals, books, or book chapters). It will ask you to consider which kinds of images you consent to being used, and whether you would like them to be digitally altered or not so as to protect your anonymity.

Section 1 also asks you to consider whether you would like me to use pseudonyms for your 1) real name and 2) Instagram username. The use of these names will be the same in analysis, the research interviews, in the thesis and in any research outputs.

Section 2 is a more general consent form that seeks to establish that I, as a researcher, have informed you in full about the research, including any risks, and that you have consented to taking part. As above, you should at the very least spend a few days considering the form before consenting to taking part.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any questions at all about the consent form, or about the research more broadly. I can be contacted via a text or phone call (07969217079), on Instagram (@lrmresearch), or email (L.R.Milor@leeds.ac.uk)

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[1] This appendix, and those that follow, were produced in 2018. Because of this, the title that these appendices use are reflective of the working title of the thesis at that time.

Once you have read and signed the information overleaf, please add your information and sign below:

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date*	

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

	Please add your initials as well as a YES or NO response
I consent to my Instagram images and posts that I have uploaded for the research project being used and understand the implications of this for data analysis	
I consent to my Instagram images and posts that I have uploaded for the research project being used and understand the implications of this within research interviews with other participants	
I consent to my Instagram images and posts that I have uploaded for the research project being used and understand the implications of this within the thesis	
I consent to my Instagram images and posts that I have uploaded for the research project being used and understand the implications of this within research outputs (for example but not limited to journals, books, conferences)	

Section 1a: Images and Pseudonyms

Section 1b: Use this section to indicate whether you would like your images to be digitally altered or not:	Add your initials if you agree	**OR** add your initials if you do not want your images to be digitally altered
I would like my images to be digitally altered if they are used within the thesis		
I would like my images to be digitally altered if they are used within research outputs (for example but not limited to journals, books, book chapters, conferences)		

Section 1c: Anonymity

I do want a pseudonym to be used in the research for my real name / I do not want a pseudonym to be used in the research and I consent that the lead researcher can use my real name **(delete where appropriate and add your initials in the box)**	
I do want a pseudonym to be used in the research for my Instagram name / I do not want a pseudonym to be used in the research, and I consent that my Instagram username can be used in the research **(delete where appropriate and add your initials in the box)**	

Section 2	Add your initials to indicate your consent
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw until 01.09.2019 without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences.	
I understand that I should email Lauren Milor (L.R.Milor@leeds.ac.uk) should I wish to withdraw from the research. As part of this, I understand that following withdrawal it is up to me to decide whether data already collected can be used or not.	
I understand that should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	

I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research. I understand that the data that can be accessed by others will be made anonymous, irrespective of the consent form above.	
I understand that other genuine researchers and/or the supervisory team will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by auditors from the University of Leeds where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change during the project and, if necessary, afterwards.	
I agree to my data being used for secondary analysis, in accordance with the above terms and conditions and the consent forms in section 1A and 1B, as part of other studies carried out by the same lead researcher.	

Appendix C Information sheet

(in)visible Bodies, Images, Instagram: Exploring the Possibilities of Becoming Through Young Women's Production and Circulation of Health and Fitness Related Image Content

This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee on 18/07/2018, ethics reference AREA 17-153. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

Thank you for considering to take part in this research project. Before you agree to take part it is important that you understand the purpose of this research and what it will entail. Please take time to read through the following information to help you decide if it is something you would like to take part in. Please contact Lauren Milor (07969217079 / L.R.Milor@leeds.ac.uk / @LRMresearch [Instagram]) if there is anything that is unclear or would like more information on. If you would like this information in an alternative format, please contact Lauren on the contact details above.

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of this project is to explore what images can do in their production and circulation on Instagram. The specific images that will be explored will be those that are taken by young women as part of documenting their health and fitness goals. This could include, but is not limited to, images such as selfies, full body shots, before and after images, workout footage, and food intake. Given there has been an increase in these kinds of images being produced and circulated on Instagram, for example, as can be seen in relation #fitspo and/or more recently #wellness bloggers/influencers, one of the main aims of this research is to explore these images from a feminist perspective. Rather than suggesting direct cause-and-effect relationships between images taken/viewed and things such as body image, self-esteem and bodily regulation etc, this research seeks to explore these relations in a more nuanced manner that is attentive to the sensory and affective dimensions of producing and circulating images. Finally, as part of feminist scholarship, a key aim of this research is to explore the bodily management and surveillance practices of women as they become entangled with technology (mobile phones, cameras, and Instagram) – what continuations do we see with these practices, but also, what may change or take place differently because of the technologies involved. The fieldwork itself should take around 9-10 months to complete.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate in this research because you are a woman aged 16-30 who has a public Instagram profile that you use to document your health and fitness goals and endeavours, where these goals may be related to weight loss, body management/recomposition or general documentation of one's health and fitness. You have been invited to take part because the researcher believes that those who participate in these kinds of practices are best suited to provide an insight into these practices. There will be approximately 20-25 other women participants in this study.

What do I have to do if I agree to participate?

The first part of this research will involve me spending a couple of hours with you at your local gym, at a time and day of your convenience. As part of this, I will ask you to take an image (still or video) while we are there – something that you may ordinarily take, such as a selfie, a full body shot or workout training. While you are doing this, I will ask you to narrate the process of taking the image to me. If you are happy for this image to go onto Instagram, I will ask if either you or I could upload it and hashtag (#) the image with #LRMresearch. This is the hashtag that is used for this research project.

Between this and the interview taking place, and any time afterwards, I would like to invite you to share any other images you feel comfortable sharing with the same hashtag. These will be used within interviews with others, and in my own individual research analysis, so when you are deciding whether to hashtag these images please be aware others within the research will be able to see them. They could also be used in dissemination. On the consent form, you can indicate how you would like these images to be used and if you do not want them to be used outside of the research analysis then please make this clear on the consent form. You will face no repercussions if you decide that you do not want your images to be used outside of the interviews and analysis – they are your images and it is completely up to you. Please see the section on confidentiality below for more information on this, or ask Lauren.

There will be also be a one-to-one interview at a time and location that is convenient to you. During the interview you will be asked in greater detail about the process of taking the image, but also other images you have taken and circulated on Instagram. We will search for the research hashtag on one of our phones so we can look at the other images that have been produced and circulated and discuss these too. The interview will take place in a more conversational way than in a strict interview format. If you consent, these interviews will be audio recorded, so I can transcribe and analyse them at a later date.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks to you in taking part in this study. However, there could be slightly increased risk than if you had not participated in relation to other

people finding your Instagram profile if you choose to not have your images or username concealed and this gets published – for example, friends, family or co-workers that do not ordinarily have access.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits to you for taking part in the study. However, in using the research hashtag, you may get to know others who have similar goals and interests to you. You may also find it of some benefit to have the space to reflect on your Instagram practices.

Am I required to take part?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no penalties or negative repercussions for those who choose not to take part, or who choose to withdraw. You are able to discontinue participation at any time within this study **prior** to 01.09.2019, as the final data set will have been produced by this time and amendments to the data will not be possible.

Will my taking part in this research be kept confidential / what will happen to the results of the research project?

While it is common for researchers to utilise pseudonyms in studies in order to protect the participant's anonymity, I am going to leave this decision up to you. The reason for this is because some people use

Instagram as a way to earn revenue, whether through sponsorships, affiliations or receiving free goods. Because of this, you may find it beneficial to have your Instagram username being used in research which could get published, as it may increase traffic to your page. Despite this, I would advise that you **do** use pseudonym for your real name and your Instagram username.

Because of the research hashtag, other people will be able to see the images that you share in the research project, and who you are. This may mean you gain more followers from participating, and/or more women to engage with online who participate in the study. However, it also means that I cannot guarantee that others in the study will keep your identity confidential. For this reason, it may be worth considering which images you are comfortable sharing with others as part of the research project.

Finally, this research uses images that you have taken in the interviews, in the analysis and potentially in the dissemination stage. *The only images that could be used are those that you have marked with the hashtag. I will not use any from your profile that you have not tagged with the hashtag.* Given the nature of some of the images (e.g selfies, body shots), it is difficult to guarantee confidentiality if you give permission for them to be used. However, if you do consent to these images being used, but you would like them to be edited, they can be digitally altered so that it is hard to discern who is in the image.

By hashtagging your images with #LRMresearch, you are consenting them to be used in the research project. On your consent form, you are able to decide *how far* you consent to them being used. You can consent to all four uses, or any combination of them, using the consent form.

Storage of data

The data produced in this research will be stored on an encrypted University of Leeds computer. Hard copies of consent forms will be stored in a locked drawer.

Withdrawing

You will face no penalties if you choose to withdraw from the study. If you withdraw before 01.09.2019, your data will be deleted and not used. If you withdraw after this date, it will not be possible to withdraw your data.

Further resources
Participating in discussions about dieting, body image, weight, exercise and so on may be potentially distressing or upsetting. Please remember at any time you can ask for certain things not to be discussed or to move on to another question. However, if you find this has affected you after the interviews have taken place, here are some resources you may find useful:

www.mind.org.uk – an England and Wales based charity that aims at supporting people who have mental health issues.
@healthgrowglow – an Instagram account founded by Grace Victory aimed at producing a community centred upon body positivity, healing and growth.
http://www.melissafabello.com/#writing – Dr Melissa A Fabello has written on the dieting industry, body image and body positivity.
Eat Up by Ruby Tandoh – A book celebrating the pleasures of food, whilst covering a wide range of topics from mental health tips to recipe ideas.

Thank you for reading through this information sheet.

Lead researcher: Lauren Milor
Contact information: 07969217079 / L.R.Milor@leeds.ac.uk / @LRMresearch (Instagram)
School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
Lead supervisor: Tom Campbell
Contact information: T.W.Campbell@leeds.ac.uk

School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT

Appendix D Interview guide

Beginning:

- Check how participant is feeling, how they have been
- If they have any questions before beginning
- Double checking it is okay to record

Topic 1: Reflections on image production

- Reflecting upon the ethnography as a whole; e.g was it typical of how they would usually occupy space in their gym, how they found it
- Reflect specifically on image-taking exercise; e.g how it felt, what they felt was distinctive about it
- Reflecting on engagement on images produced; e.g which ones gain more engagement, which ones do not

Topic 2: Reflections on image circulation

- Reflecting upon Instagram; e.g what images caught their eye, why
- Reflecting on images they had uploaded and images they had not
- Role of Instagram in their self-tracking – why do they do it? How does it feel to do it?
- Role of community – how far do you engage with others?
- What kinds of images do they feel most engagement with? Why? How?

Topic 3: Affordances of Instagram

- Why Instagram as a space to upload images?
- Distinguishing and exploring differences between Instagram stories and profile
- Filters, videos, Boomerangs, editing

Topic 4: Exploring gender

- Reflecting on gender; how do they feel gender plays a role?
- Specific focus on things that they view (e.g by others, specifically within the digital ethnography + bigger profiles) + things they produced
- Exploring the kinds of women's bodies they view, engage with, their own body in this process

Topic 5: Ways of living and being

- Discussions on the kinds of practices and images they upload; why do they upload specific things?
- Reflection on notions of health, bodies – what do they tend to see? What do they tend to upload? Why do they think this is?
- What kinds of reactions, feelings are evoked when certain images are viewed?
- What is health, how does this become circulated across the platform? How?
- What do they feel is missing?

Topic 6: Becoming

- What do they feel they get out of using Instagram as a platform in this way? What does it enable in contrast to other platforms?
- How does viewing other images related to the things they upload shape (or not) how they feel about their body? How do they view their body in relation to these other images?
- How does viewing other images related to the things they upload shape (or not) how they feel about their lifestyle, health, practices etc? How do they view these things in relation to these other images?
- How does the production and circulation of these images facilitate these feelings, thoughts, ways of living etc?

End

- Thank them for taking part, ask if they have any other questions
- Remind of contact details in case they want to get in touch for any reason.

Appendix E Recruitment materials

Figure 6 Image circulated as a poster around the University of Leeds

Figure 7 Image circulated on social media (Instagram and Twitter)