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Lena Palmer

“Poppin’ bottles, getting wheysted.”

Exploring young men’s engagement with fitspiration content and its consequential influences on attitudes and behaviour.

This paper explores young males’ current interaction with fitspiration. Its focus resides in the experiences and behaviours of the users and the content’s influence on body satisfaction, exercise behaviour, and attitudes towards masculinity. Existing literature has focused on traditional media, its creation of ideals and its effects on body image. However it has also highlighted how online sphere growth creates space for identity exploration, and one’s ability to pick and choose their own media to suit personal goals and gratifications. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore phenomena, with findings from the interpretive study suggesting men are selective about fitspiration they access, and ideals portrayed in mainstream media do not trickle down through social media, due to the sheer range of identities portrayed in online discourse. However, it also recognises how new media maintains the ability to influence ideas about masculinity, encouraging men to compare physiques and personalities to those they see in fitspiration.

Keywords: Fitspiration, engagement, online behaviour, body image, masculinity.



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INTRODUCTION

“Let the gains begin”. Natural Beast 2015.

The West’s emphasis on appearance as a determinant of personal and social value (Thompson et al 1999, cited Warren 2013), combined with an increase in health lifestyle trends, has led to cultural obsessions with fitness rising rapidly. Add in digital media

advancements, and you uncover the rise of online fitness communities, or fitspiration (fitspo). Fitspo websites advocate healthy lifestyles (Boepple et al 2013), and include images of muscular physiques, food and images, and quotes pushing one to exercise in pursuit of physical greatness. Users share their fitness advice and workout achievements as part of online profiles and images of men in particular, show large muscles, low body fat and proportioned physiques. Brandt (2015) monitored 500,000 online conversations over 3 months, and found prominent discussions covered body (23%), diet (22%) and exercise (15%), and companies have also started to proactively adjust communications objectives to align with this trend, incorporating fitness motivation to sell products on social media (SM). This is all inclusive of fitspiration, with social media being defined as Internet based applications permitting creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

The boom in online health trends raises questions about its origins. It is known that mass media promotes idealized images, making people perceive themselves as less attractive (Kazmierczak et al, 2013 p303). SM is an extension of this portrayal of appearance ideals (Warren 2013), but users make comparisons to their peers, and not just models or celebrities (Swartz cited Mulliniks 2014). As fitspiration is chosen by the user, it is perceived as more self-relevant (van de Berg et al, 2007) in comparison to traditional media, (offline communication). This behaviour and the visualisation of the body in fitspiration can potentially stimulate negative body image internalisation.

Previous research identifies "a relation between exposure to thin-ideal magazine and television media images and eating disorder pathology" in women (Bair et al 2012, p.398). Understanding the cognitive processes that influence these behaviours and the development of body satisfaction (van de Berg et al 2007) in men is also being increasingly studied, as cases of muscle dysmorphia (MD) increase. Men's belief that they're insufficiently muscular and resulting associated disordered eating and behaviour (Griffiths et al 2014) is now recognised to be as much of a danger to psychological wellbeing as diseases such as anorexia in women, coinciding with society's increased emphasis on the hypermesomorphic ideal (Saetta, no date). This body is a "well-developed chest and arm muscles and wide shoulders tapering down to a narrow waist" (Mishkind 1987, pg 1). The media now objectifies an unattainable muscular body type (Daniel and Bridges 2009), but it is not recognised if this objectification trickles down into online spaces. A recognition of online behaviour and the consequences is needed to enhance communications, and recognise how web 2.0's interactions, customisation of web use and self-expression (Shuen 2008) redevelops social norms and expectations.

Unfortunately, contemporary study into SM and body ideals has focused heavily on thinspiration sites, involving online circulation of images and words intended to instigate weight loss amongst females (Corbeil-Serre et al 2014). Consequently, this phenomenological study begins to explore males' engagement with online fitness content, their attitudes towards fitspiration, and the consequences of said engagement, and aims to answer gaps on online body objectification and behaviour. Qualitative interviews were used to offer a personal insight into experiences of fitspiration. This was then analysed with thematically by focusing on key attitudes of participants, exposing their subjective feelings and emotions.

Cyberpsychology and online behaviour must be researched to allow the mitigation of its potential dangers. With the pursuit of a culturally desired physique potentially distributed by fitspiration, it can lead to a distorted image of one's own body (Katlin, 2009), and this paper will also aim to identify the behaviour resulting from any comparisons between males and the men in fitspiration.

The paper begins by observing previous arguments and studies associated to media, body image and online behaviour, followed by an outline of the methodological approach. Three key research questions, covering engagement in, attitudes towards and consequences of fitspiration engagement are then explored, analysed and discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Behaviour

Continually developing participatory culture, where “fans and consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins 2006 cited Burgess 2009, p.10), means technology now drives social behaviour (Bimber 2012). The likelihood of acceptance also increases sharing as “virtual communities represent a neutral free judgemental space, resulting in more freedom with expression” (Brotsky and Giles 2007, p. 94).

When studying effects of online sharing, Maksl & Young (2013, p.588) found “perceptions of bridging and bonding social capital were both significant, positive predictors of comfort levels with sharing”, indicating sharing online now contributes to resources that can be mobilized for purposive actions (Lin 1997), such as identity formation. However, these authors fail to recognise motivations people have for seeking sites such as fitspo on which to share.

The circulation of online media content is user-generated, fast -moving and difficult to escape. When new areas of popular culture, such as fitspiration, rise, their legitimacy is questioned (Burgess 2009) because it is unclear where expertise lies, particularly for those seeking health advice and support. The democratisation of the Internet has contributed to “mass consumption, production, and proliferation of unregulated content” (Castro & Osorio 2012, p.170), as well as concerning material including body self-harm sites and commercially exploitive content (Wold et al, p. 135). The ease of access to fitness content combined with its range poses a threat to psychological wellbeing, despite chances of empowering and increasing social capital, defined as “goodwill available to individuals” (Seok-Woo 2014, p.212) in society. Research is needed in this to help diminish such effects.

Thinspiration Sites

Pro-anorexia sites are a prime example of this danger. Study into online health phenomena has focused on “thinspiration”, the sharing of photos and prose of slim bodies, usually by women, intended to inspire eating disorder behaviours (Lewis 2012).

In a study of personal photos shared online, Tiidenburg (2004) found that images shared by the self can positively alter relationships with one's bodies. Photos are a “negotiated version of reality” (Pink, 2005, cited Tiidenburg, p. 20), tools for identity formation, and currency for social interaction (van Dijck, 2008, p. 62). Tiidenburg observes that the use of SM platforms, for sharing images, rejects the homogenized standards of privacy and ideals initiated by consumer culture (Featherstone 2010).

Thinspiration content analysis leads Burke (2012) to conclude that its inspiring aspect provides women with pleasure amongst the distress of starvation. Sites exposing the body legitimise themselves through praising a physique achieved through disordered eating, with images of the slim body well supported. But this analysis doesn't consider the potential on-going effects of evaluation by other users, and the effects of exposure to the content by those who don't upload. Groesz et al. (2002, cited Sigman 2010, p.117) carried out a meta-analytic review of 25 studies of women. He concluded that “body

image was significantly more negative after viewing thin media images". Body-image related diseases are also being seen spreading to other peripheries of society, including men (Williams 2009). Photos shared online to create an identity may lack in authenticity and not reflect offline lifestyles, particularly as the Internet is a fertile medium for development of numerous realities and identities (Jones 1998).

Muscle Dysmorphia

Muscle dysmorphia (MD), where sufferers perceive themselves to be insufficiently muscular (Griffiths et al. 2014), partaking in exercise and disordered eating, affects approximately 100,000 people worldwide and its incidence is increasing (Babic-Zielińska et al. 2013). There has also been documented increase since 1972 in men dissatisfied with muscle tone (Cash 2002), thanks to hypermasculine media ideals. Whilst it can be argued contemporary health trends are encouraging men to be conscious of the state of their bodies, fitspiration "inevitably includes some bodies and excludes others" (Dworkin 2009, p.21).

Rhea et al (2000, cited Katlin 2009) developed a MD model showing variables including low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction result in increased motivation for one to engage in exercise to achieve a physique. Building on this, Grieve (2007) includes social environmental factors including media in his causation (of MD). However, MD studies appear to focus on those with diagnostic criteria, ignoring those with developing ideas about body image, which are just the "perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the body" (Grogan 2008). It remains difficult to acknowledge at what point someone's interest in achieving muscularity reaches a disordered state, and if MD is just one way of negative body image manifesting itself.

There are those who challenge the likelihood of the media in instigating this behaviour. When monitoring the prefrontal cortex – activated when self-reflection occurs- Sigman (2010) found males processed little activity, when exposed to images of body equivalents, compared to females who all showed action when shown images of women in bikinis. This aligns with Burke's findings and indicating men may be limited on the comparisons that they really make. But the nature of fitspiration can assist with withdrawing negative body image and encourage MD behaviour due to its constant stream of images of men with well-developed muscle tone.

Spiral of Silence

The justification of health sites can be maintained through the support they offer to those with body image issues and feelings they are unable to share in everyday discourse. Alternative media like Social Media prevents individuals with body image issues from feeling powerless, by offering a discussion area, whilst traditional media continuously portrays prevalent cultural image identity opinions (Littlejon & Foss, 2009). Uncertainty about public opinion also contributes to a lack of willingness to engage in public expression (Lin 1997) and results in a media perpetuated spiral of silence. Social networks have created an area to potentially challenge normative body ideals, despite their likelihood to encourage disordered eating, counteracting the negative results of opinions being suppressed, such as frustration and anger.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The idea that individuals are able to use the Internet to satisfy needs, such as sharing or support is reinforced by uses and gratification theory (U&G). Individuals utilise media likely to fulfil needs resulting in gratification (Lariscy et al. 2011). Whiting and Williams

(2013) identified information seeking (80%), communicatory utility (56%) and surveilling others as three key uses and gratifications for Social Media. Building on this, U&G interviews on social network adoption behaviour undertaken by Pai and Arnott (2012, p. 1049) found "users do indeed employ the function of uploading pictures and customizability to facilitate social enhancement".

It can be questioned if new media actually creates new needs, which it then proceeds to gratify. U&G theory remains very audience focused, ignoring how the technology itself influences selection of gratifications, and we're encouraged to use content in "such a personal way that we not only act, but actively construct meaning" (Sundar and Limperos 2013, p.505). The range of fitspiration content available may mean users think it is a necessity to access it, and use it in pursuit of body goals.

Whilst it would appear that there are more acceptances for body varieties online than in traditional media, there is a need to evaluate the impact of this media on males, as it has been previously discounted, yet dysmorphic behaviour was observed. Jonason (2009) recognised through path modelling that men undergo similar processes as women in developing body satisfaction, when exposed to muscular media.

Masculinity and the media

The media's ability to perpetuate male ideals and masculinity has led to men viewing their bodies as commodities to be analysed (Wykes 2005), contributing to pathologies of imperfection and MD. Masculinity previously symbolised a norm and the functioning of society linked to the strong masculine ideal (Mosse 1998). But this has since been challenged by changes in gender roles, education and media exposure to softer roles. Mosse argues masculinity has squashed these challenges, and any opponents of the masculine norm of self-control. But in post-industrial culture, where careers in physical labour are diminishing, the definition of masculinity is distorted and the concept is not as resilient as those like Mosse think.

Men's position in society is in a state of flux. Dworkin (2009) argues men feel challenged and express "boy panic" as women enter male domains. Mosse's ideal is still under attack and the movement of gender equality threatens the gender divisions "crucial to the construction of modern masculinity" (Mosse 1998, p. 79). Muscularity therefore is a way for men to maintain control.

Agliata and Tantleff- Dunn (2004) developed a study exposing men to advertising containing either muscular males, or a second set of advertising which lacked muscularity. Increased levels of anxiety and muscular dissatisfaction existed amongst those viewing the first adverts. Despite gender roles changing, a general cultural prejudice favouring the mesomorph (Grogan 1999, cited Dworkin et al 2009) fuels males to look at their bodies and masculinity as a whole. It appears mass media maintains lean muscularity as ideal, with those achieving it positioned as more successful and dominant.

Yet there is change appearing in representation of male stereotypes in the media. The increasing popularity of comedies promotes liberation of hard masculinity (Bly 1992, cited Hanke 1998) and represents varied male stereotypes. Men's media consumption is now "disparaging" (Salzman et al., 2005, p. 12) towards hard men. A study of material undertaken by Robertson (2011, cited Hanke 1998) found masculine stereotypes are now lampooned and "comic narratives simultaneously present men as objects of laughter and as subjects moving between old and new positions" (Hanke 1998, p. 76), with the hard strong man ideal becoming diminished. But with the focus in fitspiration being in achieving peak physical fitness, despite it being a new medium it may still reflect identified cultural prejudice towards masculinity.

Networked Masculinities

Building on this, masculinity fluctuates across contexts, with online masculinities emerging (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). Whilst this may be a slightly technological deterministic approach, online identity “transcends geographic and time boundaries” (Light 2013, p. 245) and networked masculinities are “(co)produced and reproduced with digitally networked publics”. Online space offers a new forum for the exploration of a range of masculine identities such as homosexuality, the metrosexual, lad culture and the urban playboy, restricting potential effects of one mainstream media ideal on males, even if currently limited.

But research such as Robertson's and Light's suggesting one ideal doesn't overrule is challenged by the increase in muscularity disorders that are still occurring. Body image is an evaluative process in which internal comparisons are made against a desired state, often mass media represented (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). Fitspiration content, despite being in the online sphere, could cause this evaluative process amongst more latent users, because it may contribute to a rebirth of exposure to strong men.

Social Comparison Theory

Cash and Smolak (2011) note individuals are fascinated by those more physically fit than themselves, and fitness environments are “inherently social and evaluative in nature” (Pila et al 214, p.93). When met with information regarding others, people relate it to their own positions (Dunning and Hayes 1996), either upwardly or downwardly.

This social comparison (SC) can then result in self-evaluation (Festinger 1954). Two studies (Halliwell et al, 2005; Martin & Gentry, 1997) found motivations for SC with thin idealized models for women didn't lead to detrimental effects when comparison reasons were motivated by self-improvement or enhancement- as they would be when viewing fitspiration content- as opposed to self-evaluation (Tiggemann and Polivy 2010). However, if motivations for viewing fitness content were not for self-improvement, results could be much more likely to induce body dissatisfaction, with comparisons occurring on “attributes such as age, race and appearance” (Lew et al, 2007, p. 544).

From their study of gendered responses towards academics, Kimmelmeier and Oyserman (2001) concluded men customarily focus on their own uniqueness, instead of social contexts and relationships. They're more likely to downwardly compare themselves to others, focusing on other's negativity to highlight personal superiority, consequently feeling better about themselves. But in an environment such as fitspiration, where the strongest and most physically fit are showcased, it is unknown if men seek to highlight negative elements of the images exposed, or if they upwardly compare to those they deem as better, resulting in low mood.

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) suitably acknowledges a number of impacts on behaviour. This includes behaviour evaluation, opinions of referent others, such as online peers and gym friends, and subjective norms and attitudes, to predict behaviour following comparison. Golan (2008) quantitatively studied TRA in relation to marketing messages, gaging respondent perceptions and message engagement. Acting intentions are based on a combination of social expectation and rational thought (Golan 2008), confirming comparable behaviour regularly occurs when analysing media content such as fitspiration. Secondly, attitude based messages, such as fitspo, are effective in social-cognitive interventions designed to change behaviour (Armitage & Conner 1999 cited Hagger et al 2002). Hagger et al (2002) expanded on TRA research, discovering via meta-analysis that TRA accounted for most variance in physical activity and behaviour. Males

most influenced by the attitudes of others aim to reach a desirable social physical standard through changes in exercise behaviour.

The literature explored acknowledges the existing pathological pre-occupation with muscularity and the ability of the media to instigate negative body image and disordered eating. It also offers insight into the comparative and cognitive processes individuals undertake when analysing media content. The growing importance of Social Media is recognised through its assistance in dealing with spiral of silence and how it helps society satisfy their needs. But with online health sites, it remains unclear why users initially seek them out, and to what extent body comparisons are made. Secondly, it notes how online images are "negotiated versions of reality" (Pink 2005) and if online users can manipulate perceived identities. This could mean other users are comparing themselves to unauthentic content and realistic ideals are therefore missing. Online space has potentially opened up exploration of a wider variety of stereotypes and behaviour changes, and the growth of online health phenomena means there is a need to observe engagement behaviour and consequences, yet there is little research on it and the field could benefit from more subjective understanding.

This study aims to address a gap in online behaviour literature by offering insight into young males' engagement with fitspiration and its resulting significant behaviours and attitudes. Three research objectives to achieve this have been created:

1. Gain insight into young males engagement with fitspiration
2. To explore the attitudes of males towards Fitspiration content
3. To understand if fitspiration engagement impacts offline behaviour, attitudes and body image.

METHODS

The research objectives informed a phenomenological approach, and this section will outline the methods used to achieve insight into men's interaction with the phenomena of fitspiration. Fitspiration is a consequence of technologically literate societies developing from growth in technology and acculturation. Consequently, all individual experiences of engagement and attitudes towards it are different. Therefore, it has the ability to influence all those engaged with it in alternative ways. Social diversity and human's shared experiences generate behaviour (McCurdy et al. 2005) so qualitative research is significant to understanding how men interact with fitspiration content and conclude on similarities.

The phenomenological study was designed to offer space for understanding individual and social complexity (Saldana 2011) and the gathering of rich data, instead of a focus on one reality. It was also important to be able to recognise opportunities in the research and "follow leads as they occur" (Blaikie 2000, p. 243) when discussing issues such as body image, which such an approach allows. A phenomenological stance compliments the need to recognize shared experiences (Bawalan 2012) of fitspiration, with emphasis placed on personal perspective, interpretation (Lester 1991) and experience of online fitness content and its effects. Fieldwork used semi-structured in-depth interviews, analysed through thematic coding.

Sampling

Non-probability purposive sampling decreased the likelihood of suppressing irregular cases, a risk in quantitative studies, and to draw a sample involved with the processes of interest (Tansey 2007) - fitspiration. To learn the most about the "issues of central importance" (Patton 2002, p. 46), engagement with and impacts of fitspo, purposeful

sampling was most suitable. Those aged 18-25 were targeted via snowball sampling and Social Media advertising. Social Media acts as a pre-screening environment for individuals, and this age set maintains an 89% regular usage rate of online sites (Pew Research Centre 2013) compared to alternative ages. They were targeted by location, Bournemouth or Kent, allowing efficient access. Snowball sampling was also integrated, using natural social networks (Noy 2008) to diminish power relations between researcher and researched, and it allowed contact to a population that the researcher didn't have close interaction with. The first participant contacted was a university acquaintance who introduced other friends. Participants expressed interest via email, and interviews were arranged. 12 men were interviewed in their own homes in dialogue that lasted 25- 60 minutes.

Data-collection

Interviews were semi-structured, allowing expansion on certain points of interest (Patton 2002), particularly attitudes and body satisfaction. Guide questions were based on pre-defined objectives, and included open ended and probing types. Asking participants these types of questions offers connection to the context in which the fitspiration phenonema has been experienced (Englander 2013), when analysing the data. Men were also asked their opinions on relevant stimuli material. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to prevent observer error and beneficence was maintained, with all research and sampling following Bournemouth University's ethics guidelines.

Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological thematic analysis was used to with the aim of giving experience primacy (Holloway and Todres 2003) and to naturally uncover patterns. Individual perspectives were scanned and labelled, similarities uncovered and then sectioned into categories in comparison to pre-existing theories and concepts, emphasising "the importance of personal perspective and interpretation" (Lester 1999, p. 1) and lived experiences. The identification of common threads extending across the set of interviews (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, cited Vaismoradi 2013) meant that similar beliefs and feelings towards fitspiration could be generalized.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following section will discuss and analyse the uncovered opinions and feelings of the participants using key themes under each objective. All considered themselves regular users of a variety of social networks. Fitness content was primarily viewed on Facebook and Instagram, with some men following athletes on Snapchat. The men felt fitspiration was anything that gives people inspiration to get fit, or be an enhanced version of themselves. They also considered it anything giving you the motivation to go and do something.

Objective 1- Engagement Behaviour

(1) Education and gratification

Firstly, nearly all of the participants revealed that they predominantly use fitspiration for education, and to enhance their workouts. When questioned on their reasons for viewing

content, participants stated how they searched for men partaking in body-specific exercises, and "*adjust*" (Participant 9) their routine accordingly if needed, with the focus being on "education over motivation" (Participant 1). Participant 3 and Participant 4 spoke about how they have been going to the gym for a while, yet fitspo offers the chance for him to maintain this by offering "*information and new workouts*" (Participant 3).

P4: "I can literally just get my phone out and within 30 seconds like I could have 30 back exercises there...I take like screen shots and then I can just scroll through when I'm in the gym."

Similarities can be drawn here with Whiting and Williams, when discovering information seeking as a key reason for Social Media use. Men maintain the ability to filter the fitness media they do not feel as relevant to themselves, challenging Sundar and Limperos (2013) criticisms of U&G theory. Indeed the media is used in a very personal way, tailored to individual needs, but men do not construct meaning as they are already clear on their end goals before using sites. Fitspiration content is an addition, utilised when wanted and ignored otherwise, with men able to "filter the rubbish and just look at the good stuff" (Participant 8), meaning content is more valuable.

Interestingly, the physical appearance of the men in the images also influenced engagement. Despite saying fitspiration portrayed "aesthetically perfect people" (Participant 11) or the "perceived body ideal", if participants felt the men bore no relation to them in body shape, they did little else to explore that site or profile. Participant 6 explained "everyone's different, so if you try someone else's routine and won't end up looking like them, because everyone's unique to you", and consequently, he would pick and choose what information he wanted to individually employ. Participant 4 built on this, but told how ethnicity also played a role in comparison.

"If I was to buy into a way a guy looked... it would have to be a black guy. I can't compare myself to a white person".

Despite their cognitive behaviour not being quantitatively measured in this study, it would appear men are limited on the comparisons that they make (Sigman 2010) because they are more in touch with their physical state than literature suggests. Their understanding of their own body shape instantaneously restricts the content they consume, important to recognise when the body is such domination in contemporary culture and consumption (Thompson et al 1999).

(2) Sharing reluctances

Brotksy and Giles (2007) found online communities, such as fitspiration, offer acceptance in a judgement free environment. However, there was a clear reluctance by participants to upload their own fitness content, despite being gym goers. Intriguingly, they would happily find alternative ways to show off their bodies online, if they deemed themselves as looking in good physical shape.

Participant 2: "I would find a photo of me in the garden playing where I look big. I wouldn't make a thing of the fact I'm big."

Participant 11: "I wouldn't like, post a photo of me on bench press like "if you dream you can achieve", that kind of bollocks, but if I do ever turn out with abs and I'm on holiday with a decent picture of me with my mates, I would be sure I would put it up."

The desire to show off achievements is present, but freedom of expression (Brotksy and Giles 2007) was not. Online is clearly a space where an individual constructs identity, with one participant still admitting that he would not upload, despite feeling up to the strength standard fitspiration bore. There is a concern with social capital, (Maksl and

Young 2013) but there is a higher fear of reducing what capital you hold, instead of uploading fitspiration an opportunity to increase it.

Participant 4: "I think I'm strong enough to fucking upload a video and be impressive, but I'm not that guy, I'm modest. I don't wanna come across like a dickhead."

Discussion reluctances

It remains inherent in men to not discuss their flaws and participants highlighted fitspo was not the arena for discussing imperfections. If participants felt insecurity towards body parts, men would be more likely to phrase questions towards those with good bodies in forums, instead of being explicit about their perceived inadequacies.

Participant 8: "People are posting like oh I do this all the time, when you guys wanna get bigger arms what do you do and what do you eat... they'd be talking about it in terms of body building instead of like a deep emotional kind of "ooh I'm unsatisfied".

Despite recognising larger forums, such as bodybuilding.com, offer support, men concluded people "hide behind keyboards online" and are rather nasty (Participant 12). Anonymity is juxtaposing, and despite the option to keep identity secret, men do not speak up on flaws, showing that there may be pre-existing embarrassment about body size that fitspiration exaggerates. Consequently it remains unclear where this initial body predisposition comes from if fitspiration amplifies it, instead of causing it.

Fitspiration also doesn't provide men with a source of pleasure (Burke 2012) via support in the struggle to achieve body goals. Those who comment are in two camps- the extremely fit who speak from a point of pride, appearing expert and commenting on other's need for improvement, or the very unfit and uneducated. The rest are "*lurkers*" (Participant 11). These lurkers maintain feelings of inadequacy that are perpetuated by the other types of men who comment. A cycle begins in which body dissatisfaction breeds, with user action manipulating one another's engagement behaviours and feelings more than visual content.

Fitspiration also makes users conscious that there are others more fit and strong, and interviews revealed that despite men believing its purpose is motivating, the content still exposes them to a huge variety of other bodies. Participant 9 maintained he wasn't the sort of person to make comparisons in general life, but then when he looked on fitspiration he admitted he had thought "I'd rather have that look than mine, then do something about it". This demonstrates how content exposes audiences to "looks" that are not visible in offline discourse, forcing comparisons, the effects of which are later explored.

Ultimately, fitspiration is searched for and used by men as they wish, but the variety of content that accumulates from these searches means exposure to more bodies for which men to compare. It would be thought that this variety makes men feel confident that there are different body types, and some do have the ability to disregard it, but any inadequate feelings that do arise are not supported by other users. This can lead to low self-esteem and men silencing their feelings further- a fitspiration spiral of silence. Similarly to mass media influences, doubt about public opinion does indeed prevent men from engaging in public expression (Lin 1997).

Objective 2- Attitudes towards the content

(1) Negativity towards uploaders

Despite these sites challenging mainstream ideals (Featherstone 2010), fitspo has developed its own ideal combining a large proportioned muscles and modest attitude. The invitation to circulate content (Jenkins 2006) exists, but there are consequences, such as negative reception, if you do not meet this self-created ideal. The attitude towards the males who upload was a strong theme throughout analysis. Participants exhibited dislike towards men who displayed their physiques online. There is a stigma attached to those who “trophy their progress” (Participant 11), and consequently their personality must be shown to be modest or entertaining, or else they risk not accepted by users.

Participant 11: “If you put me in that exact position ...you’d think what a tosser, what a dickhead. Standing there chiselled with fake tan....there is arrogance and they get carried away.”

The participants regularly gave examples of men they followed as they respected their personal qualities and attitudes towards fitness, which consequently meant they respected their physical achievements more. Participant 11 had strong opinions on a USC featherweight fighter discovered on Instagram, who he classed to be in “sick shape” and a champion, but was “so much of a dickhead” he couldn’t help but view.

“He was a fucking douche. He photoshopped his opponents head with like blood come off it...saying I’m gonna eat him alive... just shit like that, shut up.”

Continuing, one user said he looks at others and questions why he hasn’t achieved that figure (Participant 11). Participant 2 noted men on fitspo are primarily there to “make other people jealous”, and the downward personality comparison may stem from envy towards their physiques. With fitspiration content encouraging men to evaluate their physical states, resulting feelings of insignificance need to be counteracted to prevent further body image decline.

(2) Social comparison behaviour

As users are not physically superior to fitspiration males, they’re vocal about their disdain towards personalities, emphasizing their own superiority (Kemmelmeyer and Oyserman 2001). They subsequently regain control of their identities potentially damaged by their lack of physical achievement in comparison to fitspiration physiques. This reinforces social comparison debates, with men downwardly comparing (Dunning and Hayes 1996). Participants frequently mentioned how they felt men in fitspiration post pictures for encouragement, and sharers were actually the ones lacking in confidence (Participant 11), an attribute associated with dominance.

Participant 1- “People who do that sort of stuff [upload fitspo content] are looking for personal positive encouragement; they need people saying you look fantastic.”

This shows those who share body-exposing content require legitimisation from other users prior to acceptance.

(3) Authenticity and credibility

Men were questioned on their receptiveness to fitspiration marketing, and how true they felt the stories attached to the visuals really were. They concluded that images selling product were clearly using photoshop, and "handpicking" (Participant 2) larger men. But the tactics normal males used to achieve the physiques they displayed were questionable. Steroid abuse in particular was a regular assumption about those in great physical shape.

Participant 11: "I train quite hard and then these guys are looking ten times better and it's almost a defence mechanism where for guys it's easier for you to be like it's obvious you took steroids or these super strong fat burners."

Similarly Participant 10 also recognised "there was only a certain level your body can get to", and hypermesomorphic males and their projected online opinions were always approached with caution. Men are proving that Social Media does not hold the pervasiveness that traditional media has previously (Cash 2002; Grieve 2007, Grogan 2009), therefore making it more difficult to connect with audiences, because they're increasingly conscious of the processes that go into image manipulation and the media's likelihood to represent an unrealistic image.

Objective 3- Engagement Consequences

(1) Body Comparisons

Despite participants downwardly comparing in personality traits and indicating that they were able to neglect content, when conducting analysis of the data it was clear that they were still comparing their bodies to the men they saw. But comparisons developed out of curiosity as to how the fitspiration men had achieved their looks, with the participants comparing their lifestyle habits, with physiques being of secondary importance.

Participant 11: "It takes someone who eats right and goes to the gym to understand what goes into that [physique]. There's a lot of work and effort that goes into what they do, that people don't realise."

This indicates profiles on fitspiration, and the variety of content, fuels men to look at their bodies against mesomorphics (Grogan 1999), but also makes users increasingly aware of the behaviour required to reach those physiques, which mainstream media cannot do with direct messages, minimising the pressure.

That said, viewing the content did cause dissatisfaction amongst those who made comparisons, similar to Agilita and Tantleff- Dunn's findings. Low self-esteem and body image were shown by the men, regarding their muscular size.

Participant 2: "Oh my arms aren't as big, as his, he's gone ten abs, I didn't know you could have ten."

Rhea et al's (2009) MD model showed an increased motivation to engage in behaviour to rectify this. When the media are included in the influence on those variables (Grieve 2007) it adds to this dysmorphic state, increasing the likelihood of gym attendance or exercise. But despite some participants perceiving themselves insufficiently muscular (Griffiths et al 2014), cognitive comparisons of body shape do not transcend into added gym attendance or drastic lifestyles alternations. Participant 3 explained the thought process that occurred for him, which started with a body comparison.

"You think he looks better than men in that, if I trained a bit harder then I could. It does make you think oh yeah shit I should buckle down and eat a bit better, but then twenty minutes later I've forgotten about it and I'm eating a cake."

Similarly, Participant 10 acknowledged you may initially make a size comparison, but then question the image you're viewing.

"When you first view the image you think fuck imagine being that big... then I "spose just a debate like are these people actually doing it legit, like taken a few steroids and set up an instagram page."

It supports Cash's findings that men are still increasingly dissatisfied with muscle tone (2002), but MD behaviour was not shown. This is surprising considering that this age-group has the widest access to media. The dissimilarity to Babicz-Zielinska et al's findings in increased MD amongst males indicates males stop cognitively analysing Social Media messages before it requires them to alter activity, reflecting the fast paced nature of Social Media, technology's ability to influence social behaviour (Bimber 2012), and a need to divert the feelings about their bodies that fitspo perpetuates, before it requires an inconvenient change.

(2) Perceptions of masculinity

Conversations about masculinity were some of the most remarkable. Attitudes towards masculinity may be a prime reason explaining why men are less interested in comparing physiques and focus more on the personal characteristics of the men in fitspiration. To the participants, masculinity involves "holding the door open for a woman, and good manners" (Participant 10). Being an "assertive" individual who "doesn't get caught up in bullshit" (Participant 11) whilst maintaining leadership qualities, is more important than appearance.

Participant 3: "Its more to do with what sort of job you do, how you act and how you are as a person, than a physique that's made in the gym"

Participant 2: "Being a good man comes first- if you're big and strong it's an added extra."

Dominance and strength were recognised as elements of masculinity, but participants concluded they do not feel challenged by females, despite participants recognising "society is shifting from patriarchal and we're getting an equal stance" (Participant 4). This undermines Dworkin's arguments that changing roles create boy panic, with men remaining the "dominant sex" and "running things" (Participant 2), supporting Mosse's resilient masculinity. However, this is partially down to the varieties and constant changing of masculinities portrayed in the media, which can lead to confusion over an ideal.

Participant 12: "Obviously in Disney movies we're like princes, and then if you go into like HOT magazine they have like crutch watch [laughter] so you don't really know what to expect."

But Social Media has opened the door to allow men to experience with different identities, gaining support for this experimentation.

Participant 11: "You can take like Gaz from Geordie Shore, or you can take like I don't know, some kind of edgy guy, that are like the icons that like follow. Then I guess if you're caught up with those kinds of people then there is a pressure to you know, get to the

gym, or be really edgy, or wear like vintage adidas shit and that kind of stuff."

The strong, muscular ideal is beginning to fall by the wayside, replaced by a range of identities, such as lad culture and metrosexuals. Participant 2 spoke of how Graham Norton and Alan Carr were not the ultimate manly men, but attract large audiences, similarly to Bear Grylls - who is considered a man's man. Despite fitspiration portraying those in peak physical fitness, similarly to television, Social Media contexts indeed free hard masculinity (Bly 1992). However, the participants still remained wary of homosexual stereotypes and frequently made reference to the men in fitspiration with derogatory, feminine terms. When presented with stimuli of men posing, participants Participant 4 and Participant 11 referred to the men as "tarts" and "gays". Participant 4 spoke of an instructor running an online Insanity class, who even though he was gay and "wedge", "takes control of his class and gets people motivated". The man was judged on sexuality, but accepted because of his ability to portray the assertive, strong masculine traits men spoke of.

Participant 7 said he felt fitspiration should reflect just muscly guys, and men be "well-dressed but not wearing make-up or fake tan, and not walking down the road with a handbag". Fitspiration content regularly shows body-builders and models wearing tanning and beauty products; as a result, comments such as this incorporate homosexual stigma to make participants feel less threatened by the rise of these differing stereotypes shown in online media, and the consequent confusion over mixed expectations for men.

(3) Sexual desirability

The incorporation of more feminine traits by men in networked masculinities (Light 2013) means that achieving a sexual partner, from being in good shape, reinforces your position as a hegemonic male, opposed to the previous large, burly strong man (Hanke 1998) defining you. Additionally, attracting the opposite sex proved to be a clear reason as to why men used fitspiration content to enhance their workouts. Improvements in gym activity improved chances of "pulling girls" (Participant 10).

Participant 11: "As long as you're shagging bitches it's alright and having a laugh is how it's portrayed."

Participant 8: "They [gym goers] want to look good to get women, but it's not necessarily the women putting pressure on the men. I think boys just build it up in their head and think they have to look like this to get the girl."

Fitspiration positions males that achieve peak physical fitness and strength as the most attractive to the opposite sex. Participant 3 felt

"it changes the woman's perception of men when there's all these images floating about, what they expect men to be and what normal looks like".

This shows concern that fitspiration increases expectations on males to consider getting into better shape. Whilst females are not explicitly outlining the fit man as an ideal, exposure creates concerns amongst men that a fit male is desirable, which is more likely to increase gym activity than body comparisons.

CONCLUSION

Men's engagement came from a need for education gratification and information seeking (Whiting and Williams 2013). Pre-determined goals mean males are in a position of

power over the content from the initial point of engagement. Online space is also used to help men construct identity, enhancing social capital (Maksl & Young 2009). However, fitspiration poses too much of a risk to this and a reluctance to share. Also, reluctance to discuss flaws indicates that despite being user-generated phenomena, fitspiration users have created their own standards that govern other's behaviour.

These standards of modesty and well-proportioned muscular physiques were constantly under scrutiny and fitspiration is most definitely not a neutral environment (Brotsky and Giles 2007), with users frequently judging other's behaviour. Despite the use of fitspo being motivated by self-enhancement (Tiggemann and Polivy 2010), the mixture of ideals online media has opened up (Whitehead & Barrett 2001) induces a struggle for men to find where they fit, and confusion about expectations on them, resulting in frequent downward social comparison. This also meant they looked for excuses as to why fitspiration men were in such great shape, and questioned both the technological editing and drug use that contributed to the end products displayed. The lifestyle and body comparisons that do occur, whilst not leading to a change in behaviour, ultimately come from the need to maintain masculinity traits that are challenged by the exposure of stereotypes stemming from technological expansion.

Fitspiration integrates the stereotype of the hyper masculine; similar to traditional media, but its position in alternative media means its severe display of muscularity is overlooked. It does breed body dissatisfaction, but via withdrawal of predispositions that are already in men- it puts pressure for a need for a proportioned physique but the questionable lifestyle of the fitspo men. It also adds importance to maintaining masculinity through personality and sexual achievements over physique, signifying that it does not progress into extra gym behaviour.

It seems as if there is an on-going battle between societal expectations on men and the opportunities technological advancements offer them to explore and manipulate their identities. The technology itself does not appear to drive social behaviour (Bimber 2012), and it is the users themselves and social expectations (Golan 2008) that do.

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