

FITSPIRATION'S PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON BODY IMAGE AND EXERCISE
BEHAVIOR FOR YOUNG ADULTS

BY

KATRYN CHRYST

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Recreation, Sport and Tourism
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2020

Urbana, Illinois

Master's Committee:

Associate Professor Toni Liechty, Chair
Assistant Professor Suiwen (Sharon) Zou

ABSTRACT

Research has found that traditional media, such as magazines and television can influence body image concerns among both men and women (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2014; Barlett et al., 2008; Grab, Ward & Hyde, 2008). However, social media may uniquely contribute to body image as it features the users themselves; users tend to post curated and edited idealized images of themselves and remove images deemed unattractive; and it allows instantaneous and interactive communication with peers (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). This study looked specifically at the influence the social media trend of Fitspiration (fit and inspiration) may have on body image and exercise behavior. Fitspiration content aims to encourage health and wellness activities (Boepple et al., 2016). However, Fitspiration can also promote a distorted and objectifying view of fitness, one that encourages the attainment of physical attractiveness over health (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017). There is a gap in the literature into how participants interpret their experience as influenced by Fitspiration. As there have been very few qualitative body image studies, this research used a phenomenological approach to illuminate the role that Fitspiration plays in the experiences of young men and women and their perceptions of body image and reasons to exercise. The sample consisted of six women and five men between the ages of 22 and 25 who self-identified as regular consumers of Fitspiration on Instagram. Findings suggest that there is a complexity in Fitspiration's influence on behavior and beliefs that are nuanced. Fitspiration was perceived to perpetuate a fit ideal that increased tendencies of social comparisons resulting in either self-enhancing or self-deflating comparisons. Additionally, Fitspiration influenced exercise participation by motivating consumers to either maintain or increase their participation levels.

To my family, friends and Riley.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In little more than a decade, social networking sites (SNS) have emerged as a go-to-platform for individuals to connect, communicate, and share knowledge with one another (Auxier et al., 2019). In 2005, 5% of US adults were found to use SNS. The share has risen to 72% of US adults, according to a survey conducted in early 2019 (Auxier et al., 2019). As the prevalence of social media has risen in the last decade, there has been a rise in research aimed at exploring the influence it may have on users. A prevalent concern raised has been social media's relationship with body image. As traditional media (e.g., television, magazines) has been found to influence and promote body image concerns, particularly among women (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2014), research has explored the role social media may have on body image as well. Cross-sectional research has found a negative relationship between body image and social media use, particularly photo based SNS (Cohen et al., 2017). Research has identified two primary features on SNS's that may influence body image perception; an increasing tendency to participate in upward social comparison and thin and fit ideal internalization (Cohen et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Uhlmann et al., 2018). According to social comparison theory, individuals will self-evaluate based on comparison with others (Festinger, 1954). Upward social comparison refers to comparisons with those that are considered socially superior (Festinger, 1954). Thin and fit ideal internalization is the extent to which individuals buy into, incorporate, and accept the values relating to a specific ideal to the point that it affects behavior (Uhlmann et al., 2018).

Studies that have focused on thin and fit ideal internalization have looked at social media content with the tag of "Fitspiration" or "Thinspiration" (Cohen et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Uhlmann et al., 2018). Fitspiration is a

combination of the words fit and inspiration and is a social media tag aimed at encouraging participation in health and wellness activities such as dieting and exercise (Boepple et al., 2016). Thinspiration is the same type of tag but is more focused on weight and appearance. A comparative analysis of Fitspiration and Thinspiration found that Fitspiration had six times more dedicated accounts than Thinspiration (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). Fitspiration social media content may include images, video and text that are mostly user-generated and can be easily accessed and shared among consumers (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). However, rather than encouraging healthy behaviors, a content analysis of Fitspiration content found that the majority of the messaging promoted an overvaluation of physical appearance, eating concerns and excessive exercise (Boepple & Thompson, 2014).

Research has suggested that Fitspiration media which emphasizes appearance may be particularly concerning for active image-based SNS users' body image as it may overemphasize appearance values. Not only has the consumption of image-based SNS, such as Instagram, been found to lead to higher levels of body image dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2018), following appearance focused accounts has been found to positively correlate with thin-ideal internalization, body surveillance, drive for thinness (Cohen et al., 2017), self-objectification and social comparison (Andrew et al., 2016). Self-objectification occurs when individuals internalize how others perceive them and, therefore, continuously monitor their outward appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The behavior of constant self-monitoring has been suggested to lead to body shame and dissatisfaction (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2005; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012). Social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves to others as somehow better or worse. Constant social comparison can lead to a desire to change appearance, an

increase in exercise motivated by appearance negotiation and lower body satisfaction (Grogan, 2016).

Body image is a multifaceted construct that includes both perception and attitude of one's own body, can be both a positive and negative evaluation and has both a positive and negative influence over behavior (Grogan, 2016). Dissatisfaction and negative body image can lead to multiple health and wellness issues. Studies have shown that a negative body perception has been found to significantly correlate with poor wellness behaviors in adult women such as worsened sleep, decreased consumption of nutrient-dense foods, less exercise enjoyment and has been found to result in feelings of self-criticism, upset, shame, guilt, worry, and failure (Becker et al., 2017). For men, negative body perception has been found to predict lower self-esteem, worsened stress-coping, higher psychological distress, depressive symptoms and concerns with gender role norms (Murnen & Karazsia, 2017).

A primary lifestyle mechanism to combat body dissatisfaction is an increase in healthy physical activity (Cash et al., 2005; Grogan, 2016). Participating in exercise has been found to heighten levels of self-esteem, self-worth and empowerment (Hubert et al., 2008; Moore, 2011). However, when participating in exercise due to appearance-based motivation, such as to lose weight or alter one's bodily appearance, studies have found that participants may experience an increase in body dissatisfaction, and a decrease in both motivation and participation levels (Fisher et al., 2018; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012; Wasilenko et al., 2017). Paradoxically, when body dissatisfaction influences reasons to participate in exercise, studies have shown that women may feel compelled and obligated to either increase or continue participation due to a pressure to obtain physical attractiveness or an idealized body physique, which is ultimately problematic (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; T. Liechty et al., 2006; O'Hara et al., 2014).

Though there has been a rise in “Fitspiration” SNS accounts that aim to motivate individuals to engage in exercise, few studies have looked at users’ perceptions of Fitspiration, the role in body image, or the impact these accounts have on actual exercise behavior. Research has found that viewing Fitspiration accounts can increase motivation to exercise (Robinson et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), however actual exercise behavior did not occur. Furthermore, motivation may be influenced by a heightened sense of body image dissatisfaction (Robinson et al., 2017) and individuals tend to increase or maintain their levels of exercise participation due to a pressure to portray and achieve a certain body ideal (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; T. Liechty et al., 2006; O’Hara et al., 2014).

Conceptual Frameworks

This study will use Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and Leisure Constraint Theory (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991) as a conceptual framework. Social Comparison Theory is a widely used theory within body image research (Andrew et al., 2016; Fardouly et al., 2017; Hendrickse et al., 2017; Hogue & Mills, 2019; Robinson et al., 2017) and will help identify ways in which individuals may be influenced by Fitspiration imagery. Social comparison theory states that individuals will determine their own social and personal self-worth and are inclined to compare themselves to others as somehow better or worse (Festinger, 1954). Leisure constraint theory will help identify ways in which individuals may increase or decrease their exercise behaviors. The theory states that individuals may experience factors that limit the formation of a leisure preference or that inhibit or prohibit participation in an activity (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991). However, Shaw et al. (1991) expanded the model and suggested that leisure constraints not only reduce participation but may also decrease the level of enjoyment or even increase engagement within a leisure activity that is not preferred due to outside pressure.

Significance of the Study

According to a survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers Health Research Institute, nearly 90% of American young adults have reported they would trust health related information found on social media (PwC, 2012). More than 40% of respondents reported that information found via social media would affect their approach to diet and exercise (PwC, 2012). This could be troublesome as health and fitness social media accounts, specifically Fitspiration accounts, can promote a distorted and objectifying view of fitness, one that encourages the attainment of physical attractiveness over health for both men and women (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017). Acute exposure to appearance framed exercise messages can increase the risks of negative body image (Andrew et al., 2016; Aubrey, 2010; Cohen et al., 2017; Hogue & Mills, 2019), increase pressure to participate in obligatory physical activity (Aubrey, 2010; Robinson et al., 2017), and create compulsive exercise behavior (Bell et al., 2018; Uhlmann et al., 2018).

However, there is a gap in the literature into how participants interpret their exercise experience as influenced by social media. Studies have suggested that exercise experience can go one of three ways; participants may heighten their levels of self-worth and empowerment and create continued exercise habits for health based reasons (Hubert et al., 2008); participants may continue exercise habits but may experience less enjoyable participation and may feel compelled to participate to obtain an idealized body physique (Cohen et al., 2017; Frederick & Shaw, 1995; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015, 2018; Uhlmann et al., 2018); or participants may increase their levels of body dissatisfaction, decrease their levels of exercise motivation and lead to a decreased level of exercise participation (Fisher et al., 2018; J. M. Liechty & Lee, 2015; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012 Wasilenko et al., 2007). However, research is limited as to how and why these outcomes occur for different individuals. As there have been very few qualitative body image

studies, this research will use a phenomenological approach to illuminate the role that athletic ideal imagery, specifically Fitspiration social media, plays in the experiences of men and women and their perceptions of body image and reasons to exercise.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How do young adults experience consuming athletic ideal images on social media?
2. In what ways do young adults perceive athletic ideal imagery to influence their body perceptions, if at all?
3. In what ways do young adults perceive athletic ideal imagery to influence their physical activity participation, if at all?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Body Image Overview

Clinical and academic interest in body image interest originated with the 1920s works of Paul Schilder, who argued that body image is both a perception and reflection of attitudes and interactions with one another. Schilder defined body image as "the way in which the body appears to ourselves" (Schilder, 1950, p. 11). Until the 1980s most investigations of body image were conducted with young women and primarily focused on eating disorders, which reinforced the idea that the psychology of body image was only relevant to young women and encompassed only weight and shape concern (Grogan, 2016). Since then, there has been a shift in research that includes studies on boys, men, girls, older women and men, and a broader, more multifaceted definition of body image (Grogan, 2016). Today, the concept of body image has developed to include both perception and attitude towards the body, can demonstrate both a positive and negative affiliation, and has both a positive and a negative influence over behavior (Grogan, 2016).

Body image has been traditionally understood through three theoretical perspectives; sociocultural theories, cognitive-behavioral theories, and Objectification Theory (Grogan, 2016). Sociocultural theories propose that body image ideals are communicated and internalized, resulting in either a positive or negative body satisfaction (Tiggemann, 2011). The best known of these models is the Tripartite Influence Model (Van den Berg et al., 2002), which suggests that media, peers, and family are critical influencers in body image ideals. For media specifically, images can be used for comparisons standards. According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals will determine their own social and personal self-worth by comparing themselves to others as somehow better or worse. Individuals will make self-

evaluations based on either upward or downward comparisons with others (Festinger, 1954). Upward social comparison refers to comparisons with those considered socially superior, while downward comparisons reflect comparisons made with those deemed less fortunate (Festinger, 1954).

Most individuals are expected to make self-enhancing downward comparisons (Wilson & Ross, 2000) as upward comparison may be potentially damaging to self-esteem (Major et al., 1991). However, upward social comparisons can be consistent with the desire for positive self-regard through self-improvement and self-enhancement (Collins, 1996; Engeln-Maddox, 2005; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012). In a meta-analysis conducted in 2009 on social comparison and body dissatisfaction, the most influential impact was seen on women and younger people (Myers & Crowther, 2009). Nonetheless, experimental studies have shown that body dissatisfaction can also be increased after viewing idealized models in men (Arbour & Ginis, 2006; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009).

Cognitive-behavioral perspectives of body image derive from a view that body image is conceptualized from social cognitive learning, which then shapes an individual's way of body image evaluation and investment (Cash et al., 2005). The cognitive-behavioral model developed by Cash (2012) emphasizes the importance of cultural socialization, interaction, and communication with others, physical characteristics, and interpersonal characteristics in affecting body image development. Body image evaluation is the positive or negative cognitive appraisals and beliefs an individual has about their body. Body image investment is the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional importance of the body and the efforts to manage or regulate appearance or emotions related to body image evaluations (Cash et al., 2005). When there is a negative body image evaluation, Cash et al. (2005) suggest that people will attempt to cope with

their body image by either avoidance, appearance fixing, or positive rational acceptance. Avoidance entails attempts to evade one's body image thoughts and feelings. Appearance-fixing coping mechanisms encompass attempts to change one's appearance by either concealing or correcting a physical area of the body that is perceived to be unsatisfying. Positive rational acceptance involves the mental and behavioral activities that "emphasize the use of positive self-care or rational self-talk (Cash et al., 2005, pg. 197).

Objectification Theory focuses on the impact that the existing culture has on women specifically (Grogan, 2016). According to Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), women's bodies are socially constructed as objects to be continuously looked at, evaluated, and therefore potentially objectified. The theory argues that constant exposure to multiple forms of body objectification may cause women and girls to gradually see themselves as an 'object' for others to view and evaluate based on their appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification occurs when women internalize how others perceive them and, therefore, continuously monitor their outward appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Within recent body image literature, the behavior of self-monitoring has been found to lead to body shame and body dissatisfaction (Grogan 2016; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012).

Body Image and Exercise Participation

When looking at body image research, it is important to look at physical activity. Physical activity has been found to be positively associated with body image in both men and women (Bassett-Gunter et al., 2017; Fallon & Hausenblas, 2005) and, more specifically, has a significant influence on body satisfaction (Reel et al., 2007). Exercise can not only improve one's physical health (e.g., strength and aerobic fitness levels) but has also been found to increase self-esteem, physical self-worth, and the perception of an attractive body (Moore, 2011).

Additionally, physical activity may influence higher levels of positive self-regard as body appreciation, and functionality appreciation has been seen to be higher in student-athletes compared to non-athletes (Soulliard et al., 2019). Stein et al. (2007) found that an increase in physical activity can have a positive impact on athletic and social self-perception in both girls and boys. Girls who increased their level of physical activity by five or more hours a week were at least 33% more likely to experience an increase in social self-perception (Stein et al., 2007). Boys who increased their physical activity by ten or more hours a week were 45% more likely to experience an increase in social self-perception. Moreover, individuals who decreased physical activity were more likely to have reduced self-perception (Stein et al., 2007). Inversely, women with higher levels of self-worth and self-esteem may be more likely to complete an exercise program compared to individuals with low self-esteem and body image concerns (Hubert et al., 2008).

Exercise motives have been found to have a unique and important connection to body image in both men and women (Tylka & Homan, 2015). Functional exercise motivation, which can range from health, fitness, enjoyment, and mood improvement, has been found to be directly linked to higher body appreciation. Inversely, exercise participation that is motivated by external motives related to appearances, such as weight loss, muscle tone, or improved attractiveness, can lead to an increase in body dissatisfaction regardless of health or fitness benefits (Tylka & Homan, 2015). This is supported by Cash et al. (2005), who found that those that cope with body image concerns using an appearance fixing approach can experience greater body image dissatisfaction, lower levels of self-esteem and self-worth, less positive body image quality-of-life experiences (day-to-day moods, sex life, and relationships) and perceive lower social support from family and friends compared to those who use other coping factors.

Adopting a functional exercise motivation appears to play a central role in positive body image, while appearance exercise motives present a danger to body image for both men and women (Tylka & Homan, 2015). Places to participate in exercise, such as a gym facility, may represent a barrier to creating functional exercise motives and instead promote appearance motives. For example, in an analysis of women's perception of gym culture, Fischer et al. (2018) found that gyms perpetuated and sold 'ideals of bodily perfection' (p. 13) which created a culture of constant self-evaluation on their physical capabilities, appearance, and their expectation to portray high levels of femininity. Additionally, when there is a perceived central theme focusing on weight loss, gyms can be places that influence body dissatisfaction and promote the message that bodies should 'be changeable' (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008). Prichard & Tiggemann (2008) found that time spent exercising within a fitness center positively associated with self-objectification and negatively related to body esteem compared to time spent exercising outside of the fitness center.

Within leisure studies, body image itself has been suggested to act as a constraint to physical activity. Leisure constraints are "factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure." (Jackson, 1997, p. 461). Crawford, Jackson & Godbey (1991) identified a hierarchical model of leisure constraints. Their model identified intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. Structural constraints are physical obstacles such as time, money, and resources (Walker, Scott, & Stodolska, 2016). Interpersonal constraints are the results of social relationships and interactions with others (Walker, Scott, & Stodolska, 2016). Intrapersonal constraints are personal characteristics or psychological attributes (Walker, Scott, & Stodolska, 2016). According to the hierarchical model, when

battling leisure constraints, intrapersonal constraints must be overcome first, then interpersonal, and finally, structural constraints (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991). Shaw et al. (1991) expanded the model and suggested that constraints not only reduce participation but may also decrease the level of enjoyment or even increase engagement within a specific activity. Frederick and Shaw (1995) expanded constraints theory even more by suggesting that leisure activities in and of themselves can be constraining, and those constraints may not necessarily result in reduced participation but may result in decreased enjoyment or even increased involvement in certain activities. Body image perception may be an intrapersonal constraint and may limit leisure participation through reduced participation, increased participation, or less enjoyable participation (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; T. Liechty et al., 2006; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008).

Reduced Participation

A meta-analysis of over 200 studies that analyzed the associations between physical activity, sport, and body image concluded that body image is linked to exercise participation (Sabiston et al., 2019). Physical activity includes both lifestyle (e.g., paid work, household chores), and leisure activity or structured exercise, while sport includes both competitive and recreational activity. The analysis concluded that negative body image was linked with lower levels of participation in both physical activity and sport for both men and women (Sabiston et al., 2019). Although it may seem counter-intuitive, body image has been found to predict decreased physical activity and increased obesity risk over time (Liechty & Lee, 2015). Additionally, poor body image has been discussed qualitatively to be a barrier to participation (Sabiston et al., 2019). For instance, in a study of 334 undergraduate students, Moore et al. (2019) found that poor body image may be predictive of exercise participation or avoidance due to beliefs that engagement would be embarrassing and/or fatiguing.

For women specifically, body image can become a barrier due to a preoccupation with physical appearance and a concern with social comparison. Supporting research by Cash et al., (2005), Prichard & Tiggemann, (2005) found that when the motivation to participate in exercise focuses on appearance reasons, women will either choose not to participate or end participation due to an increase in dissatisfaction with either the activity or dissatisfaction with body physique. For many women with poor body image, body-focused leisure activities are less enjoyable due to preoccupation with physical appearance and concern with social comparison (Fisher et al., 2018; J. M. Liechty & Lee, 2015; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012 Wasilenko et al., 2007). In a sample of college-age and middle-age women, Liechty et al. (2006) found that about 45% of the women in the study chose not to participate in leisure activities based on appearance-related concerns likely due to the body-focused nature of the activities. Additionally, reduced participation is suggested to be influenced by levels of social comparison experienced within the activity (Frederick & Shaw, 1995). The strength of social comparison in dictating behavioral levels was strongly seen in a study by Wasilenko et al. (2007), who found that women who were exposed to a slender person while working out experienced significantly higher body dissatisfaction and exercised for a shorter amount of time compared to those exposed to the same person in a padded suit appearing to look heavier.

Furthermore, when women feel that their attempts to fix their appearances fail, their negative body image perceptions tend to increase, which adversely affects their motivation levels to continue exercise participation. Physical activities that promote a focus on weight loss and appearance-based motivation can lead to body dissatisfaction, decreased motivation, and decreased participation when the expectation of weight loss is not achieved (Fisher et al., 2018; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012; Wasilenko et al., 2007). Huberty et al. (2008) found that within a

long-term exercise program offered to females ages 26-35, failed attempts to lose weight contributed to negative body image, affected motivational levels and self-worth, and influenced dropout rates. On the other hand, women with higher perceived self-esteem and body image were more likely to complete the workout program (Huberty et al., 2008).

Increased Participation

Not only does negative body image decrease participation, but it can also have the opposite effect in which it causes stress that leads to an increase in participation. Primarily focusing on women, studies have shown that individuals may feel compelled and obligated to participate and continue participating in physical activity due to a pressure to obtain physical attractiveness or an idealized body physique (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; T. Liechty et al., 2006; O'Hara et al., 2014). In researching leisure constraints, Liechty et al. (2006) found that more than 92% of participants reported experiencing at least one of the four types of appearance-related constraints towards exercise participation. Constraints included; constraints to participation, constraints to enjoyment, constraints to physically active leisure, and constraints into activities that would promote weight loss (Liechty et al., 2006). The majority of the women within the study felt compelled to participate in physical activity due to the pressure to obtain physical attractiveness (Liechty et al., 2006). Frederick and Shaw (1995) suggested that women may feel obligated to participate in exercise and programs aimed at weight loss and will continue their participation regardless of enjoyment levels. This is supported by O'Hara et al. (2014), who suggested women may feel a sense of pressure to participate and continue participation in an exercise routine to obtain an ideal body.

Not only have studies found that body image dissatisfaction compels women to increase their exercise participation, but body image may have the power to dictate which exercise

activities women feel obligated to participate in. Prichard & Tiggemann (2008) found participants who had higher levels of body dissatisfaction were more likely to participate in a cardio based exercise program compared to a weight-training based program or holistic based program (such as yoga). The weight-training and holistic-based programs were found to be less related to body concerns and more connected to health benefits. In contrast, the cardio based program was found to correlate with an increase in self-objectification and lower body esteem (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008). However, the cardio-based participants may have been predisposed to a heightened appearance concern compared to those that participated in the weight loss or holistic programs (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008).

Less Enjoyable Participation

Frederick and Shaw (1995) investigated ways in which body image might function as a constraint to young women's participation in an aerobics class and found that it did not seem to prevent participation; however, body image was related to factors that decreased enjoyment of the activity (Frederick & Shaw, 1995). Reasons for the reduced enjoyment included concern about appearance in fitness clothing and worry about appearance in comparison to other class members (Frederick and Shaw, 1995). Even if reduced enjoyment is experienced, participation may continue despite the lack of enjoyment. Frederick and Shaw suggest that continued participation may be due to social pressure to achieve an ideal body. The perception of continuing physical participation regardless of enjoyment to obtain an ideal body may be perpetuated within the health and fitness community. In a study on women's perceptions of fitness center culture, participants felt that gyms encouraged the notion of physical activity to be a means of obtaining the ideal body and not necessarily a means of pleasure or enjoyment (Fisher

et al., 2018). Liechty et al. (2006) found that about 60% of the women in the study participated in physical activities that they did not enjoy in the hopes of losing weight.

Additionally, reasons for exercise have been found to positively correlate with the level of enjoyment experienced within the activity. Motivation to exercise, whether based on health or appearance motivation, may determine a woman's level of self-objectification and intrinsic exercise enjoyment (O'Hara et al., 2014). Individuals who exercise for appearance-based reasons may have less satisfaction in the activity compared to those who exercise for health-based reasons (O'Hara et al., 2014).

Body Image and Social Media Consumption

Research has found that traditional media, such as magazines and television, influence body image among both men and women (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2014; Barlett et al., 2008; Grab, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Given the rise in social media use over the last decade (Auxier et al., 2019), research is now beginning to investigate the possible influence it may have on body image. Compared to traditional media, social media may uniquely contribute to body image for several reasons (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Perloff, 2014). First, social media may be an immensely more personal media source than traditional media as social media features the users themselves as opposed to models or television personalities seen in traditional media (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Perloff, 2014). Second, users often present a curated and edited idealized version of themselves and tend to post attractive pictures of themselves and remove images deemed unattractive (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Third, social media tends to be used as a platform to interact with peers, and research suggests that appearance comparisons with peers may influence body image (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Hogue & Mills, 2019). Additionally, social media can be accessed at any time anywhere through the use of mobile

devices, which can exponentially increase the opportunities for appearance comparisons (Perloff, 2014). Lastly, users can comment on social media, which may influence how they feel about their appearance (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

Much of the body image and social media literature has attempted to identify specific features on social networking sites (SNS) that influence body image perception (e.g., Cohen et al., 2017; Uhlmann, 2018). Research suggests there is a positive correlation with time spent on social media and experiencing higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Griffiths et al., 2018; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). However, recent literature has suggested that body image concerns are less likely to be influenced by general social media use and more likely a result of the type of social media consumed (Cohen et al., 2017; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Griffiths et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2017) found that following appearance focused social media accounts positively correlated with thin-ideal internalization, body surveillance, and a drive for thinness while following appearance-neutral accounts (such as traveling accounts) was not associated with any body image perception or outcome. Consumption of appearance media may negatively predict lower self-objectification, social comparison, and thin-ideal internalization (Andrew et al., 2016). Additionally, as Instagram is a highly appearance-based social media, users have been found to score significantly higher in body surveillance and self-objectification than non-Instagram users (Cohen et al., 2017).

The influence that appearance-based social media has on body image is problematic as there has been a continuing rise in image-based social media sites and an increase in users, specifically among young adults (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Additionally, appearance-focused media has the power to influence what men and women believe to be an ideal body, which can lead to body image concerns (Grogan, 2016). Historically, society has idealized slenderness for

women and muscularity for men (Grogan, 2016). While there is still a societal muscular idealization for men, women's body ideal has begun to shift in recent years from a thin ideal to a more fit ideal (Grogan, 2016). The shift from a thin to fit ideal can be seen in the rising trend of social media sites devoted to "Fitspiration" (fit and inspiration), which present images aimed at promoting health and fitness (Grogan, 2016). A content analysis of Fitspiration and Thinspiration (thin and inspiration, a tag less focused on health and more on appearance) found that Fitspiration has six times more dedicated accounts than Thinspiration (Tiggemann et al., 2018). However, though the aim is to promote health and wellbeing, Fitspiration accounts have been found to result in body dissatisfaction and lower levels of self-esteem (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). An increase in body dissatisfaction may be due to Fitspiration's tendency to promote a high evaluation on appearance (Boepple et al., 2016). Additionally, Fitspiration may influence body image perception as it may increase the tendency to participate in the internalization of a fit ideal and upward social comparison (Cohen et al., 2017; Tiggemann et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018; Uhlmann et al., 2018).

Fit Ideal Internalization

Internalization is the extent to which individuals buy into, incorporate, and accept values relating to beauty ideals to the point that it affects behavior and body image perception (Uhlmann et al., 2018). Fardouly et al. (2017) found that the frequency of viewing Fitspiration images may indirectly influence body image concerns. Interestingly, viewing Fitspiration images may be more detrimental to body image than viewing images that promote traditionally thin ideals. Uhlmann et al. (2018) found a negative relationship with muscular image internalization and body dissatisfaction among women. However, when the muscular images were internalized alongside the thin-ideal, there was no longer a significant relationship with body dissatisfaction,

suggesting that muscular idealization may only be associated with lower body dissatisfaction when internalized alone. This is supported by Robinson et al. (2017), who found that participants who viewed athletic ideal images reported greater body dissatisfaction than participants who viewed traditional thin ideal images. For men, following Fitspiration accounts were associated with greater muscular ideal internalization, which in turn was associated with poorer body satisfaction (Fatt et al., 2019). Greater body dissatisfaction may be due to the perception that an ideal body should be achievable if enough time and effort are put into maintaining a healthy lifestyle of exercise and dieting, therefore putting the responsibility on the individual to alter their appearance (Robinson et al., 2017).

Social Comparison

The literature on social media and its influence on body image perception suggests that social comparison has a strong effect on body image concerns. Andrew et al. (2016) suggest there is a link between appearance-based media consumption and social comparison tendencies explained through the tripartite influence model of sociocultural influences (peers, parents, and the media) (Thompson et al., 1999). Hogue & Mills (2019) found that young adults who engage in image-based SNS that focused on images of attractive peers (upward social comparison targets) experienced increased body image concerns than before doing so. Similarly, Fardouly et al. (2017) found that upward social comparisons made through social media were more positively associated with less positive mood than upward social comparisons made in person or through traditional media (e.g., television, magazines, billboards). For women, viewing Fitspiration was found to lead to dissatisfaction in body image mediated by appearance comparison, suggesting that women tend to compare their appearance to the fit idealized images (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2015). Similarly, men's experience with Fitspiration has been found

to directly lead to higher appearance comparisons, which indirectly led to lower body satisfaction (Fatt et al., 2019).

Social Media and Exercise Participation

Though there has been a rise in Fitspiration SNS accounts that aim to motivate engagement in exercise, few studies have looked at the impact these accounts have on exercise participation. Research has found that both men and women report being motivated and inspired to exercise after viewing Fitspiration images, yet motivation has not been shown to translate into a positive physical activity routine (Easton et al., 2018; Palmer, 2015). Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) found that women reported being motivated and inspired to exercise after viewing Fitspiration images, yet the study did not measure whether the inspiration translated into behavior. Robinson et al. (2017) found that viewing Fitspiration imagery increased women's intentions to exercise, but this did not translate into actual exercise behaviors within a lab setting. Conversely, a study on Fitspiration's influence on men's behavior showed that, unlike women, Fitspiration consumption did not correlate with either exercise motivation or behavior (Fatt et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore the role that athletic ideal imagery, specifically Fitspiration social media, plays in the experiences of young adults and their perceptions of body image and reasons to exercise. The findings provided insight into the ways in which both men and women perceive their behavior to be influenced (or not) by Fitspiration accounts. Specifically, the study looked at ways in which Fitspiration was perceived by men and women with differing exercise behaviors as exercise adherence has been found to foster positive body image perception (Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012) and viewing Fitspiration has been found to foster negative body image perception (Fardouly et al., 2017). The objectives of this study are to understand: (1) how young adults experience consuming athletic ideal images on social media; (2) the perceived influence (if any) athletic ideal imagery has on body perceptions; and (3) the perceived influence (if any) athletic ideal imagery has on physical activity participation.

Qualitative Research

In order to understand the experience of individuals viewing fit ideal imagery, a qualitative approach was used for the study. Qualitative research is based on the view that knowledge is constructed by people engaging in and making meaning through their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and enables researchers to examine social practices and processes (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The majority of existing body image research tends to be quantitative, which can limit the potential breadth and depth of findings (Liechty & Yarnal, 2010). As body image is a subjective construct (Bailey et al., 2017), a qualitative approach was used to garner information and meaning from the perspectives of the participants (Savin-Barden & Major, 2013). Moreover, social media is a relatively new phenomenon, and a qualitative

approach is ideal for understanding how people make sense of new experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach was utilized for this study. The purpose of phenomenology is to illustrate people's conscious experience of their "everyday life and social action" (Schram, 2003, p. 71). Phenomenology describes the obvious but also aims to expose the sometimes taken-for-granted assumptions of what individuals accept to be true (Sokolowski, 2000). The truth of an event is subjective and relative only through embodied perception (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Phenomenology involves an in-depth analysis of individual lived experiences and seeks to capture the meaning and common features of the shared experience or event (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

This study specifically sought to understand the shared experience of consuming Fitspiration content on Instagram and its role in body image perceptions and exercise behavior. Thus, this study was designed using a phenomenological research paradigm to develop a rich analysis of the lived experience of Fitspiration consumption. This was done by interviewing individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon of Fitspiration SNS use (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Sample

The sample consisted of 11 participants (six women, five men) between the ages of 22 and 25 who self-identified as regular consumers of fit ideal images on Instagram. Instagram, an image-based SNS, was chosen as the specific platform due to its visual nature and growing user rate. The rising trend of SNS use has plateaued since 2016, partially due to user saturation, except for Instagram (Hitlin, 2018). From 2016 to 2019, Instagram use has risen from

approximately 27% to 37%, with the majority of users being young adults ages 18-29 (67%) (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Mainly, those aged 19 to 24 are substantially more likely to use the platform than those 25 to 29 years old, 73% versus 57%, respectively (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Of young adult users, 76% visit the site daily, with 60% reporting they do so several times a day (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from two sources. First, with a focus on social media use, participants were recruited from the researcher's own social media pages. An announcement with a detailed description and purpose of the study, as well as contact information, was posted to her social media accounts (see Appendix D: Recruitment Materials). As volunteers were recruited for participation, care was taken to ensure these acquaintances were not strongly acquainted with each other and did not represent the same social circle. Second, a snowball approach was utilized first with the researcher's acquaintances to recruit initial participants, then with the participants themselves. Snowball sampling has been utilized in previous studies to attain additional participants through social connections (Becker et al., 2017; Borkoles et al., 2010; Franko et al., 2015). Snowball sampling was used as a way to accumulate a multitude of perspectives and find new information-rich participants until the data set is saturated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Please see table 1 for detailed background information of all the participants.

Sampling Methods

The study utilized both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Studies apply purposive sampling as a way to intentionally select participants who are well-informed on the topic of interest, represent characteristics of interests to the phenomenon (e.g., age, gender), are willing to participate, and are able to communicate experiences in a reflective and expressive

manner (Etikan, 2016). In previous body image studies purposeful sampling has been used as a way to garner key informants and recruit participants with differing backgrounds (Bailey et al., 2017; Berry et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2019; Fuller-Tyszkiewicz et al., 2018; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012). As the research questions are related to an individual's perception of the relationship between their body image, appearance negotiation tactics, and social media use, the following criteria were used for purposive sampling; a balance of men and women participants as gender has been found to be related to body image (Franko et al., 2015) and physical activity participation (Craft et al., 2017); participants with a diverse range of Fitspiration social media consumption; and participants with a diverse range of exercise behaviors ranging from vigorous, moderate and light to no exercise adherence; participants with a diverse range of Fitspiration social media consumption. Though it would have been preferable to recruit participants who participated in little or no exercise, despite recruitment efforts, none volunteered.

Pseudonym:	Sex:	Age:	Average amount per day viewing Instagram:	Perceived percentage of Instagram feed that is fitness related (i.e. fit ideal imagery, workout videos, information & tips, etc.):	Average days spent exercising per week:	Average length per single exercise session (minutes):
Miller	Female	22	3	50%	3+	30-90 mins
Mikayla	Female	23	4-10	20%	2-5	30-90 mins
Dolly	Female	24	3	20%	5	45-60 mins
Kate	Female	24	5	25%	6	60 mins
Robin	Female	25	10	20%	5	45 mins
Devon	Female	25	20	40%	3	60 mins
Joe	Male	22	25	25%	5	60 mins
Reid	Male	23	15-20	30	3-4	30 mins
Daniel	Male	23	20	70%	6	30-90 mins
George	Male	25	10	5-10%	4	45-90 mins
Paul	Male	25	10	40%	5	45 mins

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured Interview

The study used semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for the interview to follow a schedule but grants the interviewer the autonomy and flexibility to probe details and topics that arise within questioning (Glesne, 2016). Questions developed for the semi-structured interview were developed using an open-ended approach that encouraged engagement from the interview participants (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative studies within body image research have utilized semi-structured interviews as a way to cover themes arising from the literature and simultaneously allow researchers to follow up on topics of interest brought up

by the interview participants (Diedrichs et al., 2011; Easton et al., 2018; Morgan & Arcelus, 2009; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012).

Interview Guide

An interview guide was developed based on the research questions of this study (see Appendix B: Individual Interview Protocol). The interview guide served as a baseline to discuss the ways in which Fitspiration may influence participants' beliefs and behaviors. Additionally, the participants were encouraged to show examples of Instagram Fitspiration accounts they follow to provide the researcher with additional context of their lived experience. Following, body image perception and beliefs were discussed. Some direction for the interview guide was adapted from Easton et al. (2018).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process utilized thematic analysis and a multi-step coding process. Thematic analysis is a tool used to identify patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to derive overarching themes from the interview narratives. Data analysis also included memoeing, which is a way to analyze the data within different contexts and around differing themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a multi-step coding process to identify connections and interconnections between concepts and themes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Open coding was used to identify units of data that either answer or are part of an answer to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Units of data were heuristic and “the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself—that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 354). Axial coding was

used as a way to group the open codes into similar categories based on interpretation and meaning (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The evidence collected was organized within the data analysis software NVivo. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness included note-taking, memo writing, and member checks.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study explored the role that athletic ideal imagery plays in the experiences of men and women and their perceptions of body image and reasons to exercise. Exploring how Fitspiration influences participants' beliefs, behaviors, and body image was the focus of the interview questions. The findings are divided into four sections. The first section examines how participants viewed Fitspiration to be motivational, a common theme among ten out of the eleven participants. The second section explores the factors of Fitspiration perceived to be the most influential by the participants. The third section details ways in which Fitspiration consumption may negatively influence participants' wellbeing. The final section examines tactics adopted by participants to combat any perceived negative influence of Fitspiration. The following chapter will provide a detailed explanation for each theme with reference to the narratives of the participants. Please see table 1 for detailed background information on all participants.

Fitspiration as Motivational

During the interviews, most participants described Fitspiration to be motivational and felt that it inspired them to participate in exercise. For some participants, viewing Fitspiration was perceived to influence their desire to exercise. For example, Kate (24) said, “Generally, I would say it makes me feel like I want to work out more. I think because I really like it (exercising) and I enjoy sweating and getting those endorphins.” Kate’s motivation for exercise seemed to be an internal motivation where she was participating due to the enjoyment of the activity. Other participants, however, displayed external motivations for exercise that were influenced by Fitspiration. For example, Mikayla (23) described Fitspiration as a motivator for her to participate in an active lifestyle. She said,

I want to go hiking someplace cool so I can put it on my story. I think it's a very similar mindset with I want to work out and eat healthy so I can prove to others that I'm fit.

Robin (25), who primarily follows trainers at her current local gym who post daily workouts on their Instagram page, described viewing these posts as both a motivator for her to go to the gym as well as a way to stay committed to her workout routine, “Part of me feels like ‘Hey, get your ass to the gym.’ [Laughs] Which is good, and I think is part of some of the motivation that I’ve stayed at the gym.” Additionally, she feels she “for sure [goes] to the gym more” due to viewing these types of social media posts, and Fitspiration acts as a “good reminder about you have to work for something that you want.”

For others, viewing Fitspiration seemed to provide a motivation to increase their workout intensity levels. Participants used common phrases such as “workout harder” or “push harder.” For example, after she was asked in what ways Fitspiration influences her exercise behavior, Robin (25) said, “I think I push myself harder, especially seeing other people push themselves harder.” Reid (23) said, “[Fitspiration] definitely made me feel at times motivated to go workout and work harder.” Additionally, he said he would be willing to try a workout routine on social media and it may even motivate him to “to go out there and work out longer or work out a different body part that I’ve never worked out before, trying a different exercise or all that kind of good stuff.”

Some participants described Fitspiration as motivation that also influenced their specific fitness goals. Joe (22) explained how his fitness goal is reflective of the type of person he sees on social media. He said, “that’s really my inspiration in terms of fitness. Those specific people that post their workouts and post their diet on Instagram.” On the other hand, Daniel (23) was inspired to change the way he exercises based on the people he began to follow on Instagram. He said,

In the last year, the people that I follow I think have changed the way that I work out a lot. It's become a lot more focused on functionality, longevity and performance.... I think that if I wouldn't have been following those people, if I would have been following more of like bodybuilding types, I wouldn't have had that change which is something I've really enjoyed.

For others, viewing Fitspiration was used to help motivate them to overcome exercise barriers like not having the time, feeling in the mood, or not knowing what workouts to do. Paul (25) described seeing a friend post on Instagram a weight loss picture, which he felt motivated him to try and find time to include exercise in his daily routine. He said, "maybe you just use a page like that to say, 'Hey, look, he's definitely in the last six months was getting up every day and doing something. What's my excuse?'" Devon (25) used Fitspiration as a way to mentally motivate herself when she did not feel like participating in exercise. She said,

If I am in a mood where I really need like a little nudge to go work out... there is this account that I really like. She makes the most delicious healthy desserts, and then she posts a lot of content like working out and stuff. So, I try to look on her things if I'm in a super motivated mood or if I need a little extra.

George (25) described how he uses Instagram to curate an exercise routine when he does not know what to do for his workout. He said he found the platform to "be fairly nice in the sense where if you have that piece of information, they almost created the workout for you."

Ten out of the eleven participants perceived Fitspiration found on Instagram to motivate their exercise behavior. Dolly (24) was the only participant to express she was not motivated by Fitspiration. She said, "looking at other people's bodies or what they do doesn't really motivate me."

Motivational Factors of Fitspiration

Participants revealed multiple factors of Fitspiration that lead to their own perceived exercise motivation. The motivation factors included: ideas & information, others' achievements, and appearance.

Motivated by Information and Ideas

A key factor described by participants as particularly motivational was utilizing the platform for education and generating new ideas for workout routines. For example, Reid (23) utilizes videos to learn and implement different exercise into his fitness routine. He said, "If the person is posting like 'This is a great ab workout' or 'This is a great way to work out this part of your muscle' or whatever, that's usually pretty motivating." For Daniel (23) and Miller (22), both who are personal trainers explained how they use Instagram as a way to come up with new workout routines for both themselves and their clients. When asked how Fitspiration may influence his behavior, Daniel reflected on how he gains workout ideas through a user-friendly platform, saying,

It gives me ideas for things that I might switch up in my workouts or the way I approach a workout with a client. Not everybody always wants to read research articles or the latest results from this study or some critique or something like that. Instagram is a nice casual way to consume information as long as you're keeping an eye out for what has good sources. It's my news feed in terms of exercise. It's where I find different trends and I know what's happening and what's not. So, it's got a big influence in general on me I would say.

For Miller (22), the platform enables her to push herself out of her comfort zone both in terms of how she approaches coaching clients and with her personal exercise routine,

With how easy it is to follow hundreds of different people and look at their different pages, I think it allows me to get outside my comfort zone and think of things differently.... it's nice to be able to follow people to be like, "Okay, this is what this person is doing. That's what this person is doing," and so on, and so on. And just like, being able to see what other people are doing to give yourself ideas.

Other participants who are not personal trainers use the information and ideas they find on social media to curate their own exercise and health routines. Paul (25) commented on how he uses the platform to find out the newest trends on healthy eating and supplements utilized by

individuals on Fitspiration accounts. He will then use the information he learned to try and copy and implement with resources he can get at a lower price. He explains,

They're doing it with an \$80 pre-workout, an \$80 protein and \$100 set of vitamins, minerals and nighttime recovery pills.... I'll be like, "All right, we're taking what they're sharing every day" ...It's like, "Okay, how do I implement this?"

Joe (22) said social media is a source of “true good advice.” He utilizes videos to educate himself on specific exercises that he would like to try and will read captions for healthy lifestyle tips.

Additionally, he said he would save the videos and refer back to them while he was at the gym.

“I save a lot of videos because I’ll see a good exercise, and I ...go back to my saved videos and watch what they do.” George (25) also uses the platform to create an exercise routine, especially when he does not know what to do for that day. He said he found Instagram to “be fairly nice in the sense where if you have that piece of information, they almost created the workout for you.”

Additionally, participants felt that social media provided a tool to help them develop fitness habits or routines. George reflected on how he admired Fitspiration as a way to build a sense of mastery within developing healthy habits. He said Fitspiration,

makes you want to reach a goal.... It just gets you interested. It gets you researching things and I think the more you research, the more you know, the better you could be.... Just put some more tools in your toolbox.

Using Fitspiration to help reinforce implementing healthy habits was also true for both Mikayla (23), Reid (23), and Daniel (23). Mikayla said she believes the platforms allows her to explore ways to implement habits into her life. She describes, “I think the health-focused [social media posts] are to learn more and to maybe shed some ideas on things that I can implement in my own life.” For Reid, Fitspiration provides a way to course-correct within his current fitness routine. He said when he sees a fit guy on social media, his reaction is, “Dang, they’re doing something right.” Consequently, he then described how he would evaluate his current behaviors and modify

based on how his current habits are perceived to help him achieve his fitness goals. Similarly, Daniel had a detailed response as to how he utilizes social media to create new habits for himself. He said,

When you see these videos of people working out, doing these unbelievable things that you might yourself want to do, you wonder how did they get there? What can I do today? What are the little things that people say are so important? Are they waking up early? Are they tracking their sleep? What are they eating? Are they on this diet or that diet? I think questioning other people's habits, and the motives behind them, gives you a better opportunity to form not only the habits you want to have, but with a better understanding of why you're doing them.

All five male participants and two of the female participants described utilizing Fitspiration as a means to gather information and ideas to support exercise and healthy habit implementation. Participants described how acquiring knowledge led to a sense of empowerment that reinforced or encouraged their exercise behaviors. Fitspiration was used to curate and develop an exercise routine by using videos and exercise workouts posted on the platform. Fitspiration was also a way to find information when participants needed guidance for specific exercises or information on implementing healthy habits like healthy eating, drinking water, and getting enough rest.

Motivated by Others — “If they can do it, I can do it”

Six participants perceived Fitspiration to be motivational when they saw others participating in exercise behavior and achieving fitness goals. Viewing social media posts from someone they personally knew were found to be more motivating compared to social media posts from someone participants did not know. Participants described feeling a sense of self-competence and commonly stated: “if they can do it, I can.” For George (25), seeing his friends lose weight encouraged him to do the same. He said, “It’s like “Hey somebody I know is doing

this and they're getting these results. I can also get those results." Paul (25) described a time that he witnessed a friend from high school post on Instagram about how he lost weight,

When you see someone close to home that made a huge change like that and shares it, then you go, "Man, I probably should...try and get back in to just some simple little diet things and watch what you eat a little bit more and spend 30 minutes a day just worried about personal health.

When asked why he felt more influenced by content posted by someone he knew personally versus someone he did not know, Paul explained;

I don't know if it gets to be competitive nature, things like that, but you almost think like, "Man, if I go back home next summer and all of a sudden he is in way better shape than I am, how lazy was I that he made a complete transformation and I couldn't even stay in decent shape," you know?

Robin (25), described her experience of viewing Fitspiration content as "empowering" and mentioned following a specific fitness instructor at her gym. The gym instructor primarily posts workout videos of herself lifting heavy weights or doing high-intensity cardio routines, as well as posting captions on body positivity. Robin said, "The empowering part of seeing how hard she pushed herself and posting sweaty pictures after she's exhausted is kind of like, 'Oh wow, I could do that too.'" When asked if she could explain what she means by empowering, Robin said,

I think especially for females, sometimes there's a connotation that females shouldn't be super strong or males are really supposed to be the ones that are strong. What's cool in [instructor]'s sense is that she's a lot stronger than a lot of guys that I know....I feel like you just don't see as much unless you put yourself in some of those situations of going to the gym with a lot of female instructors.

Additionally, for some participants, a feeling of "if they can do it, I can " came from viewing a social media post by someone perceived to have overcome a barrier to exercise participation. Reid (23) said,

If it's a good friend of mine...that I know has been working really, really hard to get to the point that they're at. It's like, "Oh, hey, great job!" It puts me in a good mood. It

makes me feel good and happy for that person and that makes me feel like, “Oh, hey, if this person was at the point that I was, they’re doing this now, then I can do that.”

On the other hand, Mikayla (23) felt inspired toward exercise after viewing a Fitspiration post of someone she did not know. She described a social media post she saw of a woman doing a workout in her house who has a three-year-old and a newborn baby and described it as motivating as it encouraged her to overcome her personal exercise barriers, which were perceived to be less than the mother of two. She said,

I don’t have kids. I am single. I have free time. If they can do it with two kids and probably no time, then I think it gives me the impression like, “Okay, you can do that too. You don’t have kids and this hectic lifestyle.

Additionally, she described following Paralympic athletes that have suffered traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and how their athletic talents inspired her. She said, “following these accounts of these veterans with TBI’s working out and playing international soccer, that’s inspiring to me. I think sometimes it gets into my head like, ‘Okay, I can do this.’” Even though Mikayla did not know the mom or the Paralympic athletes, she compared herself to their situation. She felt empowered and motivated to exercise because she saw them overcome barriers to participate in exercise.

Joe (22) felt that seeing others that have achieved an idealized fitness level acted as a way to orient himself on his fitness goals in terms of what he was trying to achieve. Fitspiration acts as a motivating factor for him to continue to participate and implement exercise and healthy eating behaviors. He said,

People say never compare yourselves to others because everyone’s body is different. I think that that’s the biggest load of crap, excuse my language. Because you need to be comparing yourself to other people because it’s what pushes you. If you’re not being motivated by others and you’re motivating yourself then you don’t truly know what point you’re trying to get to at the end of time.

Self-enhancing comparisons made through Fitspiration were found to be motivating for the majority of male participants. Four out of five male participants and two of the six female participants described seeing others participate in exercise and achieve fitness goals through Instagram and expressed being inspired and motivated them to do the same. Fitspiration was a way to push themselves towards participating in exercise behavior. If they saw someone else achieving an exercise goal, they felt inspired and motivated that they could do the same. Furthermore, participants expressed a sense of empowerment as they felt more comfortable implementing exercise behavior after seeing someone else demonstrate the experience.

Motivated by Appearance

Three out of the five male participants described motivation to exercise due to appearance reasons as they often commented how the person within the Fitspiration post might “look great” and consequently felt motivated to participate in exercise. For example, Joe (22) uses the platform to continually inspire his fitness journey, which he has been on for about 53 weeks. He said,

I look at these people, and I think, “Wow, I want to look like them. I want to do the same things that they do.” ... It’s a very high goal to have. But that’s really my inspiration in terms of fitness. Those specific people that post their workouts and post their diet on Instagram.

He then spoke about how he curated his social media feed based on the type of appearance goals he had. Joe (22) explained how he does not follow bodybuilding Instagram pages for the “biggest guys” as he feels that there is too much work to achieve that type of body. Instead, he follows “lean bodybuilding.” He said,

There is like the kind of body building that there is for the biggest guys who are just filling out every muscle, and there’s also the lean body building. Those are the guys that I follow because I don’t want to be like the Hulk.

Similarly, Reid (23), discussed his general reaction towards viewing Fitspiration and commented on how it is first of admiration, then as a way to motivate himself to mirror what he sees on social media. He explains, “it’s like, ‘Dang, they’re doing something right’ if they’re looking that way or if you’re working out that much.... Then it’s like, ‘Okay, how do I get to that point? What am I doing differently? What am I doing wrong?’”

Paul (25), on the other hand, felt a pressure to get back into shape after seeing appearance focused images on Instagram. Paul participated in college football and had to gain weight for his specific position. He then described how after college, he was influenced by viewing fit ideal imagery on social media and felt he needed to lose the weight he had gained for his football position. He said, “when I got done and I saw everything on social media it’s like, man I really need to get back in shape. I don’t have college football thing to lean on anymore...you can scroll through Instagram and see the ideal body, so, it’s (pause) I guess a guy better get back in shape a bit.”

Joe (22), Reid (23), and Paul (25) described appearance being a motivational factor that led them to either participating or wanting to participate in exercise. Appearance-based motivation was perceived to strengthen their urgency to get in shape and maintain an exercise and fitness routine.

Fitspiration’s Negative Influence on Wellbeing

Multiple participants described ways that viewing Fitspiration negatively influenced their wellbeing. Negative influences included participating in self-deflating comparison to others that led to experiencing a lowered sense of self-confidence and self-esteem and feeling pressure to increase their exercise behaviors.

A Tendency to Make Self-deflating Comparisons

Although participants often described comparisons as motivating, comparisons were also perceived to have a negative influence. For example, Robin (25), who mainly consumes Fitspiration content from her gym trainer, stated that, for the most part, viewing someone who does the same workout as her is motivational but can also influence her to worry about her body image. She said, "I think sometimes it's like... 'I do the same workouts; why don't I look like that?'" When asked how he feels Fitspiration content affects him, Reid (23) said, "It definitely affects my self-confidence and self-awareness.... It's like, dang, even if I try really hard, I don't know if I'll ever look like that person or be able to lift that much as that person." Specifically, viewing Fitspiration posts that emphasized appearance made him doubt his exercise habits. Reid describes,

If someone's posting like, "Oh, yeah, I hit this mark today" or "Oh, yeah, I'm super jacked" or something like that, it kind of puts me down and it makes me compare myself to them and it gets in my head a little bit about it and I think, "What am I doing wrong?" or "How do I get to that point? Will I ever get to that point?"

Additionally, he said,

I never really fully liked my body image because I'm a big dude. Like, it just is what it is. I've got broad shoulders, a big chest type of stuff. So no matter what, I've always been that way. So it makes me feel, like when I see guys that are like 6' 4" and super-skinny and cut, it's like, "Okay, well, I'm never going to look like that no matter how hard I work."

Consuming Fitspiration from individuals' participants personally knew seemed to promote a tendency to compare more than images of individuals they did not know. Devon (25) explains she feels a sense of "uncomfortableness" when viewing a fit ideal image of someone she knows versus someone she does not know. She said,

At the end of the day, if I know you, that means that I'm not that different than you. So how are you able to do certain things that, to me, I do them and I don't have the same results? But we could be the same person.

For other participants, their sense of self was perceived to be influenced by social media as they felt that Fitspiration perpetuates a fit ideal body as being the status quo and as something to be desired and pursued. Paul (25) described how he may question what other people think of him if his body image is not equivalent to the fit ideal body of his peers and those he sees on social media. He said, “If I’m not at least at par with that person or similar build then you worry, ‘Well, if I don’t look closer to that what do people actually think of me?’” Mikayla (23) explained, “When you’re seeing these posts all the time, I think it is a constant reminder of, oh you have to be healthy, or you have to look like this.” Kate (24), also feeling the same, said,

I am working through the process of trying to love myself and my body more, and that stuff makes it a little bit harder because we’re constantly being thrown these images of the “ideal person” wears this, or uses this, or “Wow that person looks great when they wear this. I want to look like that,” and realizing that that’s probably unattainable for me.

Participants described experiencing self-deflating comparisons when they viewed Fitspiration posts. They wondered, “why don’t I look like that?” and felt a pressure to emulate the fit body ideal. Self-deflating comparisons made through Fitspiration was seen to influence the majority of female participants. Four out of the six female participants and two male participants felt a tendency to compare themselves negatively to someone they saw on a Fitspiration post.

Pressure to Participate in Exercise

Although participants described Fitspiration as being a motivational factor to participate in exercise, some participants discussed how they felt Fitspiration perpetuated a pressure to participate. For example, Daniel (23) describes how he will sometimes feel pressured to maintain the same exercise level or push harder when he is tired. He said,

I would say when I’m definitely more tired like there are times when I don’t sleep enough, or I’ve had a long day, and watching somebody do something crazy... Okay, well, these

people are working this hard, and I want to be like them." Yeah, I'm tired now, but I need to keep going. There's other times when I'm tired, where I just think like, I don't know how these people are doing this. I think that's when self-doubt can come in.

Similarly, Mikayla felt a pressure to increase her exercise behavior and to participate in specific types of exercise due to Fitspiration perpetuating a fit ideal body. Though she did not describe her motivation to exercise to be due to appearance, she explained how she felt there is a general sense that exercise should be participated in to look skinny. She said,

I think [Fitspiration] definitely drives home the point of being skinny and looking good. I think when I'm working out, that goes through my head when I'm running on a treadmill. Like, run this one more lap at this pace so you can look skinny. I think it's definitely that story that we tell ourselves when we're working out. Like, okay, you need to do this so you can look like this. You need to go on the stair stepper so you can have a good butt. All those things I think really influence what type of workouts we do.

On the other hand, Devon (25) felt that Fitspiration perpetuates exercise as being a significant value that should be participated in. She said, "[Exercise] is not something that I've ever enjoyed... I do it because I need to keep my body healthy and stuff. But in that sense, [Fitspiration] just ended up making me feel bad because I wasn't good at it." When asked if she felt pressure to participate in exercise after viewing Fitspiration, Devon responded: "Oh, yeah."

Reid (23) was the only participant that described feeling like he wanted to decrease his exercise participation after viewing Fitspiration because of a sense that he will never achieve his fitness goals. He described having mixed feelings where he felt social media influenced an increase as well as a decrease in his exercise behavior. He explains,

I would say it's definitely made me feel at times motivated to go workout and work harder, but then at times just to completely say, "Screw it" and just not do workouts, because it's like, you'll see that celebrity actor who's doing good things and showing you how to do a workout and it's like, "Okay, great...I'm going to go do that." And then you'll see a buddy of yours who's super yoked and just posting literally about his muscles and that's it and it's like, "Well, screw this. This guy's my age and he's looking like this. I'm never going to look like that." You know? And it just makes me feel demotivated.

Though almost all participants described a perceived sense of motivation to exercise when viewing Fitspiration, this motivation may be due to an underlying pressure to participate. A pressure to participate was reflected in participants' body image concerns as many of them described their body image not to be reflective of where they would like it to be (see Table 2). The pressure to participate can showed up in many forms, such as feeling like they cannot stop participation and feeling as if they should increase participation. Additionally, the pressure to participate may also lead to wanting not to participate.

Participant (age)	Quote
Miller (22)	<p>“Currently my body image is not fantastic”</p> <p><i>*Disclaimer: participant was sick for a few weeks prior to the interview and was not regularly participating in exercise which she discussed influenced how she felt about her body image at the time of the interview.</i></p>
Mikayla (23)	“I'm content, I'm fine with my body image, but also, I see room for improvement.”
Dolly (24)	“I'm happy with how my body looks and I recognize it's not perfect, whatever. I have a stomach and stuff but you know what? There are other things in my life that I'm psyched about and I'm right where I want to be with that.”
Kate (24)	“A work in progress.... I'm actively trying to switch my mindset to looking in the mirror and saying something positive right away or thinking something positive versus always thinking a critique about something.”
Robin (25)	“I would say positive, but I think that what also came to mind and I just didn't say it was things that I want to improve, which I'm sure that's most people. It's just kind of sad.”
Devon (25)	“Good. Could use a little work. [Laughs]”
Joe (22)	“Not ideal.”
Reid (23)	“It's something that I would say that I struggle with, for sure.”
Daniel (23)	“Content, but never satisfied”
George (25)	“I'd say I'm doing okay. I don't know. When I think of body image, I don't know if it's ever perfect or where I want to be. I think I fluctuate a lot on that and I think what's helpful for me is just finding ways to continue to find the inspiration to workout because I think eating is a big part of it and I know if I slip up on that and I need to workout more but if I can do both of them together, I can really plough towards what I'm looking for body image wise.”
Paul (25)	“I guess, wishing I was in better shape.”

Table 2: Participants response when asked how they would describe their current body image

Tactics against the Negative Influence of Fitspiration

Several participants mentioned behaviors they have started to implement that assist in alleviating them from any negative influence they may experience through consuming

Fitspiration. Tactics that were commonly described were positive self-talk and critical social media engagement.

Positive Self-Talk

When Fitspiration is perceived to have a negative influence on body image or performance capabilities, a common practice used by participants was to focus on a positive mindset. Multiple participants described positively talking to themselves as a habit they were attempting to consciously implement to create a more positive outlook on themselves. Two female participants discussed actively reframing their mindset when they felt negative about their body image. Kate (24) said, “I’m actively trying to switch my mindset to looking in the mirror and saying something positive right away or thinking something positive versus always thinking a critique about something.” However, positive self-talk is an ongoing process where she described having to implement continually. She said,

I catch myself all the time being like, “Wow, FUPA¹ is showing in these pants.” I have to be like, “Stop it. You look so good. You work so hard.” It’s a constant... Not battle, but it’s constantly working on yourself.

Mikayla (23) discussed a similar situation where she felt she needed to think more positively about her body image. She said,

There are still times where I'm like, "Okay, it'd be nice to have a thigh gap." You see these girls in leggings that have these sticks as legs.... It's really important for me to self-reflect and be like, "Okay, this is the body that I was given. People can't do what I can do."

Both Kate and Mikayla explained how Fitspiration has the power to negatively influence their perception of themselves and their body image. To cope, they both consciously attempt to implement ways to see themselves and their body image positively by using self-talk tactics.

¹ A sometimes-derogatory slang term that describes the lower abdomen area. FUPA is an acronym for “fat, ugly, pussy area.” (Petter, 2018).

Two male participants discussed how they have attempted to shift their mindset regarding why they are exercising. Reid recently switched his priorities from focusing on appearance as a motivator to exercise to focusing on the mental health and overall health benefits of exercise as a motivator to exercise. When asked what strategies he has in place to reinforce his mindset shift from appearance to health-based motivation, he said,

I would say it's a lot of verbiage, whether that be in my head or aloud. I'm very much still changing the way I'm talking about working out, because then I feel like if I'm talking about it in a certain way, I'm going to start believing that in the certain way, too.

For example, Reid (23) described a time he was exercising with a friend who verbally expressed appearance goals during the activity. He said,

I work out with one of my friends most of the time after work. So, when I'm working out with him...he'll kind of start saying things, and I'll just be like, "Hey, man, you know what the point is? We're here and we're doing it for the betterment of ourselves." Just saying things like that actively rather than focusing on, "Oh, yeah, let's get super swole," or, "Let's lose weight," or stuff like that.

Daniel also commented on how he had to shift his mindset regarding exercise. He described how he used to feel a sense of pressure to participate in exercise and would encourage himself to keep participating by using phrases like "You need to get on this." Now he describes he uses compassionate self-talk by saying "You're doing your best and you're taking it in stride." He further explained how his mental health benefited from speaking more positively to himself. He felt less pressure to participate in exercise to impress others and described participating in exercise for his own health benefits. He said,

Just those positive and negative statements you have to yourself can have a huge effect on how you approach things. I think when I was more negative to myself and I thought more in a finite sense, you're doing this so other people will accept you. So, you'll fit in amongst other performers or trainers or whatever it might be. Now, I think that I personalize it a little bit more, and I recognize that...when I'm working out that's time for me and improving myself mentally and physically. I think taking ownership of that is really important to continued success, but also just feeling good about small wins and small accomplishments

Both Reid (23) and Daniel (23) discussed how shifting their mindset to focus on the health-related reasons to participate in exercise has played a role in enhancing their self-perception. For Reid, actively reframing his mindset to focus on the health benefits of exercise rather than appearance related benefits was perceived to protect him against feelings of negative body image. For Daniel, the mindset shift protects against him feeling negative about his fitness performance in comparison to others.

Four participants (two male and two female) described consciously pursuing a more positive shift in the way they talk to and think about themselves. Participants described using positive self-talk when their body image was threatened or if they felt a pressure to participate in exercise due to viewing Fitspiration.

Critical Engagement

When describing their experience viewing Fitspiration content, participants commented on how they were critical of who they followed and what they consumed. For example, Daniel (23) will critique and validate what he sees on social media by looking for backup sources before he implements the exercise or information acquired. He described how he's viewed Fitspiration posts from "good people" and "bad people." When asked how he discerns between "good" and "bad" Fitspiration posts he said,

I would say I'm looking for what's the message. Why are they posting this, in general? Two, maybe where did they get their information? If it's something that I've been following for a while, I usually know whether they're accredited or things like that. I feel like I'm always critiquing and looking for a second source when I see stuff that I do like.

Participants described certain screening measures they participated in when they viewed Fitspiration accounts that negatively influenced them. For instance, Dolly (24) described a time where she unfollowed a certain individual. She said,

I guess there was one time I did. I followed this model because I thought she was really pretty. I was like, "Oh I love her posts, she has pretty posts, she travels a lot," whatever. This is the one time where I was like... She was insanely skinny, and I think every time I saw her post, I was like, "Wow." It just was a bad... And the thing is I don't think I recognized it as a bad influence on myself. I never looked at her pictures and were like, "I feel bad about myself." But I think I just didn't need that in my life, and so I unfollowed her. I was like, "I don't...", I'm not motivated by that. It doesn't make me feel like I need to work out. It doesn't make me feel better. There's no reason to follow someone like that.

Devon (25), on the other hand, described how she will disconnect herself from social media altogether when she feels that what she is consuming is negatively influencing her. She said,

I just try to turn off my phone. I've gone extended periods of time with my social media disabled, just in a way to try to not obsess because there comes a point that you're just kind of obsessed about certain things that other people are doing.

One critical common screening tactic that participants utilized to combat the negative feelings, they perceived from certain Fitspiration pages was to only follow individuals that were perceived to be relatable to them.

Following Relatable Content. Four of the six female participants and one male participant discussed how they are more likely to follow and are encouraged by Fitspiration accounts that create content that is "relatable." Mikayla (23) commented how the content that is "unreachable" in her perception does not motivate her, but a more realistic post would influence her positively. She said,

I think accounts that are so far unreachable for me just don't motivate me at all because I'm like, I could never look like that, or that takes a ton of work, and I have no time. I think the more realistic the post, the more of an effect it has on me positively.

Similarly, Kate (24) said,

I think the reason that we follow these people on Instagram is because some part of us wants to be like them. And it's more realistic to want to be someone who posts about maybe the pretty but also the shitty in their life than it is to want to be like someone who's only posting their highlight reel. It just makes you feel more relatable to that person.

Participants expressed that relatability was important within social media because if they did compare themselves to the content creator, it was perceived to be a more positive experience comparing themselves to someone that posts the “pretty and also the shitty” compared to someone who only posts the “highlight reel.” Fitspiration that posts the “highlight” reel of women wearing makeup and looking perfect while exercising was seen to influence Devon (25). When asked how she felt social media affects her, Devon responded that it makes her feel she should look her best when she is exercising. She said,

I mean, just in how we all have to look perfect all the time. If you go workout, your hair can't look greasy. You know what I mean? Even if you're sweaty, you should look great. Those are things that really end up affecting you, for sure.

On the other hand, Robin (25) described experiencing a sense of “empowerment” from following a trainer at her local gym on social media who would post sweaty selfies. She said,

She'll even post a picture of just like her being really sweaty and exhausted after a workout, and you can't even really see her body. But it's just talking about everyone looks like this at some point and everyone goes through this.

Devon (25) experienced a longing to see the relatable side of exercise on her social media and described feeling a sense of negative influence when she saw Fitspiration accounts that beautifies exercise. For Robin, it was motivational to see someone on social media showcasing the sweaty and exhausting side of exercise.

Therefore, to protect themselves from the harmful influence of viewing unrealistic body ideals, participants described how they will screen their social media and only follow certain people that align with their values and are deemed as being a positive influence on their physical and mental state. For example, Kate (24) said,

The social media culture of wanting to be someone you're not kind of sucks. Not saying that that never affects me like that, but I really do try to only follow people that make me feel good about myself. Fitness stuff, specifically, I would say... Not that it motivates me,

but I like on my feed having other people who are into being healthy, and eating good food, and working out, who share similar interests as me.

Additionally, Paul (25) commented on how, after college, he made it a point to only follow fitness accounts of individuals that he could relate to. For him, he did not find it helpful to only follow Fitspiration accounts of individuals who did fitness for a living. He said his goal was to “get in shape” but pick up ideas from “someone that’s doing it on top of a job and an everyday life.”

The majority of female participants and one male participant described seeking Fitspiration that had a relatable aspect to it, like posting sweaty selfies and showing a balance between fitness and “real life.” Participants described how they curate their social media feeds by following and prioritizing accounts that are perceived to positively influence them.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to: 1) Understand how men and women experience consuming athletic ideal images on social media; 2) Understand in what ways individuals perceive athletic ideal imagery to influence their body perceptions, if any; and 3) Understand in what ways individuals perceive athletic ideal imagery to influence their exercise participation, if at all. The findings provide insight into young adult men and women's experiences consuming athletic ideal images on social media. Research has found that traditional media, such as magazines and television can influence body image concerns among both men and women (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2014; Barlett et al., 2008; Grab, Ward & Hyde, 2008). However, social media may uniquely contribute to body image as it features the users themselves; users tend to post curated and edited idealized images of themselves and remove images deemed unattractive; and it allows instantaneous and interactive communication with peers (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). This study looked specifically at the influence the social media trend of Fitspiration (fit and inspiration) may have on participants' body image and exercise behavior. The findings suggest that there is complexity in Fitspiration's influence on behavior and beliefs as the influence was perceived to be positive, negative, and sometimes both depending on the participant and aspects of the social media content.

Fitspiration's Influence on Body Image

Research suggests that Fitspiration may influence body image by increasing tendencies to participate in upward social comparison and the internalization of a fit ideal (Cohen et al., 2017; Tiggemann et al., 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Uhlmann et al., 2018). This internalization was particularly apparent when participants described Fitspiration content influencing their fitness goals. The results of this study suggest that participants perceived

Fitspiration to perpetuate a fit ideal and increase tendencies of social comparison. However, the experience was neither solely positive nor negative. Instead, their experience was nuanced.

Body Image and the Fit Ideal

Participants in this study perceived Fitspiration as a platform that perpetuated a fit ideal body. For some participants, the fit ideal was perceived to influence and threaten their body image or self-confidence negatively. Fitspiration posts were observed to negatively influence participants' body image when there was a perceived overemphasis on appearance and focus on unattainable and unrealistic body ideals. These findings support research which suggest that viewing appearance-focused social media negatively influences body image (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016) as it positively correlates with a drive for thinness, increased levels of body surveillance (Cohen et al., 2017) self-objectification and social comparison (Andrew et al., 2016). Additionally, research suggests that Fitspiration may promote dissatisfaction in body image more so than other types of appearance-based social media (Fardouly et al., 2017; Fatt et al., 2019; Uhlmann et al., 2018). Robinson et al. (2017) suggest that body dissatisfaction from viewing Fitspiration may be due to the perception that an ideal body should be achievable if enough time and effort is spent towards maintaining a lifestyle of exercise and dieting, therefore placing the responsibility on the individual to alter their appearance. When the responsibility is placed on the individual and their attempts to fix their appearance are perceived to be a failure, research has shown that negative body image tends to increase, which adversely affects motivation to continue in maintaining exercise behavior (Huberty et al., 2008). The current findings extend this research by highlight nuances to this relationship based on type of social media content and individual strategies for viewing content.

Counter to the literature, three male participants felt a positive reaction towards appearance-focused Fitspiration posts. They described feeling a sense of inspiration by the fit ideal appearances demonstrated within the Fitspiration post and were motivated to mirror their bodies to be reflective of the muscular representation they saw. These participants may have experienced an internalization of the fit ideal. Internalization is the extent to which individuals buy into, incorporate, and accept values relating to beauty ideals to the point that it affects behavior and body image (Uhlmann, 2018). Studies have shown that men who follow Fitspiration accounts may internalize the muscular ideal more so than men who do not follow Fitspiration (Fatt et al., 2019). Greater drive for muscularity internalization may in turn be associated with poorer body satisfaction (Fatt et al., 2019). However, the three male participants did not describe having poor body satisfaction. On the contrary, they described a level of self-efficacy in their efforts towards achieving their body image goals. This may be due, in part, to the three participants continued participation in exercise as physical activity has been found to influence higher levels of positive self-regard, body appreciation and functionality appreciation (Soulliard et al., 2019). Additionally, participants may have believed that the type of Fitspiration content they followed was more attainable for them and even intentionally chose content for this reason.

Though some participants felt a negative influence on their body image from viewing Fitspiration, some participants in this study also perceived Fitspiration to be a positive influence on their body image, specifically their body functionality appreciation. Functionality appreciation is the appreciation of what the body can do and is capable of (Alleva et al., 2019). Findings suggest that participants felt a sense of empowerment in their bodies' abilities to achieve fitness appearance and performance goals. Fitness appearance goals included weight loss

and muscle tone. Performance goals included knowledge and habit development, specific exercise implementation, and increased levels of exercise intensity. Though Fitspiration has a tendency to promote a high evaluation on appearance (Boepple et al., 2016) which can increase body dissatisfaction and lower levels of self-esteem (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018), this study found Fitspiration can also promote body appreciation by focusing on body functionality most commonly through the use of videos and content that gave the consumer knowledge and ideas on fitness. These findings are supported by research which suggests that focusing on body functionality leads to higher levels of body appreciation (Tylka & Homan, 2015). When there is motivation to exercise based on functionality (motivation to participate for health, fitness, enjoyment, and mood improvement) it can lead to greater body appreciation than when motivated by appearance alone (Tylka & Homan, 2015). Additionally, a study by Mulgrew et al. (2018) found that specialized media campaigns can impact both body image satisfaction and intent to exercise. The study focused on the effectiveness of exposure to two functionality-focused media campaigns in the ability to improve body satisfaction and found that media campaigns that aim at physical functionality and health rather than appearance can produce immediate benefits in young women's body satisfaction and exercise intentions (Mulgrew et al., 2018).

Body Image and Social Comparison

According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals will determine their own social and personal self-worth by comparing themselves to others as somehow better or worse. Individuals will make self-evaluations based on either upward or downward comparisons with others (Festinger, 1954). Upward comparisons have the potential to be damaging to self-esteem and can influence body image (Major et al., 1991). A little more than half of the

participants described experiencing self-deflating comparisons when they viewed Fitspiration posts, the majority of these being female participants. For some, the self-deflating comparisons seemed to be more influential when they were comparing themselves to an individual they knew personally. These findings are congruent with the literature that suggest both men and women tend to compare their own appearance to the fit idealized images found in Fitspiration, which may then lead to lower body image satisfaction (Fatt et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). Social media may be a unique platform that increases user's tendency to compare themselves to others resulting in negative outcomes compared to other traditional forms of media. Fardouly et al. (2017) found that upward social comparisons made through social media were more highly associated with negative mood than upward social comparisons made in person or through traditional media. This may be due to Instagram being a platform that is simultaneously filled with pictures of the individual, their peers, and fit ideal body images (Perloff, 2014). According to the Tripartite Influence Model, media, peers and family are key influencers in body image ideals and internalization (van den Berg et al., 2002). Therefore, Instagram being a platform that simultaneously displays peers and media figures (Fitspiration figures) may magnify the influence of body ideals on consumers. Additionally, Instagram can be accessed at any time anywhere through the use of mobile devices, which can exponentially increase opportunities for social comparison compared to traditional media (Perloff, 2014).

Though some participants experienced self-deflating comparisons from viewing Fitspiration, participants also experienced self-enhancing comparisons. Participants described seeing others participate in exercise and achieve fitness goals through Instagram and expressed being inspired and motivated to do the same. Though the literature suggests that upward social comparison can be damaging to an individual's sense of self-esteem (Major et al., 1991), upward social

comparison can also be consistent with the desire for positive self-regard through self-improvement and self-enhancement (Collins, 1996; Engeln-Maddox, 2005; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012). The findings in the current study suggest that there was a perceived increase in motivation to exercise based on upward comparisons, which is counter to the literature which suggests that a concern with social comparison may decrease levels of exercise participation (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; Liechty et al., 2006; Wasilenko et al., 2007). However, the later studies were conducted on participants that were experiencing social comparison in person rather than through social media.

Tendency to make self-enhancing comparisons may be, in part, due to the level of self-efficacy the participants have in exercise. All of the participants regularly participated in some level of exercise; therefore, if they saw a post of someone that had an admirable fitness level or who lost weight, they may have been more likely to feel that they could achieve those goals than the average social media consumer. However, social media may uniquely contribute to self-efficacy through the implementation of vicarious experiences. This study found that participants described being motivated to participate in exercise behavior after viewing videos of exercise routines or seeing someone else doing the exercise or achieving fitness goals. According to Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals can gain self-efficacy through vicarious experiences of viewing a behavior by another individual or “model.” Fitspiration may be a source of vicarious experiences as much of the content focuses on viewing behaviors (i.e. workouts, healthy diets) demonstrated by similar others.

Fitspiration’s Influence on Exercise Behavior

All but one participant perceived Fitspiration to motivate and inspire exercise behavior. This is supported by previous literature that found men and women report being motivated to

exercise after viewing Fitspiration images (Easton et al., 2018; Palmer, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). However, the previous studies did not measure whether the inspiration felt after viewing Fitspiration translated into actual behavior. The participants in this study reported Fitspiration having a direct influence on maintaining or increasing their exercise participation. Though the study did not analyze direct exercise behavior, participants described how they felt Fitspiration influenced their exercise behavior. Many participants perceived Fitspiration to influence their desire to exercise, the number of workouts they participated in each week, the workout intensity, their specific fitness and body goals and increased motivation to overcome exercise barriers.

The influence of Fitspiration on exercise behavior may be related to the fact that participants already had an established exercise routine, therefore having an existing motivation to continue exercise behavior. Additionally, participants expressed participating in exercise due to health reasons such as maintaining fitness levels, focusing on longevity, managing stress and improving mood. This supports research which has found that those that who are motivated by health reasons to participate in exercise are more likely to adhere to an exercise routine (Hubert et al., 2008).

Fitspiration's influence may also be due to participants internalizing a fit ideal body image and feeling pressure to participate in exercise to achieve the body ideal. Participants described feeling pressure to participate in many forms such as feeling like they cannot stop participation or feeling as if they should increase their participation. In one case, a participant described sometimes reducing their exercise participation due to the pressure to participate. Pressure to participate may be due to participants' body image concerns as many of them described their body image not to be reflective of where they would like it to be (see Figure 2).

These findings are supported by body image research that suggests body image is a constraint to exercise in that it may limit participation through reduced participation or increased participation (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; T. Liechty et al., 2006; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008).

Reduced participation may occur due to a lack of enjoyment for the activity due to a preoccupation with physical appearance and a concern with social comparison (Frederick & Shaw, 1991; Liechty et al., 2006; O'hara et al., 2014; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012). Furthermore, when individuals feel their attempts to fix their appearance may not be achieved, they may experience decreased motivation to continue exercise (Fisher et al., 2018; Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012; Wasilenko et al., 2007). Increased participation may occur if an individual feels compelled and obligated to participate and continue participating in exercise due to a pressure to obtain physical attractiveness or an idealized body physique (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; Liechty et al., 2006; O'Hara et al., 2014).

However not all participants felt that a pressure to participate in exercise was negative. Participants discussed being motivated by Fitspiration to continue their exercise or increase their exercise behavior to achieve an idealized body physique and fitness level. Participants who felt inspired to achieve an idealized body physique and fitness goals often described focusing on the functionality of how the Fitspiration influencer achieved their fitness goals (e.g., how long they exercised, what foods they ate, what habits they engaged in daily). It was then important for the participants to adopt and mimic the habits they saw in Fitspiration posts to help them achieve their body goals. Though there was a level of appearance-based exercise motivation, which can lead to greater body dissatisfaction (Tylka & Homan, 2015) and a pressure to maintain exercise participation to achieve the body ideal (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; Liechty et al., 2006; O'Hara et al., 2014), participants seemed to describe a greater focus on the functionality aspect of how

to achieve their fitness goals. Simultaneously being motivated by functionality and appearance seems to be a unique finding of this study. Previously literature suggests that adopting a functional exercise motivation may be a central role in positive body image while appearance exercise motives present a danger to body image for both men and women (Tylka & Homan, 2015). This study found that there may be dual motivation to exercise that focuses on appearance and functionality. Motivation that is influenced by appearance may not be as detrimental towards body image as long as functionality motivation is greater.

Fitspiration and Combating Wellbeing Concerns

One unique finding from the study was that participants described tactics they used to foster and create positive self-regard when there was there was perceived threat from consuming Fitspiration to their wellbeing such as increased body image concerns and a pressure to participate in exercise. One behavioral tactic discussed by the participants was adopting positive self-talk habits. Recent literature that has studied the development of positive body image suggests that cognitive strategies leads to body acceptance (Bailey et al., 2016; Becker et al., 2017). The adoption of positive self-talk habits is supported by Cash et al., (2005) who suggests that people will attempt to cope with their body image by either avoidance, appearance fixing, or positive rational acceptance. Positive rational acceptance involves the mental and behavioral activities that “emphasize the use of positive self-care or rational self-talk” (Cash et al., 2005, pg. 197). Additionally, high levels of positive rational acceptance can lead to better self-esteem and increase in body satisfaction (Cash, 2005).

Another behavioral tactic discussed by participants was the use of critical social media engagement by curating who they allowed themselves to follow on social media. Critical media engagement may protect against negative effects of some social media messages (Liechty,

Coyne, Collier, & Sharp, 2018). Preferably, participants discussed a more positive experience when they opted to follow a Fitspiration account that was perceived to be relatable while following non-relatable accounts had the potential to threaten their wellbeing. The importance of relatability may be explained through self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is the extent to which an individual feels they will be successful in performing a desired behavior and can be increased through vicarious experiences of viewing a behavior by another individual or “model” (Bandura, 1986). Fitspiration accounts may act as vicarious experience towards health and wellness behaviors and the behavior demonstrated by a relatable model may feel more attainable than a non-relatable model as the individual may feel a closer connection to the relatable model. Therefore, individuals may prefer following Fitspiration accounts deemed relatable as they may perceive their self-efficacy in creating health and wellness behaviors may stay the same or rise. Whereas self-efficacy levels may feel threatened or decrease when viewing non-relatable accounts resulting in body image or performance concerns.

Additionally, social media may be a unique platform that increases the influence of vicarious experiences as social media may be an immensely more personal media source than traditional media (Perloff, 2014). Social media allows for instantaneous and interactive communication with others (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Therefore, individuals may develop intimate relationships with individuals seen on their social media feed and are more likely influenced by the content compared to traditional media.

Theoretical Implications

In this study I initially proposed using Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) and Leisure Constraint Theory (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991) as a conceptual framework for data analysis. The findings provide support for both theories. Social comparison theory was used

as a theoretical lens to explore in what ways individual perceived Fitspiration to influence their body image. Comparisons were commonly made by almost all participants when consuming Fitspiration media. Interestingly, participants described experiencing upward social comparisons that were perceived to be either self-deflating or self-enhancing to their body image or perception of their performance capabilities. Interestingly, participants perception of social comparison being self-enhancing or self-deflating often occurred at the same time. Participants viewed Fitspiration as motivational while also feeling a sense of discomfort in their own self.

Leisure constraint theory was used as a theoretical lens to explore in what ways individuals perceived Fitspiration to increase or decrease their exercise behaviors. The theory suggests that individuals may experience factors that limit the formation of leisure preferences, inhibit or prohibit participation in an activity, decrease the level of enjoyment, or increase engagement in a leisure activity that is no preferred due to outside pressure (Crawford, Jackson & Godbey, 1991; Shaw et al., 1991). Within body image literature, body image is suggested to be a constraint to exercise (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; T. Liechty et al., 2006; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008). This study supports body image as a constraint to exercise as participants described feeling a pressure to participate due to their body image. However, not all participants perceived the pressure to participate to be a negative experience and rather they sometimes enjoyed feeling pressure to exercise as they found pleasure in the health benefits of exercise in addition to their desire to achieve certain body image goals. Some participants also felt that this pressure led to increased exercise participation.

Additionally, the findings provide support for self-efficacy theory. Though I was familiar with the theory prior to conducting the study, I did not conduct the study with this theory in mind. Rather, its importance became apparent as the data analysis progressed. Participants

perceived Fitspiration to be motivational towards exercise behavior, especially when they saw others achieving fitness goals or demonstrating ways to participate. Participants then felt their levels of self-efficacy increase by using phrases such as “if they can do it, I can.” According to Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals can gain self-efficacy through vicarious experiences of viewing a behavior by another individual or “model.” This study found that social media may be unique platform to transmit vicarious experiences to viewers as much of the Fitspiration content focused on viewing behaviors (i.e. workouts, healthy diets) demonstrated by others. Social media has the ability to lend a feeling of presence, which can encourage belief and attitude change (Barak, 2007; Green et al., 2004). Additionally, social media is more personal than conventional media and consumers can bond with the content they see (Perloff, 2014). Therefore, when individuals view Fitspiration, they may feel like they can achieve or perform the behavior they are viewing and are more likely to make self-enhancing rather than self-deflating comparisons. Within a gym context, men and women were found to use social comparison as a motivational strategy to increase their exercise commitment as they saw such comparison crucial to self-improvement (Pridgeon & Grogan, 2012). This study suggests that viewing Fitspiration posts can also act as a motivational strategy to increase health and wellness commitments.

Practical Implications

For professionals and researchers, these findings confirm that social media can influence behavioral change related to exercise and can be a powerful vehicle in disseminating health and fitness information. More than 40% of American young adults reported that information found via social media would affect their approach to diet and exercise (PwC, 2012). The participants in this study discussed how Instagram specifically is a useful social media platform to disseminate health information as the use of images and videos was perceived to be more

appealing than text. However, professionals using social media to encourage exercise or fitness behaviors should be aware of the potential negative influence images can have on consumers well-being. This study suggests that social media that focuses on appearance-based motivations to participating in exercise could negatively influence body image. Therefore, professionals that aim to create body positivity among media consumers should create content that focuses on body functionality by providing consumers with valuable content they can implement (i.e. videos showing exercise routines, content that provides knowledge and ideas on implementing healthy habits) rather than focusing on appearance.

Additionally, for professionals to enhance behavior change through social media, it is important that they know the nuances of their intended audience. As Fitspiration accounts that were deemed to be realistic and relatable were more likely to be followed as well as enhance consumers wellbeing and likelihood of adhering to exercise, professionals should create content that is perceived to resonate with their intended audience. For instance, if professionals hope to encourage weight loss for obese young adults by encouraging them to exercise, relatable content could involve body types that are relatable to the audience, as well as content that prescribes implementing achievable exercise goals while simultaneously acknowledging the barriers to exercise.

Furthermore, with the worldwide lockdown resulting in the outbreak of COVID-19, Instagram would be a highly effective platform to positively motivate health habits among individuals who are stuck at home. Participants in the current study mentioned the value of Fitspiration in promoting on-going exercise habits. Practitioners could intentionally utilize the platform to motivate regular exercise that can be done at home by posting exercise routines

focused on bodyweight workouts or utilizing every day at home items to replace gym weights (i.e., squatting while holding a gallon of milk or a chair) or other fitness equipment.

Limitations of the Study

Relevant and useful information was obtained in this study, however, there are several limitations. The first was the homogeneity of the participants. Nine of the participants were white and two were Hispanic. Therefore, the data cannot be generalized to a broader, more ethnically diverse population. Additionally, it would have been preferred to include data from participants who do not exercise. All participants engaged in a weekly routine of exercise which may have resulted in a more positive experience of viewing Fitspiration messaging which primarily promotes exercise and fitness goals, behaviors the participants already adhered to. The high level of exercise participation within the sample may have been due to the recruitment strategies of the study. All participants were recruited through my social circles or participants' social media networks. As I perceive myself to be an athletic individual and my leisure activities are predominantly around physically active activities (i.e. sports, exercise, hiking, outdoor activities) I tend to surround myself with a community of likeminded individuals. Therefore, when recruitment material was sent through my social media networks, the audience receiving the materials was most likely a more physically active population.

Furthermore, all participants frequently utilized social media, specifically Fitspiration. It is likely that individuals who do not use social media or do not follow Fitspiration may perceive social media to influence their body image and exercise behavior differently if they are not apt to use it or do not enjoy, the social media platform. Additionally, as body image may be a relatively uncomfortable topic to discuss, there is a chance that the participants did not want to fully disclose their feelings on the topic due to their comfort level.

Lastly, my background in how I personally understand my body image and its influence on my exercise and social media behavior may have influenced the interview process and the questions that were asked to the participants. I have personally had body image concerns that were heightened by my social media usage and influenced my exercise participation. It is possibly that my own personal experiences may have played a role in the questions that I asked and my interpretation of the data. I was aware of my personal position during the data collection and analysis phase. To combat any biases, I made sure to ask clarifying and probing questions to prevent making assumptions and allow the participants to fully explain their thoughts and opinions. Additionally, I used memos as a way to reflect on my predispositions as a researcher and inform how it may influence data analysis.

Suggestions for Future Research

As this study explored the perception that Fitspiration has on body image and exercise participation from a sample of primarily white young adults, further research should broaden the demographic to individuals of Hispanic, African American, and Asian ethnicity as body image differences by race have been found in previous studies (Dye, 2016; Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). Expanding the literature could be particularly important due to the existence of significant racial/ethnic disparities in obesity rates. According to Stodolska (2018), 23.6% of Hispanic children, 20.4% of Black children, and 9.8% of Asian children are obese compared to 14.7% of white children. Additionally, further research should explore how social media may influence older and younger populations as body image concerns have been shown to exist throughout the lifespan (Bailey et al., 2016; Becker et al., 2017; Liechty and Yarnal, 2010; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2008).

As this study only looked at individuals who actively participate in exercise, additional research should encompass individuals of varying athletic abilities. Having a broad range of participants with differing exercise behaviors would have provided possible contrasting experiences of consuming Fitspiration accounts.

Additionally, despite years of study on body image, there has been limited research on the influence social media has on body image. Social media has been found to lead to higher levels of body image dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2018). However, this study found that social media could enhance self-efficacy levels when participants consumed social media that focuses on body functionality over appearance. Future research should explore various social media platforms as well as the specific nuances of social media content as to why self-efficacy levels may be influenced by social media compared to traditional media.

Conclusion

This study provides insight into the role that athletic ideal imagery, specifically Fitspiration social media, plays in the experiences of young adult men and women and their perceptions of body image and reasons to exercise. As this research was conducted using qualitative research methods, it adds to the existing body image research which tends to be largely quantitative (Liechty & Yarnal, 2010). Additionally, body image research tends to be focused on studies of all women or all men participants. This study uniquely looked at both genders' perceptions of experiencing Fitspiration. The findings of this study highlight the complexity and nuances in the role social media consumption can play in body image and exercise. As social media has been seen to be a negative influence on body image (Fardouly et al., 2018) this research found that there are also positive aspects of Fitspiration on body image. However, the influence of Fitspiration media consumption has on wellbeing is subjective to the individual.

Studies to investigate the extent to which social media is influencing individual's self-perception would be helpful additions to body image research.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Exempt Determination

January 9, 2020

Principal Investigator	Toni Liechty
CC	Katryn Chryst
Protocol Title	<i>Understanding the perceived influence of Fitspiration for young adults</i>
Protocol Number	20508
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Category	Exempt 2 (ii)
Determination Date	January 9, 2020
Closure Date	January 8, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an **exempt** protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

APPENDIX B: INDIVIDUAL INTRVIEW PROTOCOL

Individual Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself (to initiate conversation and obtain basic information)
 - a. Prompts: major in school, family, interests
2. Can you tell me what you know about the trend of Fitspiration on Instagram?
3. Can you tell me about how often you consume Fitspiration and kinds of content you view?
 - a. Prompts: videos, written content, specific influencers.
4. What is your general reaction when you view fitspiration pages/posts? How does it make you feel?
5. Can you tell me about any ways that you think this type of social media content affects you? Prompts might include:
 - a. Can you tell me any ways that it influences how you think or feel?
 - b. How does fitspiration content affect your behaviors (your habits, the things you do).
 - c. how does it affect your exercise habits?
 - d. Is there any other way that it affects you?
6. Can you tell me about ways that you think this type of social media differs by who posts the content? For instance, someone you don't know or someone you do know.
7. Can you provide examples from Fitspiration accounts that you follow?
8. When you hear the term "body image" what comes to your mind?
 - a. Prompts might include: Do you think of appearance? How your body functions? Certain body parts? What do you think it means to men/women in general?
9. How would you describe your current body image?
 - a. Prompts might include: Were there any times in your life that you felt differently than you do now? How do you think men/women in your age group generally feel about their bodies?
10. How does your body image affect you?
 - a. How does it affect your behaviors (your habits, the things you do).
 - b. how does it affect your exercise habits?
 - c. how does it influence how you think or feel?
 - d. Is there any other way that it affects you?
11. We talked about your experience with Fitspiration. Can you tell me about ways your think viewing fitspiration has affected your body image perception, if any?
12. Do you have any other comments about any of the things we've talked about?
13. General Prompts:

Can you tell me more about that?
Can you expand on that?
Can you think of an example?
How did/do you feel about that?
What's that like for you?
14. Basic Information
 - a. Age
 - b. Race/Ethnicity

- c. Level of social media involvement (how often do they view fitspiration social media in a day).
- d. How active are you (how many times per week, on average how many minutes.)

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research

Understanding the Perceived Influence of Fitspiration for Young Adults

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceived influence Fitspiration has on body image perception and exercise behavior. Participating in this study will involve being asked questions regarding your consumption of Fitspiration media and how you perceive it to influence your behavior and beliefs and your participation will last approximately an hour. Risks related to this research include nothing beyond normal everyday risk; benefits related to this research include a better understanding of your social media use and its influence.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Dr. Toni Liechty: Professor
Department and Institution: University of Illinois Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism
Contact Information: tliechty@illinois.edu
Sponsor: n/a

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about the influence of Fitspiration. The purpose of this research is to explore the role Fitspiration plays in the experiences of men and women and their perceptions of body image and reasons to exercise. You have been asked to participate in this research because of your experience with Fitspiration social media. Approximately ten participants will be involved in this research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

What procedures are involved?

The study procedures include a semi-structured interview about Fitspiration social media consumption and how it is perceived to influence behavior.

This research will be performed at a location of your choosing. You will need to come to the study site one time. Your visit will last approximately one hour.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

Nothing beyond normal daily risk.

Are there benefits to participating in the research?

Participation in the research will aid in your understanding of your own Fitspiration social media consumption.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Faculty, students, and staff who may see your information will maintain confidentiality to the extent of laws and university policies. Personal identifiers will not be published or presented.

Will I be reimbursed for any expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests or you were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan.

Will data collected from me be used for any other research?

Your information will not be used or distributed for future use, even if identifiers are removed.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researchers Dr. Toni Liechty at (217) 300-0105 or tliechty@illinois.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or if you have concerns or complaints about the research.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu.

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date (must be same as subject's)

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS



PARTICIPANTS WANTED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

My name is Katryn Chryst and I am a graduate student in Recreation, Sport & Tourism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am looking for participants for a research study related to the perceived influence of Fitspiration on behavior.

Project: In this study we want to hear your thoughts on ways in which you perceive consuming Fitspiration on Instagram has influenced your body image perception and exercise behavior. For example: What is your general reaction when you view fitspiration page/posts? Can you tell me about any ways that you think this type of social media content affects you? Can you tell me about ways your think viewing fitspiration has affected your body image perception, if any?

Procedure: Participation involves one individual interview (approximately 45 to 60 minutes) that will occur at a time that is convenient for you and place of your choosing (e.g., Activities and Recreation Center, Campus Recreation Center East, coffee shop).

Requirements: You must be between the ages of 18-25 and consume a type of Fitspiration social media on Instagram at least once a week. Audio recordings are required during the interview process and will be used for transcription purposes only.

If this describes you and you are interested in sharing your opinions and experiences, please contact me by email at chryst2@illinois.edu