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# Women's Body Image in the Media: Fitspiration on Instagram

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Women's Body Image in the Media: Fitspiration on Instagram


by


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**ABSTRACT**

Several studies have been done to examine the effects of fitspiration on body image satisfaction using social comparison theory but there has yet to be a study done using framing theory to find out what exactly these images are focusing on. This research will use framing theory to examine what characteristics and body types are being seen on Instagram under the hashtag "fitspiration".

Using a mixed method approach, this study uses a textual analysis to first get a larger sample set of fitspiration images on Instagram. It then uses in-depth interviews to get a deeper understanding of what the general public thinks the main frames of fitspiration are. Results for this research found that the social media trend emphasizes a stronger and more health-focused ideal and a strong sense of health and/or fitness behind the frames of each image.

With the increased use of social media starting at such a young age it is important to understand the culture of popular trends in order to evaluate how we are interacting with them. Previous research focused on the outcome as opposed to the origin of the issue. This research gives a sample of the fitspiration culture in order to help us start to understand the trends of health and fitness online.

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

Body image is a big topic in the media today, as it has been over the last few

decades. The average size of models in advertisements is becoming increasingly smaller

and the average size of the American woman is becoming increasingly larger, creating a

large gap between the two types of women. In the more recent years, it has become even

more popular for individuals to want to live a healthy lifestyle by eating nutritional foods

and exercising often, whether it is for a certain look or to take care of their bodies. With

social media growing, more individuals have turned to sites such as Instagram for

inspiration or to share their health goals. "Since Instagram's launch in Oct. 2010, it has

gained over 150 million users, with an average of 55 million uploads per day. That's more

than 16 billion photos since its launch date" (Hu, Manikonda, Kambhampati, 2014). With

the use of hashtags, new trends have begun to form and have found followings of millions.

Fitspiration specifically is associated with over 28 million images under the hashtag

"fitspiration" or the shorthand version "fitspo" (Tiggemann, M., & Zaccardo, M. 2016). The

average American spends over 184 minutes on social media per day, being exposed to

thousands of images (Boepple, L., & Thompson, J. K. 2016). This research will aim to fill the

research gap of what content individuals are posting in fitspiration.

This study will dive into images under the hashtag of "fitspiration" to find out

exactly what is being depicted in the images. A textual analysis of images on Instagram will

be used to determine what trends have been used to shape fitspiration as well as find out if

fitspiration is actually a positive encouragement of a healthy lifestyle, or just thin women

posting under a new hashtag.

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Body Image in the Media**

Models have been used in the media to sell products for as long as advertisement has been around. There has been an increasingly larger gap in the average body size between women and models. Models have begun to get thinner throughout the years, which has resulted in a skewed image of what the idea of beauty really is. Media has helped paint this image, making women believe that in order to achieve the ultimate idea of beauty, one must be thin; This is referred to as "The Thin Ideal." Media has helped portray the picture of the thin ideal in which the ideal image of beauty is to maintain below average body weight and little to no body fat. A content analysis done on 69 popular women's magazines in America revealed that 94% of them had an image of either a thin model or a thin actress on the cover. (Harper, & Tiggemann, 2008). Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer have claimed that statistics show that if you show a beautiful, skinny girl on a cover of a magazine then you will sell more copies (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). Photograph editing has been used excessively over the past couple of decades. "Research done on extremely thin media body ideal is founded on the assumption that media images of thin models and celebrities are thin and ideal, inasmuch as they are perfected through the use of appearance-enhancing device's like makeup, styling, lighting, and image editing, which is a uniquely effective tool for manufacturing idealness because it creates outcomes that cannot

be achieved through natural means" (Harrison & Hefner, 2014). These images result in unrealistic expectations that have shaped women into believing they need to look a certain way in order to be considered beautiful. This is explained by the social comparison theory, which suggests that women will evaluate their own beauty and appearances based on what they believe the cultural ideals in the media are. Unfortunately, this ends up being a comparison where women believe that they fall short, resulting in them having a negative view of their own appearance (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). This is exactly how body image in the media has been used: thin, beautiful models in advertisements to help sell more products. As this gap increases, women have begun to participate in actions to help themselves achieve this body type; thousands of dollars have been spent on weight loss programs, gym memberships, and even image enhancement surgeries (Fallon & Hausenblas, 2005).

In more recent years, there has been a shift to include more plus-sized and healthy weight models into advertisement. Research has shown that including more average and plus-sized models into the media helps eliminate the amount of negative comparisons, as well as promote a more positive body image satisfaction. This research suggests that viewing advertisements with average and plus-sized models not only has positive effects for the viewer, but it also creates a positive association with the company and their products as well as increases memory recall for their advertisements (Clayton, Ridgway, & Hendrickse, 2017).  In 2003, Dove preformed a research study to find the real truth about beauty, which included 3200 women in over 10 countries. The study found some not so shocking results, "less than 2 percent of women feel beautiful, 75 percent want representation of women to reflect diversity through age, shape, and size, and 76 percent

want the media to portray beauty as more than just physical" (Murray, 2013). This opened a door for an amazing marketing campaign that allowed for companies to break out of the "thin ideal". Examples of companies who have made attempts are Dove's "Real Beauty Campaign" and American Eagle's "aerieREAL campaign" which both used untouched images of women for advertisement. With these shifts, there has been more room for different categories of body types in the media. Some governments such as the Australian, Israeli, and French have implemented laws that state that one must be medically cleared or have a minimum BMI in order to model and companies that retouch their images must label them as retouched in order to be used in the media (de Freitas, Jordan, & Hughes). Companies such as Getty Stock Image and CVS Pharmacy announced that they would no longer use altered photos that made models look thinner than they actually were. As one would expect with any change in a company or a new campaign, these businesses have received negative backlash stating that they are glorifying obesity. However, others believe that this is a step in a more positive direction and hope that media will do away with airbrushing and photo retouching in order to portray a more realistic beauty (Pounders, 2018). There is a cultural changing beginning to emerge and women no longer want to be viewed as unhealthy, not simply thin or large but rather being seen for more than just their size and appearance. Having a broader sense of diversity will help to eliminate the thin ideal all together.

**Body Image on Social Media**

Facebook is the fastest growing social platform and Instagram follows with a close second, with over 59% of women between the age of 18-29 now involved on the site

(Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017). Instagram's website statistics share that there are over 800 million active monthly users, over 500 million daily active users, and over 250 million active story users (Instagram, 2017). Editing of photographs has become so common in traditional media that it has spilled over onto social media. It is not uncommon and many people know that all the images they see on social media or on dating profiles have undergone retouching or enhancement (Harrison & Hefner, 2014).  Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have made it easy to edit and enhance your photos through filters and different tools directly in the platform, therefore creating the image that the user wishes to be associated with. "Photos can exert greater self-censorship over physical appearance. Photos on online sites can be carefully selected, enhanced, and edited" (Kim & Chock, 2015). Social grooming, the process of checking up on friends' social media accounts, leaving messages, or commenting/liking photos, has increased opportunities for images to be viewed and affect one's self depictions of what an ideal body type should look like. "Research has found that making comparisons with media images can be significantly linked to upward social comparison process because such media tends to portray idealized versions of physical attractiveness (Kim & Chock, 2015). These studies have found that peers can be more influential on comparison because of the relationship that is tied with the individuals being viewed. Social media is where you connect with people you know and associate with compared to traditional media where there is no connection with the models in the images.

Having access to social media, virtually anywhere, allows for many chances for viewers to be exposed to different body types. A study done in Australia found that adolescent girls spend an average of 2 hours a day on social media. This time is often spent

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online shopping, streaming media content, or visiting fashion websites and blogs. These all allow for exposure to thin models in the media. The findings of this study are that there is a strong correlation between the amount of time spent online and the internalization of the thin ideal resulting in body image dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Previous studies have shown that there is a correlation between the time that one spends on social media (specifically Facebook) and the internalization of the thin ideal. This study specifically found that women who post on social media and edit their photos are more likely to internalize the thin ideal. Therefore, resulting in a negative body image (Slater, Varsani, & Diedrichs, 2017). Though some studies suggest this is a two-fold correlation; lower self-esteem can often link to depression, or drive to achieve a perfect look and can heavily influence the way that one perceives their body image. Negative body image perception is often caused by having a high internalization of the thin ideal (Fardouly, et. al. 2015). Another study expressed that there is a link between time spent engaging in photo activity, specifically receiving comments on their own photos and un-tagging themselves from photos that do not display their best personal appearance. Body dissatisfaction is associated with how an individual perceives the cultural ideal of beauty and then compares themselves to this image. When one engages on social media, they constantly compare themselves to what they see in the media. The rise in social media and photo activity has allowed for individuals to make interpretations of what is considered thin, healthy, fit, and beautiful by adding and enhancing their own photos along with engaging in the photo activity of others.

Much of the previous research is done on how body image on social media affects body image satisfaction. With many studies drawing the same conclusion: time spent

online correlates with the internalization of the thin ideal. High internalization of the thin ideal leads to body image dissatisfaction, as explained by social comparison theory. The research fails to fill the gap: What images are social media users viewing that are causing these comparisons? This research will explore images on Instagram in order to understand their effects on those that view them.

**Fitspiration**

Thinspiration (thin inspiration) was a previous trend that promotes unhealthy eating habits, encouraged pro-eating disorders on websites and blogs, as well as promoted unhealthy exercise habits. This supports a thin body image with little-to-no body fat, which was thought of as the ideal body image to those that followed the trend. Previous research found that many of these pro-eating disorder websites and blogs contain images of thin models and celebrities accompanied with quotes and lyrics that encourage eating disorder behavior. Images related to the thin ideal are often worse when also associated with "thinspiration" and "thinspo". This includes images of models and women who appear to be malnourished (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015).

Fitspiration (fit inspiration) is a positive spin-off of thinspiration that has been created using blogs, photos, and websites to promote individuals to exercise and engage in healthy eating habits in order to achieve a healthy lifestyle and reach related health goals. Social cognitive theory suggests we learn from what we see. When an individual is viewing images of thin and fit people they are more likely to want to develop similar habits in order to achieve a similar body type (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017). This might be a suggestion as to why there has not only been a shift towards health and fitness on social media but in the

media in general. A study using Pinterest conducted a content analysis to answer what body image is associated with fitspiration and what behaviors are associated with this body image (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017). The findings of this study showed that fitspiration was correlated with attractiveness and thinness, as well an encouragement for engaging in physical activity. This study concluded that while fitspiration is more positive than thinspiration, it is still focused on a thin body image. A content analysis of fitspiration on Instagram used social comparison theory, coding for "food", "people", and "other". This study found that one third of the photos associated with this hashtag were food. The images of women showed one common body type being thin and toned, most of which were related to fitness in some way. The main finding of this study was that there is an objectification of at least one body part, commonly the abdomen or the legs, which was thought to lead to body image dissatisfaction. (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2016). A study by Ghaznavi and Taylor expresses that content promoting self-objectification leads to women seeing themselves as a third party which can end in a higher form of self-monitoring. These women are more likely to negatively evaluate themselves and constantly compare their own photos to others. This process is often linked with self-grooming, which is a way to make sure that one is portraying the most positive image of themselves on social media. This includes making sure that you have only positive images, untagging yourself from photos deemed unsatisfactory, and editing photos before they are posted.  (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015). The process of self-grooming combined with fitspiration allows for many interpretations between individuals. These previous findings help to shape the current research in hopes to understand how the general public is portraying images that are being posted under the hashtag of "fitspiration". The previous research focuses heavily on the

social comparison theory and leaves out how the images appear that are associated with the hashtag. The question to be answered is: Are there common trends in the photos being posted among the many users of fitspiration? This research will try to understand what the characteristics of these images are under the hashtag of "fitspiration".

**Framing**

Framing theory was introduced into the mass media research field in the 1950's by Robert Entman, it has been a concept with a debatable definition ever since. While it has struggled to have a solid definition, the concept has remained the same. Framing is the idea of taking a picture frame and placing it over the "important part of the story." Gitlin (1980) defined frames in context of both visual and verbal, "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize the discourse, whether verbal of visual (Iorgoveanu & Corbu, 2012)." Framing has been used in all different types of media research as it has remained relevant throughout the years.

Framing is used in two different ways in the media, either sociologically or physiologically and sometimes overlapping. Framing is often thought of as the topic of a post or a photo, creating meaning to otherwise meaningless content. Sociologically framing focuses on the process in which frames are created, organizing the information in ways that select or emphasize a select portion of a story or photo leaving out other details (Borah, 2011). This is demonstrated regularly in the news and can easily be seen when comparing different news sources against each other. For example, CNN News often reports negatively on President Donald Trump's actions, stating that his plans for the wall are not thoroughly

thought out or budgeted for, threatening the cost of billions of dollars. In comparison, Fox News highlights on the positives surrounding President Donald Trump, the proposed wall will replace broken and damaged areas of already existing walls bordering Mexico, keeping out illegal immigrants from the southern nations who are costing our country billions of dollars in lost tax money. While both stories may or may not contain completely accurate facts, they both are missing the whole picture. The sources frame out the most important content in order to create their own story that will appeal to their specific audience. The issue with this is, "in many cases, especially with political issues, there is not always a way to present a situation in different but equivalent ways… it is not always possible to manipulate a frame without changing some of the facts" (Borah, 2011). Emphasis of each frame of the story helps to create biased opinions on certain topics, and leads its viewers/readers to think about the content in the way in which the source has framed; this is attributed to the psychological framing of content. Individuals are free to make their own interpretations of the media whether it be news or a photo. The frames that are produced help to guide each individual towards similar conclusions. When viewing images of models in the media, traditionally you do not see the numerical details about the size of the model or detailed information on their beauty products. However, the way in which each advertisement is framed, viewers are lead to think that these women are beautiful and that they have the ideal, thin body. This is because of the way that they are posed, the clothing that is carefully selected for them to wear, as well as the airbrushed and photoshopped complexion of their skin. These images have been produced in a way to make the viewer think about beauty and thinness, resulting in the psychological frame of the thin ideal.

Framing theory has been a process used in media that focuses on one aspect of reality helping solidify the frame of focus by emphasizing certain information, while excluding other components of the story. Framing helps to create new perceptions of reality, as well as persuade readers to view the topic a certain way (Entman, 1993). A previous analysis by Boepple and Thompson (2016), found thinspiration was focused around the thin ideal. Websites contained women talking about eating minimally and working out excessively to achieve this "ideal" body type. These frames create a sense of accomplishment in these lifestyles, showing that if you (the consumer) do what the advertisement says, then you can look this way too (Boepple & Thompson, 2016). The frames that were identified in this study glorified the idea of purging, eating disorders, and exercising in order to achieve a thin body image. Bennett argues that frames are more like a scenario and helps to frame a story that happens over time. Frames also help to make sense of the end product (Bennett, 1975). The example shows that if you are to engage in these glorified actions of purging and exercising excessively your end result will be a thin body image that is seen in the thinspiration images. The problem with this framing is that not everyone can obtain the same body image, and engaging in these glorified actions can be very dangerous, even life-threatening. The frame leaves out all of the negative side effects that come from these actions and therefore is very misleading to consumers.

Social media has helped to expand the realm of traditional framing by allowing the everyday user to create frames. The average social media user is constantly engaged in the activity of popular trends, allowing them to make their own interpretations of how they would like topics to be viewed. This is referred to as bottom-up framing (Nisbet, 2010). Bottom-up framing is often used in online public forums such as blogs, social media

platforms, and other online content, where the content creators influence the viewers/readers with their opinions/frames that they have on a particular issue. This could be more influential on viewers due to the content being created by an everyday user, rather than the mass media (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009). Bottom-up framing is used to understand what frames are being created under the hashtag of fitspiration. Instagram is a platform where the average everyday user creates the content, allowing for a specific aspect of an image to be focused on. With the users on Instagram creating their own content, it has allowed for popular trends to arise such as thinspiration and fitspiration, this is no longer defined by the media but now by social peers. The positive side of this is there is no longer a "cookie cutter" model where they all look the same but rather each individual emphasizing their beauty in a unique way. The downside of this is that popular media trends have been glorified for so long they have followed over to social media. Users are constantly editing their photos to create a seemingly flawless appearance, angling their bodies in images to hide their imperfections, and photoshopping away any evidence of cellulite.

Visual framing theory will also be used to analyze fitspiration in this research, as previous research has failed to look at the overall framing of images under this trend. "Visual framing has been defined as the selection of one view, scene, or angle when making the image, cropping, editing, or selecting it (Pegoraro, Comeau, & Frederick, 2017)." Images can be very powerful in framing because people are more likely to relate to what they see, rather than what they are told. This is due to images being closer to the sense of reality (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011) "Photographs tell stories, they are so much a part of our daily lives we rarely think about how they influence us and what that influence is

(Pegoraro, Comeau, G& Frederick, 2017)." Instagram is a platform where photographs are primarily used to tell a story. With fitspiration being the positive spin-off of thinspiration, the definition would suggest that positive aspects are frames in these images, looking for healthy lifestyles of going to the gym to achieve a healthy body rather than a thin image as well as focusing on a healthy meal plan. Previous research suggests that individuals who view images of fitspiration have a negative body image satisfaction or have feelings of anxiety over their bodies. Previous research has not expanded on what aspects of these photos are causing these feelings, or what frames have been emphasized on this hashtag trend.

This research will do an analysis of the photos that are being posted under the hashtag of "fitspiration" to understand what these frames are. The photographer is able to tell the viewer what is important; this is done by the angle in which they take the photo, the distance, and the frame of focus (Parry, 2010). Each image that is posted under the hashtag of "fitspiration" has a creator that has taken the photo in a way to tell their audience a story. The goal of this research will be to understand the overall story behind the hashtag. Through this research, the reader will be able to understand how Instagram users have developed a fitspiration culture that has been shaped with photographs on social media. Through textual analysis the images will go through a breakdown of each portion of the image, developing definitions that explain what is being framed in fitspiration.

**Research Questions**

This research is important because social media is changing the way peers interact. We are now both the creator and the consumer; Understanding how we perceive what we

are consuming can help the way that it affects women. Instagram is growing and millions of new photos are posted daily. Thinspiration had originally brought about followers who promoted eating disorders and other unhealthy habits in order to achieve the "thin ideal". Having content easily assessable can be concerning especially if it is promoting harmful expectations. Previous research focused heavily on social comparison theory and body image dissatisfaction in regards to fitspiration. The literature has failed to understand what these images are that media users are viewing. This research will use framing theory along with textual analysis and interviews in order to understand what the images are that media users are viewing. Being able to understand the images that are associated with fitspiration will help to define the culture behind it. The first step will be to understand what characteristics are being framed in the photos.

> RQ1: What are the characteristics of fitspiration images on Instagram? (focus of the photo, and photo content.)

Individuals have the freedom to create their own interpretation of fitspiration. With the shift in culture from the thin ideal to a more accepting preference of healthy models, the next question to answer will be what body types are associated with fitspiration on Instagram.

> RQ2: What body types are associated with the hashtag?

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

## Textual Analysis

### Fitspiration on Social Media

With social media being easily accessed anywhere, it has become the norm to look to social media for tips and tricks on different health and health related behaviors. "Fitspiration on social media allows users to view exercise-related images and videos and communicate with like-minded individuals. This often contains exercise tips, recipes, and photographs of food and/or people (including professional photographs, self-portraits and before and after images to highlight changes in weight or muscle" (Carrotte, Prichard, & Lim, 2017). Many individuals follow different types of content on social media platforms such as Instagram, it is not exclusive to just their network. Simply by searching the hashtag "#fitspiration" or "#fitspo", over 60 million photos populate. Using visual framing, this research will analyze the hashtag fitspiration to understand the angle in which photos are taken in order to depict a fitspiration photo. The textual analysis will analyze the content of each photo as well as the body images that are posted under this hashtag.

### Textual Analysis Method

"Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (McKee, 2003). Textual analysis is a good way to

make sense of the way that individuals make sense of trends, of who they are, as well as how they fit into these trends and the world around them. This research is interested in making sense of the content that is posted under the hashtag "fitspiration" on Instagram. Instagram is a platform that allows its users to become the content creators, post photos and videos, edit them within the platform, and post for an audience to see. A similar study was done with a content analysis on Pinterest in 2015. Pinterest is similar to Instagram in the sense that an individual can search for tags and follow users that interest them. This study collected 1,050 photos under hashtags "fitspiration," "fitsporation," and "fitspo" all used to collect a wide representation of the trend. The images were then analyzed to understand the trend and the content that individuals were posting associated with the hashtag (Simpson, & Mazzeo, 2017). This study will follow a similar process, but using a qualitative approach.

With the large amount of visuals posted on Instagram under the hashtag "fitspiration", there is room for a broad interpretation. In order to fill the gap in research, this analysis explains how the trend of fitspiration is being represented on Instagram by content creators. This study received an exempt IRB approval. Images for this textual analysis were gathered by searching under the hashtag "#fitspiration" and selecting every other photo to create a sample size of 100 photos. For this study, the exclusion criteria consisted of those photos containing only a male. A qualitative textual analysis was done on these images to determine the framework "fitspiration", and solidify the definition of fitspiration to the Instagram population. The images were looked at individually and were analyzed by characteristics of the photos including: body type, focus of the image, and photo content. All data was analyzed using guidelines from Fowler in Deciphering

Advertisements literature and in three steps: open, axial, and selective coding. The most significant themes were categorized by what had become saturated in the data analysis. Each theme and subtheme is outlined in a codebook, which was been included in Appendix 1.

**Results**

## Analysis

To start the coding process, visual framing and the research questions were at the top of the priority list. To begin, each chosen image was printed out in order to highlight and take notes to create a sense of each frame. Open coding was the first step in this process, taking note of all the elements each image entailed. Each image was looked at by all of its individual parts to understand its visual frames, the angle in which the photo was taken, the parts that were emphasized, and the road map that each of the images guided the viewer through in order to get each theme and subtheme. This included analyzing each photo and looking at each part of the body from the arms, legs, and abdomen. The amount of visible body fat, amount of muscle definition, and any visible weight-related imperfections. All details of the image and the body types were noted. Examples include: crease down thigh that emphasizes the quads, minimal body fat in the core but without creases that showed definition, small crease in the upper arm that emphasizes the bicep. These images were placed into categories, including: healthy weight, toned, thin, plus-sized, and muscular. Each image was then placed into theme two's categories for focus of the image, including: legs, glutes, abdominals, full body, arms, shoulders, back, and breasts. Lastly, each image was analyzed for photo content and placed into categories that included:

workouts, selfies, food, and quotes.  The second step of the coding process was axial coding. This was included creating links between each previous analysis done in. Axial coding began by creating connections between similar categories, helping to create definitions of each category. Much of this step included comparing and contrasting each image to find all the differences that defined each body image, what frame created the focus around a specific body part, as well as the content of the photo. An example from one particular image included a crease down the thigh that emphasized the quads and a small crease in the upper arm that emphasized the bicep. In contrast, this women had no thigh gap, love handles, and dimples or cellulite on the back of her thighs. The woman in the photo was at a gym and there were weights in the background. A different photo showed a woman standing in front of a mirror in leggings and flip flops with no evidence of working out visible. The final step of the coding process for this study was tying together all the similar subcategories to create finalized categories: selective coding. This process was completed by analyzing the groups of images and comparing them to one another in order to help develop finalized definitions that explained the frames of the images. This was done by connecting the body types and comparing the differences of each, such as healthy weight versus toned. This allowed for minimal error as the images went through a comparison with each category making sure that they fit well within the definitions that were created to define the themes and finally images were linked together with the focus of the image category. For example, images that were classified under "toned" expressed definition in some of their muscle. A woman who had equal amounts of muscle and body fat could be classified under "healthy weight", but if she were to flex for a picture and showcase creases around her biceps, the image would then fall under the "toned" category. This could be

further linked to content of the photo because while the image in question was a self-portrait (selfie), she was also standing in the middle of a gym with free weights in front of her. This situation is a common occurrence which has been strategically framed for each individual's social network on Instagram. Listed below is each theme with its respective sub-themes, body image, focus of the image, and photo content expanded upon. Due to minimal previous research analyzing the images of fitspiration a unique codebook was developed to help create an outline for future research.

**Theme One: Body Image**

Theme one: Body Image, outlines the various body types that were represented on Instagram, using categories of healthy weight, toned, thin, plus-sized, and muscular. To begin the analysis of body image, each photo was looked at individually, (notes and highlighter were used in order to help make connections between each image). This included looking at the definition or the creases that outlined muscle groups in the arms, legs, and abdomen as well as gauging the amount of body fat that one appeared to have. In order to eliminate subjectivity on body fat, the research looked for visible muscle and bones as well as using cellulite, love handles, and extra skin to help gage an accurate reading for each image. Each definition below was derived from the analysis of each photo; Once the definitions were created the researcher was able to quantify each image under the appropriate definition. The codebook is qualified and quantified below.

*Healthy Weight*

The healthy weight category was represented by a woman's body that had an average amount of body fat. This was best defined by no visible bones showing, muscle but

no definition, and no visible cellulite or excessive body fat. Out of the 100 images analyzed, 44% of them were represented by a healthy weight body type.

### *Toned*

The toned category was represented by a woman who closely represented a healthy weight body type. The differentiating factor included having muscle with some definition in the arms, legs, glutes, and/or abdominals. This also includes physique models or women who were training to be in physique competitions. 27% of the images that contained women were represented by a toned body image.

### *Thin*

The thin category was represented by women who had minimal body fat and minimal muscle tone. It was not uncommon to see a woman with this body type have visible bones (ie. collar bones or rib cage). 13% of the images that included women were represented by a thin body type.

### *Plus-Sized*

The plus-sized category was represented by women who had excess body fat and minimal muscle tone. It was not uncommon to see women who had cellulite and love handles. These women often were showing progress photos of their fitness journey. 8% of the photos that included women were represented by a plus-sized body type.

*Muscular*

The muscular category was represented by women who had minimal body fat and extensive definition in their muscles, specifically in the arms, legs, and abdominals. This included women who were involved in bodybuilding or training to be bodybuilders. 7% of the photos that included women were represented by a muscular body type.

**Theme Two: Focus of the Image**

This category was to determine what the main focus of the body was in each image. This category included only images that contained at least 75% of the body and excluded images that only included the face. To begin the analysis of focus of the image each photo was looked at individually and notes were taken in order to express what body parts really stood out the most on each image and then placed into the categories of legs, glutes, abdominals, full body, arms, shoulders, back, and breasts. This included flexing of the arms, shirts pulled up/wearing only sports bras as tops in order to show the abdomen, and images where the glutes and the legs were angled in order to show definition. This section focused less on the amount of body fat and more on the frame of focus in which each user was trying to emphasize. Each definition below was derived from the analysis of each photo. Once the definitions were created the researcher was able to quantify each image under the appropriate definition. The codebook is qualified and quantified below.

*Legs*

Focus of the legs was coded when women were posed in a way that showed off their legs, thighs and/or calves. This included images that focused on either the front or the

back of the body. Several images featured women with their legs propped up on top of an object or piece of furniture. Legs were the most common body part that was shown off, representing 22% of the photos.

### *Glutes*

Focus of the glutes was coded when women were posed in a way that showed off their backside. Often women were taking a photo of their backside in the mirror looking over their shoulder. It was common for these photos to include women who had tight bottoms or spandex on that helped to emphasize the glutes. Glutes were represented by 19% of the photos.

### *Abdominals*

Focus of the abdominals showed emphasis on the stomach/mid-section of the subject. Often women were pictured with only a sports bra on or lifting up their shirt to showcase their core. Abdominals represented 18% of the photos.

### *Full Body*

When an image did not simply emphasize one particular area of the body, but rather their entire body, it fell under the full body category. This is often shown when a woman is doing a full body workout such running or yoga, not standing or posing in a way that brings more attention to one portion of the body. 15% of the images were represented by photos of the full body.

### Arms

Focus of the arms was coded when women were posed in a way that emphasized a portion of their arms. This includes both the biceps and/or triceps. Often women had short-sleeve shirts on and were flexing their arms for a selfie in a mirror. 13% of the images were represented by photos of arms.

### Shoulders/back

Focus of the shoulders/back was coded when women were posed in a way that showed off their back muscles. This was often shown when women were pictured with only either a tank top or a sports bra on. It was common to see photos of a woman doing pull-ups or flexing their back in the mirror with a selfie over their shoulder. 9% of the photos were represented photos of shoulders/back.

### Breasts

Focus of the breasts was coded when women were posed in a way that emphasized their chest. This often includes photos of women in only either a sports bra or a low-cut shirt. Images were often of women from the belly-button up and their breasts emerging from the top of their clothing. 2% of the photos were represented by photos of breasts.

**Theme Three: Photo Content**

This category was used to determine the entirety of each image analyzed. Categories included: the gym, outside, relation to physical activity, selfies, food, and quotes. To begin the analysis of the photo content, each image was looked at in its entirety, and then placed into categories including: work-outs, selfies, food, and quotes. This included whether the

subject of the image was in a gym setting, engaging in a workout of any type, taking a selfie (self-portrait), photos of food, or quotes that were posted under the hashtag. This section had no focus on the body size or angle of the person, but rather the environment and the entirety of the image. The goal was to address the relatedness to health and/or fitness. Each definition below was derived from the analysis of each photo. Once the definitions were created the researcher was able to quantify each image under the appropriate definition. The codebook is qualified and quantified below.

### *Workout*

Workout photos were the most represented photos at 38%. These often included photos of individuals using gym equipment, stairmasters, pull up bars, squat racks, bench press, and occasionally outdoor workouts such as yoga or running. These were photos that were taken by non-pictured individuals often of the woman actively engaging in a workout.

### *Selfies*

Selfies were photos that were taken either with a forward-facing camera or a mirror picture. They represented 32% of the photos. This section included images of gym locker room selfies. These images consisted of full body and face selfies, competition photos from both physique competitions and bodybuilding competitions, as well as selfies that did not seem to include any physical activity. These photos were not of a woman actively working out.

## *Food*

Food was represented by 18% of the photos. This section included photos of strictly food, with no people in the image. a strong presence in the search included photos of protein shakes, wraps, salads, and yogurt.

## *Quotes*

Photos that included words written over an image represented 12% of the images. This section often included motivational terms and sayings, possibly used to inspire the continuation of the physical activity.

## Semi-Structured Interviews

### Method

To further understand how images of "fitspiration" are depicted on Instagram, this study used a second method: Semi-Structured Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to keep a relaxed environment for the participants (Longhurst, 2003). This qualitative method allows for the researcher to understand the overall picture, analyze findings, analyze complex views from participants, and conduct the overall research in a more natural setting (Creswell, 1997). The interviews began with an interview guide, which helped to lead the conversation while keeping it conversational in order to allow the participants to speak freely to answers that they had more to elaborate on. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for the main questions to be asked as well as for the participants to express more about how they felt on the health and/or fitness aspect of

each photo. The interview guide (appendix 3) was used to keep the research questions in mind as well keep the interview on subject.

**Participant Recruitment**

Participants were not formally recruited but selected from a convenience sample at the University of South Florida. Participants were deemed eligible only if they were a female between the ages of 18-30 and had an active Instagram. Participants were briefed about the research and the interview process before their scheduled interview. Before participating in the interview, each participant was required to sign a consent form that was approved by the IRB at University of South Florida.

**Interview Process**

Participants were told that the questions were all based on opinion and there was no right or wrong answer. They were briefed that the questions would begin with general social media use and then go into showing photos of fitspiration images pulled from Instagram. Participants were told depending on their answers they may be asked further questions and if they felt strongly they could add anything they felt important. Interviewees were told that all questions were opinion-based and that no one would hear what they said as we would only use pseudonyms. Finally, they were told that if they felt uncomfortable they could end the interview at any time. All interviews were recorded using the researcher's phone for transcription at a later time.

The interview guide was composed of open-ended questions incorporated with closed-ended questions. Subjects answered questions about their average use of social

media as well as questions based on a sample of photos from the original textual analysis. Subjects were asked "how much time do you spend on social media weekly/daily?" They were then asked "what are the main platforms that you use?" (Instagram frequency was then assessed). Subjects were then asked questions about their followings: "Do you follow any health and/or fitness related content?" and if yes they were asked "Can you name any specific accounts?" These questions were then followed with questions about their average followings, "Do any of your friends post content that is related to health and/or fitness?" frequency was assessed.

Subjects were shown a representative sample of photos from the textual analysis and asked questions following each photo. Questions consisted of "Do you think that this photo is related to health and/or fitness?" followed by "How would you describe this woman's body type?" They were shown photos from the hashtag that were placed under the food category and asked the following questions, "Do you think that this would be considered a healthy food option?" followed by "Would this motivate you to eat something healthy or something similar?" Lastly, they were shown photos from the quotes category and were asked the following questions, "Do you think that this quote is related to health and/or fitness?" followed by "Do you think that this could be seen as motivating?"

Subjects were asked follow-up questions following the photos and questions. This included information about their viewing habits using the Likert scale; "Do you sometimes, always, or never read the captions and hashtags?" Followed by the question, "What motivates you to read the captions and hashtags?" The last questions asked were for the subjects to define the words that they used to describe each body image.

**Results**

    **Analysis**

    The researcher transcribed each interview that was recorded and upon completion analyzed each interview to look for common themes among each participant's responses. The first step of this process was open coding, which entailed reading through the each participants responses and taking note on what key words they used to describe and answer each question. To begin creating themes, selective coding was used. The research began with the themes that were used in the textual analysis section and began to place the participants answer into the respective theme that they described. The final step of the data analysis was selective coding. This was to create concrete definitions that were used to describe each body type that the participants used. Each theme had common subthemes that were addressed in the codebook that can be found in appendix 2. Each interviewee's identity was kept private during the interview process by making sure to only identify them by pseudonyms (their interview ID). Each participant was briefed about the interview process and then asked to fill out an informed consent that was approved by the IRB at the University of South Florida. The researcher's semi-structured interview guide can be found in appendix 3.

**Media Usage**

    Through the analysis of the (n=15) interviews, two themes emerged. Body image that was represented by the photos of Fitspiration on Instagram and content of the photo, including how much is it related to health and/or fitness. Below the following themes and their respective subthemes will be discussed in further detail.

All women interviewed (100%) claimed to check social media 7 days a week. The women estimated that their average amount of time spent on social media was between 1-5 hours (median=2.3 hours). Their main platforms were Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat with an average time being 20 minutes – 120 minutes spent on Instagram (median=60 minutes). 53% of the interviewed women said that they follow a specific fitness and/or health-related Instagram account. All the women interviewed (100%) stated that they see a health and/or fitness related post from their average following, 67% stated that they see it daily, while the other 33% stated they see it weekly.

**Theme one: Content of the Photo**

The first question each participant was asked about all 28 photos from the textual analysis sample was: Do you think that this is related to health and/or fitness? While previous research suggested that fitspiration had a negative aspect of only promoting a thin body type and not reflecting back to the health benefits of diet and exercise (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017) this research came to a different conclusion. Table one outlines the results of this question for each photo. Overall, participants felt that 82% of the photos were related to health and/or fitness.

*People*

The subjects were shown nineteen images that were strictly focused on women. Subjects were asked, "Is it related to health and/or fitness and if so, how?" While each answer varied slightly, they seemed to all come to similar conclusions. 78% of the photos were considered to be related to health and/or fitness. Some of the answers are highlighted below:

*"I think yes only because she is wearing workout gear… Even though she is not working out she is wearing tennis shoes. I don't always think work out gear means fitness but when you are wearing tennis shoes you mean business. If she had flip-flops on, I would just think she is going to run errands."* [Interviewee: 003]

*"Umm… yes. She is taking a selfie in the mirror of a gym locker room. She has on gym clothes and her face is like glistening which makes me believe maybe she was just sweating. So yes, I would say it is related to fitness."* [Interviewee 007]

*"She clearly works out a lot. I mean most girls do not know how to lift weights unless they are trained. So she looks like she goes to the gym often. Fitness-related for sure."* [Interviewee 001]

### *Quotes*

Quotes were the second most common photos shown. Five images were shown that included various sayings associated under the "fitspiration" hashtag. Subjects were asked, "Do you think that this quote is related to health and/or fitness?" Answers for this question were very similar, resulting in 88% of the photos being related to health and/or fitness. Some of the answers are highlighted below:

*"I do think that it is related to both health and fitness. It is more of a mental health aspect though. You need to be in a good mindset before you can be healthy. So yes, it is related to health and fitness."* [Interviewee 015]

*"haha yeah that is cute. I think that it is related to fitness. It is saying that the first few times you go to the gym it isn't going to be easy but eventually you won't be able to live*

*without it. I think that this is true even related to my life. Whenever I stop going to the gym and then start again, it's really hard to make it a habit but eventually you feel like it's the best part of your day." [Interviewee 011]*

### *Food*

Four Images of different food items associated with the Fitspiration hashtag were shown. The subjects were first asked, "Do you consider this to be a healthy food item?" The answers to this question varied but concluded that 79% of the food photos were considered a healthy food option.

*"Yes, that is yogurt, fruit, and chia seeds. This is a much healthier option for breakfast, I guess maybe even for lunch than like a pizza. I would say that this is a healthy food option and I would most definitely want to eat that." [Interviewee 009]*

*"oh my gosh that looks so delicious! I would eat that every day if I could. I would say yes that it is healthy. It looks like maybe lettuce, grilled shrimp, grilled chicken, tomatoes, and maybe brown rice. I would say that is a really healthy meal." [Interviewee 004]*

**Theme two: Body Image**

The second question asked after viewing images of people was, "How do you describe her/their body type?" Subjects were not given options, but rather an open-ended question that they could choose to answer however they deemed fit. Synonyms from each subject were used to describe each image. Beginning with open coding, each interview was looked at individually by picking out popular words and themes used to describe body

type. Then, using axial coding, the interviews were looked at and compared together to combine common themes and placed into the categories that were used in the textual analysis section; healthy weight, toned, thin, plus sized, and muscular. Lastly, using selective coding, the themes were able to come together and create definitions of body types as well as synonyms to easily go through and code each interview. Appendix 2 includes the detailed codebook of exactly how each body type has been defined, based on the categories and the information collected from each interview in order to create a standard definition. Table 2 represents each body type from the sample of textual analysis photos.

### *Toned*

Toned body image represented 39% of the photos from the textual analysis sample. Participants were asked "how would you describe this body type?" Some of the answers are highlighted below:

> *"You can tell she goes to the gym a lot. She looks athletic and lean. She has some lines on her thighs which show her muscles and then she has strong looking arms. I would say she is probably average weight but she is toned for sure…. I would say she is toned."*
> *[Interviewee 006]*

> *"She doesn't show a lot of her skin in this photo. She looks like she has some muscle though because she has tighter clothing on. She is in shape so she must go to the gym. I would say toned for sure." [Interviewee 010]*

### Skinny

Following behind toned was skinny, which represented 17% of the photo sample from the textual analysis sample. Participants were asked, "How would you describe this body type?" Some of the answers are highlighted below:

*"She is skinny, you can tell she doesn't have a lot of body fat and she doesn't really have much muscle if any at all. I would call her skinny." [Interviewee 004]*

*"She is thin. She doesn't have much meat on her bones and she is much smaller than me. [laughs] I would look at her and think that she is thin." [Interviewee 013]*

### Muscular

Next to follow was muscular which represented 15% of the photo sample from the textual analysis sample. Participants were asked, "How would you describe this body type?" Some of the answers are highlighted below:

*"Muscular, that is the first thing that comes to mind. She looks super strong, I mean she has a bar on her shoulders and she is doing a squat. So muscular." [Interviewee 012]*

*"That is hardcore, like crossfit type body. She is really really strong maybe even a little bit bulky." [Interviewee 009]*

### Average

Next to follow was average, which represented 12% of the photo sample from the textual analysis sample. Participants were asked, "How would you describe this body type?" Some of the answers are highlighted below:

*"She looks like an average woman. This is what I picked most of us to look like. I usually compare others body types to my own, I think I have an average body and she looks like me"* [Interviewee 004]

### Plus-Sized

Next to follow was plus-sized, which represented 12% of the photo sample from the textual analysis sample. Participants were asked, "How would you describe this body type?" Some of the answers are highlighted below:

*"They look overweight, I mean they are in the gym so they are obviously trying to get into better shape and be healthy though...I would consider them plus-sized."* *[Interviewee 002]*

*"She has curves for days! She is really thick! Am I allowed to call her thick in this?... Yeah she is thick not overweight but she has meat on her bones for sure."* *[Interviewee 007]*

TABLE 1 – Representation of each body type specified by subjects interviewed (n=15)

| Body type | Percent of photos that reflect this body type |
|---|---|
| Toned | 39% |
| Skinny | 17% |
| Muscular | 15% |
| Plus-Sized | 12% |
| Average | 12% |
| Flabby | 4% |
| Big-Boned | 3% |

# CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

## Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the frames of fitspiration images on Instagram and understand the foundation of the culture behind the trending hashtag that users on social media have created. Recent studies have used content analysis on similar images but have failed to determine exactly what frames create the interpretation of fitspiration for the public eye. Instagram creates a unique platform, as it is the most common social network, where users specifically post photos of their daily lives. It is important to note there are many images under the hashtag of "fitspiration" and this is a small random sample that has been analyzed. The textual analysis content was analyzed by one person to determine body type; The interviews had 15 different individuals analyzing images, using many different terms to describe the respective body types. The English language is very complex and many different words have similar meanings. The codebook in appendix 2 is used to help link together different descriptive words that participants used to describe the same images that they were viewing.

### Research Question: What characteristics are associated with Fitspiration?

Research question one: What are the characteristics of fitspiration on Instagram? relied heavily on the framing theory. The use of frames helped the viewers make sense of

different social trends. Frames are essentially used as road maps to lead the viewer from the original picture to the ideas and concepts the author is trying to portray. "Gamson and Modigliani define a media frame as a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events and weaves connections among them" (Bronstein, 2005). When analyzing the characteristics of these images, both the focus of the image as well as the association to health and/or fitness was taken into consideration. "Fitspiration was created to promote health and well-being through the promotion of healthy eating, exercise, self-care, and the overall philosophy, which emphasizes strength and empowerment" (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2016). Through both textual analyses and interviews, the goal was to understand if characteristics of healthy eating, exercise, and self-care were expressed. Framing theory explains the way media represents a topic and how it influences the attitude and support of the viewing public (Bronstein, 2005). Through the interviews, the research was able to determine the way the participants viewed the images and if they felt that the images, under the hashtag Fitspiration, aligned with the textual analysis findings and the definition of fitspiration.

The textual analysis section of this study was to get a broad understanding of what the images were that defined the "fitspiration" hashtag. The researcher went through image by image asking themself the same questions that each subject of the interview process was asked; Is this image related to health and/or fitness? What aspects of the photo lead you to this conclusion? The researcher took detailed notes on previous literature to create themes as well as noting each aspect of the images assessed, each theme that was found was defined based on the findings and in turn created a complex code book to help outline what the overall findings were for this method. The researcher found that

38% of the photos showed a person working out and 32% of the overall photos were in selfie mode. 18% were photos of food, and 12% were quotes. The main support of these findings were the interviews, which were developed in order to dive deeper into the definition of fitspiration on Instagram and really find out what each sub-theme of the textual analysis meant.

During the interviews, subjects were asked if they thought each image was related to health and/or fitness or if the food item was a healthy choice. Overall, subjects reported that 82% of the photos shown were related to health and/or fitness in some way. Most commonly, these images were of women posting images of themselves in the form of a selfie (32%). These selfies were frequently taken in relation to physical activity either in gym clothes, in a gym locker room, in the gym mirror during a workout, or after engaging in some type of physical activity. These images included physical activity such as being inside a gym (22%) or engaging in outside training (16%), both of which align with the Fitspiration goal of promoting a healthy well-being. The use of framing theory, allowed the viewers of these images to create their own road map with the help of a few questions. The viewers began by seeing just a simple Instagram photo and ended with a complex description of each image and details about how it related to fitspiration. The results suggest that this social media trend is using fitspiration to encourage and promote a lifestyle change of health and wellness. A previous study done on fitspiration images from Instagram found similar results, that the majority of the images were associated to healthy individuals that were dressed in some sort of work out gear (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2016). In retrospect, framing of images can be relatable and lead individuals to create their

own road map to the proposed idea that these images are related to health and/or fitness. Much of the feedback explained why they felt it was related to fitness:

> *"It's fitness related, She is wearing workout clothes and working out at home, who does that? It's not like a selfie that is taken in workout clothes. She is clearly athletic."* *(004)*

As well as why they felt it was not related to health and/or fitness:

> *"I feel like she wants it to be related to health or fitness because she is in yoga pants and she clearly used the hashtag 'Fitspiration', but she is just posing in front of a fence and not doing anything physical. She looks like she is really in shape but that is the only thing that relates it to either health or fitness."* *(008)*

The creators help to define the hashtag fitspiration based off of the content that they post.The pieces of each frame are seen in individual parts: their workout clothing along with the environment in which each photo is taken (ie. in a gym locker room, in the gym during a workout, or engaging in outside training). Each aspect of the photo helps to create a connection from the image to the idea that the photo is related to Fitspiration.

**Research Question: What body images are associated with Fitspiration?**

"Framing is important whenever an issue can be presented in multiple ways which may potentially influence how people think about an issue" (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997). Research question number two: What body types are associated with the hashtag Fitspiration? was based on the frames that each participant saw when looking at each photo. To understand the different body images that are associated with Fitspiration, it is important to first understand the definition of visual framing. "Visual framing begins with the choice of events to cover, followed by the selection of what pictures to take, how to take

them (angle, perspective, assumptions and biases, cropping, and so forth), and deciding

which ones to submit" (Iorgoveanu & Corbu, 2012). Previous research had concluded that

fitspiration images all had similar body types: thin women who had minimal body fat, thus

promoting the thin ideal. When analyzing these images through the textual analysis, it was

important to eliminate all bias. In order to do this, each image had to be looked at by each

component and then defined by the overall findings in each photo. In the interview process,

participants had not been briefed on the previous research, therefore were not pre-

exposed to a bias. The complete codebook for both the textual analysis and the interviews

can be found in appendix A and appendix B. What body types are associated with the

hashtag "fitspiration", was not a straightforward answer, this is due to each individual

having different connotations of what they define as fit/ While the textual analysis was

compiled as a codebook, the interview portion was more complex. The textual analysis

codebook was developed by the researcher, one person's terminology on how to describe

each body type. The interview codebook was more complex. Subjects used many different

words to describe each body type, and some had similar answers while others varied. The

purpose of the definitions each subject gave at the end of the interview helped to connect

the body types together in order to conclude that many of the words used to describe body

type were in fact synonyms. This finding suggests that the framing of each photo helped

focus on what portion of the body to look at, as well as how each photo should be

described. The end result was that many of the different words in the English language

mean close to the same thing. That is why words such as lean and toned are categorized

equally.

The textual analysis concluded that photos under the hashtag fitspiration had created a healthier take than had originally anticipated; 44% of the images portrayed a healthy weight and 27% portrayed a toned body image. This was supported by the interview methods as participants (n=15) felt that 39% of the images were represented by a toned body image, which used a synonym of healthy. An example of an explained toned body type is as followed:

> *"Umm. I would say she looks a lot like the other women. She isn't skinny but she does not have a lot of body weight. She has muscle that is obvious. I would say she looks healthy and toned" [Interviewee 007]*

A previous study done by Harrison and Fredrickson (2003) focused on sports media and the effects of an athletic body type in the media. Particularly, this study found sports media could have a stronger focus on what the body can physically do rather than what the body looks like. Similar research has suggested there is a positive correlation between sports media and body satisfaction (Sabiston & Chandler, 2009). This relates to fitspiration in the fact that these images, by definition, are supposed to encourage and empower viewers to engage in activities and habits that will move them towards a healthier lifestyle. The sports media is linked to what the body can physically do over its physical appearance. This means it will focus more on the fitness aspect. A previous content analysis done on fitspiration on Instagram found that body type was overwhelming represented by thin and toned body image, which aligns with current cultural ideals (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2016). Although the current research found that a high percentage of body type was represented as being toned, it also found that being thin had a different meaning.

For the textual analysis, thin was represented at 13%, showing minimal body fat and minimal muscle tone. The interview section supported this finding as participants felt 17% of the images were represented by the term "skinny", which synonyms include thin and slender. An example of an explained skinny body type is as followed:

"She is really skinny. You can see she does not have a lot of body fat but she doesn't have any visible muscle definition either. I do see that her ribs are poking out a little bit as she pulls up her shirt to show off her stomach." [Interviewee 015]

Previous research has suggested a strong internalization of the thin ideal has a correlation with body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Many studies have shown that there is a strong correlation between the amount of time spent online and the internalization of the thin ideal. Levinem, Smolak, and Hayden (1994) composed a study that suggested 70% of teenage girls read magazines and use them as an important source of beauty and fitness information. Others have found reading magazines and viewing images of thin models on media correlated heavily on body image dissatisfaction and the drive for thinness (Joshi, Herman, & Polivy, 2004). The previous research on fitspiration that links the content with the thin ideal suggests these images support behaviors to create a thin, fit, sexy, or beautiful image rather than a healthy lifestyle (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017). Though skinny and thin were not the most represented photos under this hashtag, they still have not fully diminished. This suggests almost 50% of the photos are associated with a healthy lifestyle, promoting a toned and healthy body image.

**What does this mean for Women viewing content on Social Media?**

The thin ideal has become internalized due to the fact that women who are displayed in magazines and on TV constantly displayed a very similar image: that of being

thin. This created a constant reminder that in order to have the ideal image of beauty one must be thin. Fitspiration and other trends on social media are very similar to this construct. Women starting at very young age spend hours on social media weekly and they are coming into contact with thousands of photos daily. Cultivation theory explains that the more time spent interacting with the media the more likely that you are to believe that the body images are both realistic and ideal (Holmstrom, 2004). What the everyday user does not realize is that they are only viewing a frame of the overall photo. Previous research only looked at the way that images of fitspiration and thinspiration made women feel but failed to leave out what exactly they were looking at. This is important because as the previous research suggests, women starting at a very young age are constantly comparing themselves to images that they see. This is even more important due to the fact that social media is where content is created and consumed. Previous research shows that women are more likely to compare themselves to their peers rather than to model due to them feeling a closer comparison. Understanding that these images are only frames of the entire reality help one to better evaluate the story of the photo. "People implement their intended way of thinking by paying attention" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This means that the more we are aware of the fact that these images do not show the full story, or the entire frame, the less likely we are to internally make comparisons. Bryant and Rockwell's (1994) study suggests "when you are educated you are more likely to critically view images using your own personal standards rather than those that the media sets in place for its viewers."

This study aims to educate its readers to further understand how framing is used in the media. Culture is changing now more than ever before to be more accepting of all shapes and sizes which has been demonstrated in this study by how the body types have

been defined, The research showed that there are more healthy and toned body types and majority of them are relating to health and/or fitness. A previous study done by Halliwell and Dittmar (2004) suggests when comparing images of thin models against plus-sized and average sized models, plus-sized and average sized models can decrease negative body image comparison along with negative body image satisfaction (Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004). With children using social media at a very young age and coming into contact with more images than previous generations, it is important to educate them to understand how to critically view these images. This study is a strong example of how to break down the images by each component in order to fully understand what the creator is trying to demonstrate, whether that be exercising more often, or eating healthier. After reading this study, viewers will understand the importance of being a critical viewer by using their own opinions as well as understand that the culture of fitspiration is one that encourages a health and fitness lifestyle with a more accepting culture for body image.

### Limitations and Direction for Future Research

This thesis research begins to understand the different types of images that have been posted under the hashtag of "fitspiration" on Instagram. There is a limited amount of research done on the content that is posted under the hashtag, leaving room for future research to dive even deeper into the frames of this trending hashtag.

The current research has limitations that have left it unattainable to generalize to the entire fitspiration content on Instagram. Although this study contained a random sample of images selected from Instagram, it was a relatively small sample of only 100 photos collected on the same day. Utilizing a larger sample collected over a longer time

period would be more beneficial for data analysis. The current research also only used the hashtag "fitspiration". Future research could include a wider variation of the hashtag, "fitspo" and "fitsporation." This would allow for an even broader sample for Instagram. This research only used one social media platform. While Instagram is the most popular medium, a sample collected from Facebook and Twitter would help strengthen the arguments. With limited funding, this research used a convenient sample. Utilizing a larger random sample will result in more diversity and would allow for a broader expansion of views.Further research would benefit from doing a comparative analysis of fitspiration and thinspiration. This research was able to show that the trending hashtag "fitspiration" has a high level of healthy and/or fitness related images and doing a comparative analysis against Thinspiration would be able to determine if there has been a shift from thin to fit, as Fitspiration intended.

This research has helped to set a foundation for future research to further understand the fitspiration culture, and how it presents on social media. This study cannot generalize all images of fitspiration to contain inspiration of a healthy lifestyle through exercise and diet, but it was able to conclude some important findings. This study was able to use visual framing to fill the gap between what was originally thought to be fitspiration and what the population has perceived fitspiration to be.  After an analysis of multiple images, this study was able to come to an understanding of what the idea of a healthy lifestyle is and how to use it to inspire others through images. This is important because the trending hashtags were originally thought to be negative and promote only a thin body image. This study suggested that through the shifting culture, the social media trend is also suggesting a more healthy and fitness-focused lifestyle . This means that fitspiration is now

being used as a healthy encouragement rather than just an advertisement for being thin. With culture shifting from the thin ideal to a more accepting society in plus-sized and healthy weight, we are in constant contact with these platforms where images are being uploaded by the second. The better we understand how we are consuming content and what frames are being portrayed, the more successfully we will be able to address the culture that fitspiration has created.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:**

**Textual Analysis Codebook**
Body Type:
- Healthy Weight
- Toned
- Thin
- Plus Sized
- Muscular

Focus of Image:
- Legs
- Glutes
- Abdominals
- Full body
- Arms
- Shoulders
- Back
- Breasts

Photo Content:
- Selfies
- Gym locker room photos
- Competitions
- Physical activity relations
- Food
- Training outside
- Quotes

Descriptions:

Body Type
**Healthy Weight:** Average looking body weight, no bones visible but body fat is closer to a healthy BMI. Some muscle, no definition.
**Toned:** Healthy weight, less amount of body fat. Showing some muscle definition in the legs, arms, and abdomen.
**Thin:** Minimal body fat, visible bones such as collar bones, ribs, and minimal muscle tone.
**Plus sized:** Contain excess body fat and have minimal to no muscle definition.
**Muscular:** Minimal body fat and intense definition of muscles in arms, legs, and abdomen.

Focus of Image
**Legs:** Focus emphasizes the thighs and/or calves.
**Glutes:** Focuses emphasizes the back side of the body specifically the gluteus maximus.
**Abdominals:** Emphasis on the stomach, often have only a sports bra or pulling up shirt to show stomach.
**Full body:** The image does not emphasis any portion of the body.
**Arms:** Images that emphasis biceps, triceps, or forearms.

**Shoulders:** Emphasis is on the backside but specifically on the upper portion of the back between the arms.
**Back:** Emphasis on the backside of the body, often having only a sport bra on.
**Breast:** Emphasis is on the front side of the body, specifically the chest.

Photo Content
**Selfies:** Photos taken of one's self either in a mirror or with a forward facing camera. Can be full body or just of a portion of the body.
**Gym locker room photos:** Photos that have lockers, sinks, changing rooms, bathroom stalls in the background.
**Competitions:** Individual is in a bathing suit like outfit, significantly tan, oiled up, posing in a way that shows off muscles. (Could be holding a trophy or standing in front of a competition poster).
**Physical activities:** Individual shown using gym equipment, i.e. stair-master, pull-up bar, squat racks, and bench press.
**Food:**  Photos that contain packaged food, prepared food, or meal preparations. This can either be an individual eating a food item or a photo specifically of food.
**Training outside:** Individuals doing a workout outdoors. This can be anything from running to yoga. This excludes organized activities such as sports.
**Quotes:** Images that contain some type of writing on them. This can be a quote or a saying talking about health and/or fitness.

**Appendix: B**

**Interview Codebook**
Body Type:
- Muscular
- Toned
- Average
- Skinny
- Flabby
- Big Boned
- Plus Sized

Descriptions:

Body Type

**Muscular:** Minimal to no body fat, intense definition in arms, legs, abdomen. Synonyms: bodybuilder, bulky, built, stocky

**Toned:** Little amount of body fat, long lean muscles, can see definition in arms, legs, and abdomen. Synonyms: in-shape, strong, lean, athletic, healthy, fit

**Average:** Considered the average American. More meat on the bones, not fat but not skinny, right in the middle. No definition but could have muscles and has a little extra body fat.

**Skinny:** Considered not healthy. No muscle definition and no body fat. Can easily see bones in the ribcage, shoulders, and collar bones. Typically has a thigh gap. Synonyms: slender, thin

**Flabby:** No definition and has excess body fat. Typically has cellulite and rounded features such as the face and the stomach. Synonyms: soft, obese

**Big Boned:** Healthier than flabby, solid, no cellulite, might look strong, features do not look as rounded. Synonym: chubby

**Plus Sized:** Extra body fat, might be toned, has larger/wider features such as butt, thighs, and chest. Synonyms: Thick, curvy, overweight

**Appendix: C**
**Interview Guide Book**

- How active are you on social media? Weekly? Daily?
  - What are your main platforms?
  - On average how much time do you spend on Instagram?
- Do you follow any fitness and/or health related content on Instagram?
  - Can you name any fitness models/ accounts that you familiarize yourself with?
  - If following fitness accounts, what do you look for in them? Workout routine? Motivation? Food Tips?
  - How often do you come across fitness and/or health related content on Instagram?

Looking at textual analysis photos

- People:
  - First thoughts? Are these related to health/fitness?
  - Body Type?
  - Emphasis on body part?
- Food
  - Related to Health/Fitness?
  - Would this be something that might motivate you to eat healthy?
- Quotes:
  - Health/Fitness related?
  - Motivating? Scroll past it?

**Appendix: D**
**IRB Approval : Textual Analysis**

October 31, 2017

Brook Bryant
School of Advertising and Mass Communications
Tampa, FL  33612

RE:          **Not Human Subjects Research Determination**
IRB#:        Pro00032843
Title:       Fitspiration on Instagram- A textual analysis

Dear Ms. Bryant:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application. The activities presented in the application involve methods that qualify as not human subject's research. As such, the activities do not meet the definition of human subject research under USF IRB policy, and USF IRB approval and oversight are therefore not required.

While not requiring USF IRB approval and oversight, your study activities should be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of your profession. If the scope of your project changes in the future, please contact the IRB for further guidance.

If you will be obtaining consent to conduct your study activities, please remove any references to "research" and do not include the assigned Protocol Number or USF IRB contact information.

If your study activities involve collection or use of health information, please note that there may be requirements under the HIPAA Privacy Rule that apply. For further information, please contact a HIPAA Program administrator at (813) 974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice
Chairperson USF Institutional
Review Board

**Appendix: E**
**IRB Approval: Semi-Structure Interviews**

**USF**
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA**

RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 ● Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 ● FAX (813) 974-7091

January 26, 2018

Brook Bryant
School of Advertising and Mass Communications
Tampa, FL  33647

RE:            **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**
IRB#:        Pro00033391
Title:         Framing of Fitspiration on Instagram

**Study Approval Period: 1/26/2018 to 1/26/2019**

Dear Ms. Bryant:

On 1/26/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

**Approved Item(s):**
**Protocol Document(s):**
Thesis Protocol.docx

**Consent/Assent Document(s)*:**
USF IRB Informed Consent.docx.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2)

involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D.,
Chairperson USF
Institutional Review Board

**USF**
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

**Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk**

Pro # __00033391_____

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

**Framing of Fitspiration on Instagram**

The person who is in charge of this research study is Brook Bryant. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Janelle Applequist.

The research will be conducted at any site that the participant and Principal Investigator mutually agree on.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to find out what frames individuals see through the images associated with Fitspiration on Instagram and if they are seen as motivating and encouraging for a healthy life style.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

You are being asked to take part in this study because you fall into the demographics: women 18-29, the largest population of women involved on Instagram.

## Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

### Provide:

- Answers to questions in interviews that will last as short as thirty minutes but not longer than one hours.

- Permission to be audio recorded by the primary investigator for the purposes of transcription. The tapes will only be accessed by the primary investigator and the data will not be identifiable. The tapes will be maintained by the primary researcher until after completion of their master's degree in May 2018, at which time they will be deleted off the primary investigator's recording device.

## Total Number of Participants

About 25 individuals will take part in the study at any site that is agreed upon between the participant and the primary researcher.

## Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

## Benefits

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

## Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as to what would face in a daily atmosphere. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

## Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

## Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

## Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.

- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.

- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

## You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Brook Bryant at (727) 432-1988 or email at brookbryant@mail.usf.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

## Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____           _____
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                                      Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

## Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

_____     _____
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent              Date


_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent