School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

Fitspiration or Fitsploitation? Postfeminism, Digital Media and Authenticity in

Women's Fitness Culture

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published

by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or

diploma in any university.

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Abstract

Women's fitness culture is an observably popular phenomenon in the West on social media, in gym space or even through the prevalence of activewear. Women are called to take responsibility for their physical fitness in a way that contests but also actively draws from well-established models of femininity. This thesis asks how and to what effect women's fitness represents itself as empowering as well as reinforces gender roles. I propose that women's fitness conveys a postfeminist sensibility that is characterised by a neoliberal emphasis on transforming and disciplining the self while presenting this project as a mode of feminist liberation. I use textual analysis supplemented by participant observation in different areas of fitness culture to engage with these ideologies and how they are deployed. Through analysis of different types of fitness subjects, practices and texts including gym selfies, activewear, fit bodies and spaces and queer fitness celebrities, I will argue women's fitness culture constructs a fit feminine subject aligned with prevailing cultural values of capitalism, whiteness, heternormativity and an essentialist understanding of gender. However, I acknowledge too that fitness culture is an active and dynamic space where agents are able to contest and negotiate with these values. While the dominant ideal reading of fitness culture may suggest that its subjects are interpellated to conform to these roles, evidence in this thesis suggests that there is always the possibility of resistance.

Keywords: postfeminism, fitness, bodywork, authenticity, digital media, embodiment

Contents

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Introduction:

Strong is the New Sexy: Women's Fitness in the Age of Postfeminism

In September 2017, I attended an event called *Wanderlust 108*[1] in Perth, Western Australia. The event was marketed as a 'mindfulness triathlon' and involved a 5km run or walk, an hour of yoga and half an hour of meditation. Wanderlust was sponsored by various health and wellness companies, whose wares were all for sale at the 'Mindfulness market' on the event grounds. The event was framed in the context of community and a sense of togetherness with the hashtag '#cometogether' and phrases such as 'community instead of competition' or '1 = unity/ 0 = wholeness/ 8 = infinite possibility' conveyed on the event's Facebook page. Even the name, 'Wanderlust', evoked a narrative of community, globalisation and travel that often seems to accompany the more 'exotic' representations of yoga and meditation. Although the event was ostensibly available to anyone, the audience overwhelmingly constituted fit, young, white, middle-class women, arguably the event's target demographic. This was bolstered by the codes and signifiers constructing the event, including the images used on the website (mainly representing women) and the activities available that are commonly characterised as feminine.

While there was reassuring evidence of the value of female wellbeing, there was, predictably, a price. Throughout the day, one activity was omnipresent no matter what we were performing – consumption. While tickets for entry ranged from $30 to $40, for an extra $30 participants could upgrade to the 'tribal pack' that included a headband, branded water bottle

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[1] See https://wanderlust.com/108s/

and the opportunity to get 'tribal markings'[2] on the day. Upon entry and throughout the festival we were given free probiotic water and a packet of vouchers and flyers for yoga studios. Advertising was visually and audibly pervasive – over the speakers, emblazoned on our yoga mats, on the screens, on the fences and even near the toilets. After the formal part of the triathlon had finished, we had the option of choosing an extra event hosted by a particular wellness business, such as an essential oil workshop, a kombucha tasting or an acro-yoga[3] demonstration.

The Wanderlust festival is just one set of sites, practices and subjects that constitute the field of women's fitness culture. However, it is metonymic for many of the broader issues that I discuss, in that there is a dissonance between what is promised (empowerment, community, enlightenment, wellness) and what is offered (consumption, conservative gender roles, the marginalisation of minorities). This is particularly visible when we consider the kinds of subjects that are addressed by this event: young, white, middle-class, able-bodied women. Wanderlust – and events like it – proclaims an interest in pursuing a kind of authenticity-centred lifestyle that is presented as an antidote to a cultural environment which is increasingly perceived as false and superficial. Within contexts such as these, this pursuit is undertaken without critical reflection of what this authenticity means. It invokes a narrative of self-care and self-love, which are key discourses among popular feminist communities[4], yet does so in an ethically questionable way. Feminist polemic is decontextualised in a complex manoeuvre where the mantra of 'self-care' is put to the use of capitalist venture.

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[2] 'Tribal pack' ticket holders received a body-safe pen with which they could mark their bodies in silver and gold dots and lines, in a way that the company referred to as emulative of 'tribal' markings.
[3] Acro-yoga refers to a type of yoga that combines with acrobatics, where two participants use the weight and resistance of each other's bodies to assume various postures.
[4] These communities often cite Audre Lord: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare' (Thorpe, 2016). See Thorpe (2016), 'Why self care is an important feminist act' https://www.bustle.com/articles/200074-why-self-care-is-an-important-feminist-act

While feminist principles and consumer culture are not ipso-facto incompatible, there are a number of compromises involved that require consideration. My thesis will provide a framework through which this awareness may be gleaned, and which may be applied to further areas of women's fitness culture as it emerges.

The questions I answer in this dissertation are, broadly: what are the ideological underpinnings of women's fitness culture, and how are these ideologies deployed? How does fitness culture employ feminist rhetoric and to what effect? What modes of resistance or negotiative reading are available? I argue that women's fitness culture presents itself as an empowering, new mode of feminist femininity, but problematically reifies gender roles that construct women as postfeminist consumers. I discuss this through examining various areas of fitness culture – texts, sites, subjects and practices. In doing so, I identify the cultural context from which women's fitness culture has emerged, and how it has converged with the discourses of digital media and postfeminism that have shaped ways of thinking about the body and the self.

Why now?

This research responds to a critical cultural moment where women's fitness culture and its accompanying discourses of postfeminism, authenticity and neoliberalism are pervasive, and yet convergence of these various discourses remains relatively under-theorised in academia. The popularity of fitness culture at this moment is unprecedented because of the availability and advancement of technology. The problem that I identify in this research is how this popularity is presented as a solution to harmful attitudes about women's bodies and behaviour, such as the pro-anorexia 'thinspiration' movement and the objectification and over-sexualisation of women in media. However, the solution that fitness culture offers – that

is, the opportunity to work on the self in a way that is 'healthy' by rejecting the once-naturalised ideal of slimness and instead embracing muscularity and all that it involves – still leads to poor self-image, exercise addiction and other health issues (both mental and physical). This thesis explores what exactly makes fitness culture appealing compared to earlier physical cultures and beauty ideals, and what strategies are used to encourage participation in women's fitness culture.

Research context

While the scholarship of Western fitness culture is not new, much of the discourse has largely a) not focused specifically on women or b) has centred on the gym as the singularly significant site. For instance, Roberta Sassatelli's *Fitness Culture: Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun* (2010) and Jennifer Smith Maguire's *Fit for Consumption: Sociology and the Business of Fitness* (2008) are pivotal texts for the sociological study of fitness culture, but have areas in their respective arguments where gender could be addressed further. Smith Maguire proposes that while gender is significant in the mediation of fitness culture, 'the stratification of the commercial fitness field is first and foremost cast in the terms of class' (2008, p. 17). Sassatelli does not directly analyse class or gender in her work, stating that her approach intentionally avoids 'tracing fitness to a modern, post-modern or late-modern subjectivity with its body projects, or to the distinction requirements of a particular class' (2010, p. 3), and only briefly mentions that the gym experience may allow fitness culture participants to engage with social classification, 'such as class and gender' (p. 4). Both theorists approach the ways fitness allows negotiation of identity within the physical space of the gym – and in fitness media to some extent – but neither text investigates how and why women in particular are interpellated as subjects of fitness culture. Additionally, these texts prefigure the need that has arisen since the increasing

prominence of digital media, including the digital spaces of fitness that exist beyond the physical space of the gym. Smith Maguire argues that the predominance of gyms and health clubs 'makes them the logical focus for this research (2008, p. 10), while Sassatelli proposes that 'fitness gyms are at the core of such culture' (2010, p. 2). While gyms are significant for the performance and construction of fit identities, this thesis contends that fitness is increasingly performed in multiple sites and permeates many aspects of daily life, which all need to be considered in the analysis of fitness culture.

Alternatively, other scholars have examined how women are audienced and represented in fitness culture, but have yet to deal with either a) the framework of postfeminism or b) the fast-paced advances of technology, nor do they critically theorise their research within the complexities of women's identity politics over the last decade. Shari Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs' *Body Panic* (2009) undertakes a critical textual analysis of how gender is represented and constructed in fitness magazines, but does not directly engage with the concept of postfeminism, nor does it refer to digital fitness media such as online shops, e-newsletters, blogs or apps. Sarah Hentges' 'creative and critical exploration' (2014, p. 4) *Women's Fitness Culture in America* begins to approach new technology such as the *WiiFit* (a gaming console that offers gamified fitness training programs) and the role of social media in fitness. Her account, rather than being a conventional academic study, is 'a mosaic' of 'short essays, academic inquiries, poetry, creative non-fiction, memoir, choreography, personal experience, observation, character sketches, social and cultural critique' (Hentges, 2014, p. 4). It has only been very recently that *New Sporting Femininities: Embodied Politics in Postfeminist Times* (2018) was published by Kim Toffoletti, Jessica Francombe-Webb and Holly Thorpe. This book, released a mere four months before the submission of this dissertation, reaffirms the significance of a postfeminist framework when approaching

women's fitness. In the introduction to the book, Toffoletti et al crucially locate representations of women's physical cultures (specifically sport and fitness) in the context of 'postfeminist times'. They argue that 'studies of movement and physical cultures ideally lend themselves to explorations of the cultural practices and everyday processes through which contemporary postfeminist femininities are produced' (Toffoletti et al, 2018, p. 2). This frames fitness culture as a vehicle through which to explore how postfeminism functions, which is the approach I adapt in this thesis. While most chapters in the book were dedicated to approaching the intersections of women and sport, essays such as Sarah Riley and Adrienne Evans' 'Lean light fit and tight: Fitblr blogs and the postfeminist transformation imperative' (2018, pp. 207–230) identify how fitness culture operates within a postfeminist sensibility and interpellates subjects to shape their understandings of femininity to incorporate a neoliberalist individualist narrative. This essay also makes connections between digital media and postfeminism, but, due to length more than other factors, cannot fully elucidate this link as I attempt to do here. These works all inform my research in some way throughout this dissertation, but I am interested in extending the aims of their studies to account for the contemporary cultural context.

Scope

The scope of this thesis examines *women's* fitness culture, rather than fitness culture in general, because of the way women's fitness interacts with ideologies of postfeminism, the relationship between consumption and the body, the construction of women as sexual objects, and the discourse of authenticity that permeates these areas. Both men's and women's fitness culture is situated within the framework of patriarchy, but this has different implications for women than it does for men. I also do not explore types of holistic wellness practices such as meditation, nor do I research types of diets that are associated with fitness culture. It is not

feasible to feature all aspects of fitness culture in a single thesis, and I do believe that the above topics (and any others I have not included) have potential for future research along the framework I propose here.

This thesis uses a cultural studies approach that is inherently interdisciplinary, and combines methods of research from areas such as anthropology and sociology. I undertake textual analyses of texts such as 'gym selfies', fitness apparel newsletters or fitness magazines, which I critique through various theoretical frameworks. I use participant observation to gather data from defined and restricted spaces (for example, within gym spaces), and to fortify my understanding of fitness culture representations and strategies of interpellation. I also make use of fitness blogs, Instagram accounts and other social media to study the relationship between how fitness texts are produced and how they are read or experienced. This also allows for a degree of reflexivity in my research.

As is the case with cultures that prescribe normative, disciplinary behaviours, there is potential for negotiation and creativity in women's fitness culture. Women's fitness culture is represented in a specific way, and the ideal readings of these cultural texts work to reinforce conservative notions of gender, sexuality and race in a way that reflects oppression. Power is not unidirectional, however, which means here that participants in fitness culture may find resistive strategies of reading and practicing fitness that offer individual experiences of pleasure and power. Tracy Rundstrom Williams, for example, coins the term 'empowered femininity' as a discourse through which women's fitness magazines can be read. Empowered femininity may facilitate subversive representations of women where they 'are portrayed as admirable, but they are admired primarily for their bodies' (2012, 54) and women are encouraged to 'take action and make changes, but those changes are limited to

certain arenas' (Rundstrom Williams, 2012, p. 54). This suggests that women's fitness culture presents positions that appear to be resistive in one aspect, but function to reaffirm other problematic ideologies in other aspects. There is, however, capacity for resistance in the lived experience of fitness, as well as through mediated representations.

Definition of terms

This thesis spans multiple 'thinking cultures' from popular media to scholarly discourse. Accordingly, terminology changes depending on different contexts. It is vital, therefore, to define my own use of these terms here. 'Fitspiration' is a colloquial portmanteau that combines the terms 'fitness' and 'inspiration'. Fitspiration or 'fitspo' refers to the representation of fitness culture in social media, with the primary purpose of interpellating a viewership as if they were already interested in the project of fitness. Fitspiration media constructs and reaffirms the kinds of ideal bodies (and gender roles) that are aspirational. These images tend to be portrayals of fit bodies – often in a gym setting, if not shown physically undertaking exercise – accompanied by a platitudinous motivational slogan, such as 'focus on health, not on weight' or 'it doesn't get easier, you just get better' (Live Fit & Love Food, 2014). Although my area of research is in women's fitness culture generally, I am interested in how it is represented through cultural artefacts; these representations are constitutive of the fitspiration genre. 'Fitsploitation' is a tongue-in-cheek term of my own devising that uses the '-ploitation' suffix borrowed from the exploitation film genre (such as Blaxploitation, Ozploitation, Nazisploitation and so on). This juxtaposition has two functions: the first challenges whether fitspiration media is as helpful and empowering as it presents itself to be. The second is to question the polarising views of women's fitness culture and media as being empowering *or* exploitative. Throughout the thesis, I aim to demonstrate how fluid these concepts are, and how experiences of empowerment in fitness culture are so often accompanied by experiences of exploitation, surveillance and discipline.

Postfeminism

Postfeminism, as I will demonstrate, has a variety of meanings and historical contexts. I propose that women's fitness culture is an example of postfeminist media culture in that women's fitness is uncritical and unaware of the concept of postfeminism, yet still enacts a postfeminist sensibility. Coined by Rosalind Gill, 'postfeminist sensibility' refers to a network of themes related to power relations, gender roles and ideologies of the self. According to Gill, these themes include:

> the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference. (2007b, pp. 169–70)

Media cultures that express any or all of these themes can, according to Gill, be said to be part of this postfeminist sensibility. Gill is critical of postfeminism because she sees these themes as shaped by persistent oppression and marginalisation related to 'race and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability – as well as gender' (2007b, p. 170). Gill suggests that the postfeminist sensibility cannot be reduced to a conservative return to 'traditional' gender roles, nor is it an entirely new form of feminism, but rather that postfeminism reworks elements of dominant ideologies about gender (and race, class and other kinds of subjectivities) within the discourse of feminism. I argue in this thesis that women's fitness culture presents an example or case study of postfeminist media culture that represents and reproduces Gill's thematic characteristics of postfeminism, and deploys them in a way that simultaneously appears to pay tribute to feminism while attempting to render the project of feminism obsolete.

Similarly, Angela McRobbie proposes that these themes in popular media work to invoke feminism in a way that acknowledges that 'traditional' feminism is over:

> Drawing on a vocabulary that includes 'empowerment' and 'choice', these elements [of feminism] are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise…as a kind of substitute for feminism…in such a way that it will never again rise from the ashes. (2009, p. 1)

McRobbie's critique argues that feminism has been incorporated to neutralise the threat that feminism poses to patriarchy and other governing power structures. This incorporation involves the neoliberalist values of choice and empowerment, which may serve a particular kind of individual (especially if they occupy other privileged roles in society, for example, being white and middle class) but do not benefit the collective efforts that feminism strives for. Postfeminist media culture exemplifies a kind of 'commodity feminism' in that it applies the logic of capitalism to the notion of feminist liberation, meaning that feminism can be reduced to a purchasable item (Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1991, p. 8). This imposes restrictions on who has access to this kind of liberation.

Fitness culture

In order to establish a strong theoretical foundation from which I analyse fitness culture, it is helpful to understand the boundaries of the term 'fitness culture' as I deploy it in this thesis. I borrow from the framework of 'cultural fields' theorised by Pierre Bourdieu and adapted by Smith Maguire in her analysis of fitness culture. According to Bourdieu, a field is 'a space of positions and position-takings' (1993, p. 30) that encompass subjectivities, power relations and the practices that are informed by them, as well as how they relate to each other. The fitness cultural field is not simply metonymic for the fitness industry, but is 'a network of

sites, texts, producers and consumers that generates practices for and meanings of the body' (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 5). Smith Maguire uses field theory to 'draw from and bring together the disparate roots of, and modes of engagement in, the practice of physical fitness' (2008, p. 8). To be considered a participant in this cultural field, Smith Maguire argues that one must be involved in 'either immediate performance or textual appreciation – and, ideally, it takes both forms, as the latter provides a critical consciousness of the criteria for the former' (2008, p. 7). It should be noted here that Smith Maguire applies field theory to fitness culture as a sociologist, and, as mentioned above, is chiefly concerned with how class structure is managed and negotiated in fitness fields. Conversely, my cultural studies approach employs field theory insofar as my working definition of women's fitness culture pertains to a set of texts, practices and subjects related to the intersections of body-work, femininity, discipline and pleasure. As my area is women's fitness culture, I address the power relations involved in women's fitness first and foremost through the lens of gender. However, I adopt an intersectional feminist approach that identifies how other subjectivities (that are accompanied by varying levels of oppression and marginalisation) may affect how women are interpellated, read and treated.

Where Smith Maguire draws attention to the significance of physical gym space and representations, my emphasis is predominantly on media representations. The rationale for doing so is because fitness media does not just 'provide a critical consciousness' (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 7) of gym space or gym activity, but actively constitutes and constructs it. For instance, a woman wearing fitness apparel in a café transforms the café into a space in which fit identities are performed. To investigate this relationship between fitness culture, fitness media and the subjects involved, this thesis is structured so that each chapter thematically deals with a particular aspect of fitness culture. Some of these themes may

appear outwardly disconnected from one another. For example, discussion of queer subjectivities in fitness culture (Chapter Five) may not obviously bear a close relationship to gym selfies (Chapter Two). However, all these themes represent varying aspects of the *field* of women's fitness culture. Moreover, each chapter presents some overlap between analysis of media, practices and spaces.

Digital media and authenticity

One of the common threads that pervades various sections of the fitness cultural field is digital media and the prominent accompanying discourse of authenticity in the construction of the self online. The role of digital media in women's fitness culture is crucial in disseminating representations of fit femininity, constructing new fitness space and interpellating un/fit subjects. By 'digital media', I am referring to the technologies (smartphones, social networking websites, digital marketing tools) *and* the values (authenticity, visibility, transparency) that characterise the 'social media age' (Marwick, 2013, p. 6). I engage with social media as primary and secondary research sources, including Instagram profiles of a fitness microcelebrity, blogs (both academic and non-academic/social) and the Facebook page of a fitness apparel company. I also perform textual analysis on a selection of e-newsletters, which represent a crucial mode of targeted advertising for online shoppers. Digital media is significant to my research of women's fitness culture because it permeates many different areas of fitness, and embeds fitness in broader networks of identity construction online.

Significance

Significantly, this thesis explores the convergence of prevailing discourses surrounding fitness culture, postfeminism and social media in Western culture, which are symptomatic of

broader cultural issues, such as neoliberalism and individualism. My research will clarify the driving preoccupations and anxieties as well as the material cultural conditions from which women's fitness culture emerges. In doing so, I will be resolving the paucity in the literature between critiques of postfeminist media cultures, critiques of fitness culture, and examination of the use of digital media by certain cultural groups. This thesis proposes a way of thinking critically about popular social trends that may have ideologies and effects that are concealed through category confusion. This research will provide the theoretical tools with which to reveal the ramifications of women's fitness culture, as well as the contexts in which it is embedded.

Awareness of women's fitness culture and its underlying problematic ideologies has begun (in both research and popular culture), but it requires further explication. News websites and blogs such as The Business Insider and Now To Love have implied that the fitspiration trend has failed in some way: 'Why fitspo is failing' (Sheather, 2015), 'the Fitspiration movement is backfiring' (Praderio, 2017). These articles and others argue that fitspiration imagery overemphasises the physical body, and should instead highlight the process of becoming healthy – which may include body types beyond conventional beauty standards. However, my research will demonstrate how fitspiration has *not* failed because of how it centralises the body – this is exactly its intention, given its inextricable connection to ideologies of postfeminism and the neoliberalist values of discipline and surveillance. Furthermore, the valorised 'process' of fitness is accompanied by equally problematic ideologies of how femininity should be enacted, which are increasingly embedded in narratives of productivity, work and self-discipline.

Chapter Structure

Structured into five chapters, this thesis begins broadly with a consideration of the context from which the women's fitness culture phenomenon has emerged. The ensuing chapters focus on varying aspects of fitness and femininity, and how fitness culture conveys a postfeminist sensibility. Chapter One will outline the historical trajectory of postfeminism and its critique, alongside competing interpretations and stages of feminism itself. Postfeminism has many forms and is therefore difficult to define. It can be interpreted as a substitute for 'real' feminism that is grounded in capitalism; as a backlash to second wave feminism; as an anti-feminist statement, and many other concepts in between. I will be drawing from Gill's conceptualisation of postfeminism as a sensibility, which will facilitate a more malleable, context-dependent analysis of postfeminist media. I will also draw from McRobbie's work on postfeminism as a mode of disarticulation or undoing of the work of what is understood as feminism (2007). The chapter will furthermore explore the integral role of digital media – social media, blog posts, websites and so on – in both producing and disseminating postfeminism, and how both digital media and postfeminism crucially engage a spurious discourse of authenticity. I argue that postfeminist discourse is implicitly intertwined with neoliberalist notions of so-called authenticity, which are performed in women's fitness culture. This is because postfeminism engages the rhetoric of feminism by critiquing representations of women and femininity as 'unrealistic' as a way of imposing a 'realistic' alternative that itself represents certain hegemonic ideals. These postfeminist messages are compatible with digital media because it is a platform where narratives of authenticity are already being contested.

Chapter Two extends this argument to the field of women's fitness culture and critiques the cultural work of the 'gym selfie', a widely used genre of social media in women's fitness culture. The chapter evaluates various discourses used to analyse the selfie, divided into what

I have identified as three modes of thinking about the selfie: the selfie as text, the selfie as practice, and the selfie as a site of power relations. These three sections overlap in places (and indeed, my analysis of the gym selfie draws from all three modes), but presenting them separately allows for a more nuanced critique of the cultural work that the selfie may perform. I draw from classic theories such as Erving Goffman's theory of social interaction (1959), Laura Mulvey's concept of the gaze (1975; 1989), and Jacques Lacan's mirror phase (1977), as well as contemporary selfie research. The second half of this chapter looks closely at the gym selfie, and integrates Lacan's mirror phase with Sassatelli's concept of 'mirror work' at the gym (2010). I propose that the gym selfie operates as a representation of a postfeminist 'transformation imperative' (Riley and Evans, 2018), where images of women's bodies are imbricated in a narrative that suggests the body is inherently flawed and needs to be fixed. In doing so, these images become commodified as part of naturalising the transformation imperative as an essential goal of women's fitness.

Chapter Three addresses fitness apparel and the marketing techniques used to sell the garments. I propose that fashion should be analysed not only as a semiotic element but also as a lived, embodied experience. I draw from theories of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), clothing as a form of identity construction (Craik, 1994), and lifestyle clothing (Pettinger, 2004) to discuss ways in which clothing acts semiotically. To explore how clothing serves as a lived experience, I employ theories of the body as a 'dressed body' (Entwistle, 2000) and fashion as '*styled* bodies' (Connell, 2013, p. 210, original emphasis). These frameworks are useful for analysing fitness clothing as that which is responsible for producing meaning through and on the body. Here, I argue that the comfort of fitness clothing, designed for the purpose of physical activity, contributes to the way these inspirational messages are internalised and worn. I further investigate how fitness apparel functions beyond the experience or the sign of

the clothing itself, and how apparel companies interpellate their consumers through branding. I work with a case study of a popular international fitness apparel brand for women called Lorna Jane, discussing their marketing strategies from shop layout to e-newsletters.

Chapter Four examines contrasting types (the 'cardio bunny' and the 'woman who lifts') as a means to further expose contradiction inherent in postfeminist women's fitness culture. This strategy reveals the ways in which resistance and conformity to both gender roles and the codes and conventions of mainstream body-work can operate. The cardio bunny is popularly constructed in mainstream fitness culture as a feminised, infantilised gym novice who is ignorant to authentic gym practices. The woman who lifts, on the other hand, may work to transgress gendered expectations of women's gym practices by lifting weights and becoming muscular, but she is also conforming to the privileging of masculinity in gym space and the idea of a correct way to work out. These two modes of fit embodiment are performed in the gym space, which I analyse through Henri Lefebvre's framework of 'social space' (1991, p. 162). This chapter is heavily informed by Michel Foucault's theory of 'docile bodies', as well as theories that approach the body through intra-action (Crossley, 2006 and Colls, 2006), and Judith Butler's work on the 'body as matter' (1993). I employ participant observation in this chapter to study the relationship between physical fitness space and the embodied performances that are conducted there.

Chapter Five deploys a case study of fitness celebrity Jillian Michaels to examine the potentialities of a queer subject in fitness culture. Michaels is widely known for her role as a trainer in the American television series *The Biggest Loser*, a reality show that involves overweight contestants training and dieting competitively for a cash prize. Following the success of the show, Michaels released a set of products (videos, training programs, books

and apps) and has also endorsed various fitness products. Michaels identifies as gay, but her orientation and relationships are largely kept separate from her fit celebrity persona. Alongside the marginalisation of her queerness, Michaels is constructed as a feminine, 'heterosexy' sex symbol through her appearances in media. This illustrates how the fitness celebrity industry functions to make queer sexuality seem irrelevant or inappropriate in the context of fitness culture, effectively reaffirming heteronormativity as part of an ideal femininity. The chapter begins by detailing ways in which queer women are represented and constructed in media in general and in sport media, and finally uses Michaels as a vehicle through which to que(e)ry whether or not women's fitness culture can foster the existence of a queer subject.

Chapter One

Digital Battlefield: Postfeminism, Authenticity and Women's Bodies Online

In 2014, an online movement emerged on social media (Tumblr, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter) depicting pictures of women holding hand-written signs illustrating 'why I don't need feminism' or 'I don't need feminism because…'[5]. The movement is now known as Women Against Feminism, with participants mostly comprising of young, white, middle-class women. Arguments forwarded by Women Against Feminism include: feminism as problematically encouraging freedom through individuals identifying as victims; women are 'empowered enough' without the aid of affirmative action that may diminish their individual merit; the goals of second wave feminism are irrelevant in an age of equality legislation; and feminism does not do enough to acknowledge men's issues, particularly those issues that are purportedly 'created' by feminism. The ubiquity of social media has afforded this group visibility, with the criticism it has received from popular news websites such as Buzzfeed or the Huffington Post[6] having the opposite effect – the publicity has worked to recruit more followers and supporters of the cause. This group exemplifies a type of prominent, problematic postfeminist discourse in contemporary society – a cultural narrative now central to how women and representations of women are understood in the West. This chapter attempts to perform the vital work of examining the complex relations between types of postfeminist femininities and social media.

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[5] See http://womenagainstfeminism.tumblr.com/
[6] See Huffington Post Canada (2014) '20 women who apparently don't need (and are against) feminism' from https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/07/15/women-against-feminism_n_5588062.html; Warren, Rossalyn – Buzzfeed (2014) '14 women say why they don't need feminism' from https://www.buzzfeed.com/rossalynwarren/i-do-not-think-it-means-what-you-think-it-means. It is important to note that these articles maintain a critical stance towards this movement.

Postfeminism, in the context of this thesis, presents itself as 'a new kind of anti-feminist statement which is different from simply being a question of backlash' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 1). Elements of feminism, such as empowerment and choice, are 'converted into a much more individualistic discourse' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 1) and disseminated in media and popular culture so that 'a new women's movement will not emerge' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 1). This is interpreted to mean that women and men can return to practices or ideologies that have historically oppressed or objectified women, but in a way that takes feminism into account while simultaneously proposing that its project is over. Complexly, the arguments depicted in movements such as Women Against Feminism invoke the rhetoric of feminism – referring to empowerment, autonomy, self-reliance and independence – while denouncing its relevance. This has the effect of incorporating the potentially resistive strategies of feminism while keeping dominant patriarchal structures in place. Authenticity rhetoric is also particularly crucial to the constructions of 'real' feminism and femininity that are espoused in these online communities. This is done to convey the myth that femininity has been distorted by feminism and has since become something more authentic and essentialist, without the constraints of either patriarchy or feminism to corrupt it. Postfeminism is located within the broader context of commodity feminism, which re-stages feminist language with 'the logic of commodities' (Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1991, p. 8) to neutralise the threat that feminism poses to patriarchy and the structures in which it is embedded, such as capitalism. This kind of postfeminism employs postmodern, self-referential branding and is integral to the accessibility and pleasure of postfeminist discourse, at the cost of a more nuanced understanding of gendered ideological difference.

One of the characteristics of postfeminism is that it invites a return to practices that have previously been critiqued by feminists during the second wave. It is important to note that

these practices are not necessarily disempowering. However, instead of challenging the larger

socio-political structures that reproduce inequality, postfeminist ideology and practices place

the onus of liberation on the individual, which may work to keep the status quo in place

through ignoring broader social issues. Instead of questioning the rationale for why women

are in need of empowerment in the first place, the postfeminist subject is invited to find their

own empowerment by *choosing* from activities that were once criticised as oppressive.

Somehow, the empowerment hierarchy is perceived as reversed here because women

'choose' to participate. This perspective ignores the fundamental rule of politics that

successful systems require subjects to invest in the conditions of their oppression. Pursuits

given affirmation by a postfeminist notion of autonomy include the popularisation and

commodification of sex work, pornography and pole dancing[7]. Sarah Gamble analyses the

alignment of these practices with a postfeminist sensibility:

> Because it [postfeminism] is critical of any definition of women as victims who are
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> unable to control their own lives, it is inclined to be unwilling to condemn
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> pornography and to be sceptical of…date rape: because it is skewed in favour of
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> liberal humanism, it embraces a flexible ideology…adapted to suit individual needs
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> and desires. Finally, because it tends to be implicitly heterosexist…postfeminism
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> commonly seeks to develop an agenda which can find a place for men. (2001, p. 44)

Gamble is suggesting here that some of the central focal points of postfeminism –

'victimisation, autonomy, and responsibility' (Gamble, 2001, p. 43) – are activated through

practices that second wave feminists have condemned for conforming to patriarchy and a

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[7] These three examples are contentious as postfeminist practices because of the polarising history of the 'feminist sex wars' in the 1970s-80s, involving sex-positive feminists and anti-pornography feminists debating the ethics of pornography, sex work and other sexuality issues.

male gaze[8]. From a postfeminist perspective, activities such as pole dancing[9] are regarded as encouraging women to take advantage of the sexualisation of women's bodies to advance in the workplace, and emphasise the importance of individual choice over collective representation. Postfeminism in this way claims to offer empowerment and freedom from oppression, but does not question the structures upon which gender inequality is based.

In the context of this thesis, this chapter plays a vital discursive role in explicating the variously linked cultural and political currents of a) second wave feminisms of the 1960s–70s; b) the perceived backlash against feminism in the 1980s and 1990s, related to iterations of aggressive individualist capitalism; c) the counter-wave of feminist theory including Faludi's *Backlash* and d) the complex unfolding of types of feminism, anti-feminism, patterns of advanced consumption and new challenges of digital and social media. The first section of this chapter explores postfeminist practices and the paradigms upon which they are based by investigating the complex movement of postfeminism from second wave feminism and how it manifests in contemporary media culture. It is important to acknowledge that postfeminism emerges from an ambivalent relationship between popular movements and academic discourse, and that this exact generation of postfeminism is unprecedented because of the emergence of new technologies. Consequently, this thesis draws from both popular media sources (news feeds, social media and so on) and academic discourse. The increasing influence of popular news feeds on identity politics is a symptom of a larger issue to do with how late capitalism has shaped feminism. That is, any attempt to learn about social inequality

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[8] Coined in 1975 by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey, the male gaze denotes the way women are looked at through the cinematic lens – men have the gaze, and women are gazed at, dividing men into active agents and women into passive objects (Mulvey, 1975, p. 62). According to Mulvey, direction of the gaze is informed by institutional power.
[9] See Whitehead, Kally and Tim Kurz (2009). 'Empowerment and the pole: a discursive investigation of the reinvention of pole dancing as a recreational activity'. *Feminism and Psychology, 19*(2), pp. 224–44.

or historically and socially constructed political systems is disrupted by a neoliberalist discourse of the self. In this chapter, I will determine how postfeminism employs feminist rhetoric in the creation of a counter-discourse that reinforces normative ideologies in a repackaged, postmodern form.

The second section examines the role of digital media in the dissemination of postfeminist ideas and performance, arguing that social media and other technologies operate as part of the 'packaging' through which postfeminism is deployed. Issues of authenticity already exist in physical cultures, and social media has contributed to that paradox. I draw on Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of surveillance, as well as other more contemporary works that explore feminine authenticity in online worlds. An examination of the relationship between postfeminism and digital media is necessary because these two concepts are almost synchronous in their emergence, sharing similar cultural contexts and expressing similar preoccupations and anxieties. This chapter will lay the basis for further chapters which explore how postfeminism, fitness culture and digital media converge to prescribe adherence to prescriptive understandings of femininity, consumerism, class structures and racial identity politics.

'Feminism undone': Tracking the development of a postfeminist sensibility

Contemporary interpretations of postfeminism have emerged from the destabilisation of the category 'feminist', 'feminine', and the structure of gender itself. This chapter draws from the works of scholars Rosalind Gill and Angela McRobbie because their definitions of postfeminism encompass the evolution of the concept while avoiding binding the definition to any one movement, group or theory. According to Gill, postfeminism should be understood as follows:

Not as an epistemological shift, nor as a historical transformation, and not (simply) as a backlash against feminism, in which its meanings are pre-specified. Rather, postfeminism should be conceived of as a *sensibility* and postfeminist media culture should be our *critical object*. (2007a, p. 249, original emphasis)

Postfeminism, according to Gill, is not any one of the above concepts, but an integrated combination of the three that results in an entirely new 'sensibility' that is felt or sensed rather than involving judgement formed from a critical or evidence-based method. It is worth unpacking the definitions of 'epistemological shift', 'historical transformation' and 'backlash' to demonstrate how Gill's definition of postfeminism has been developed. The 'epistemological shift' alludes to the way postfeminism has emerged from (and is positioned against) the context of postmodern or post-structuralist treatments of feminism. Historical transformation refers to the way feminism has been integrated into an easily accessible, commodified form which reasserts hegemonic ideology about gender, race, sexuality and class. Lastly, backlash describes an anti-feminist statement which posits that feminism has achieved what it has aimed to do but has gone too far, and is thus the cause of women's unhappiness. Gill's definition of postfeminism as a sensibility sees postfeminism as a product of a cultural context that responded to and shaped feminism from three different directions at the same time. As a result, postfeminism is not a sum of these parts, but a sensibility: 'recurring and relatively stable themes, tropes and constructions that characterize gender representations in the media in the early twenty-first century' (Gill, 2007a, p. 255). In order to analyse the cultural work of postfeminist themes, tropes and constructions, then, we must not only understand these three different directions of influence, but also how they interact together to inform a way of thinking about representations of women and feminism.

McRobbie's definition of postfeminism is similarly intentionally broad to avoid reducing postfeminism to any movement, effect or historical period. She questions whether postfeminism is a sign of the complexification of feminism, or a backlash against it, and concludes that it is both and neither. McRobbie writes of postfeminism as a 'process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined…while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism' (2009, p. 11). As a result, postfeminism cannot and should not be understood as simply 'anti-feminism', but as a mainstream movement that uses the tools of feminism to transform our understanding of feminist resistance towards something that benefits the status quo of patriarchy and capitalism. This thesis will work with both Gill's approach to postfeminism as a sensibility and McRobbie's approach of postfeminism as a process of well-informed and well-intended dismantling of feminism.

Second wave feminism, *Backlash* and the disarticulation of feminism

Susan Faludi was a journalist in the 1990s who wrote *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992) to expose the way the media was falsely representing feminism as being the cause for a general unhappiness experienced by Western women. Faludi writes that the media frames this dissatisfaction as a result of feminism 'going too far' (that is, that feminism has achieved more than women are entitled to), resulting in 'man shortages', 'infertility epidemics' and women 'burning out' in their careers. These, in turn, apparently led to an increase in levels of anxiety and depression, loneliness, alcoholism and stress-related health issues for women. Faludi critiques this perspective of the media and argues that it is in fact persistent inequality and 'men's opposition to equality' (1992, p. 9) at the core of this dissatisfaction. 'Backlash' (as Faludi coined the term)has been made palatable in the media, according to Faludi, by communicating that 'keeping the peace with the particular man in

one's life' is 'more essential than battling mass male culture' (1992, p. 80). Thus, backlash describes an anti-feminist statement which sees feminism as having achieved its goals; that those achievements resulted in negative outcomes for all genders, and advocates for a reversion to pre-feminist times. Faludi called for women to remain critical of anything that declares feminism to be over. *Backlash* was instrumental in rejuvenating feminist discussion in the media about issues that have not been resolved in women's rights.

Since *Backlash,* the concept of feminist backlash has been critiqued to account for an increasingly popular form of anti-feminism that uses feminist principles to neutralise subversive ideology. McRobbie, in *The Aftermath of Feminism,* argues that feminist backlash has advanced beyond Faludi's initial work. She proposes instead that postfeminism 'positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed' (2009, p. 12). McRobbie does not view the rhetoric of postfeminism in binary terms as anti-feminist or pre-feminist, but as that which integrates the language of feminism with governing systems of oppression (capitalism, racism, heteronormativity) to signify that the goals of feminism have been achieved. This is done through a process that McRobbie refers to as disarticulation, drawing from Stuart Hall's work on articulation. According to Hall, articulation refers to 'a connection or link…which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not eternal but has to be constantly renewed' (1985, p. 113). In McRobbie's use of the term, articulation describes the acknowledgement and appreciation of how different minority identities can intersect and therefore create opportunities for cooperation and solidarity (2009, p. 24). This acknowledgement of shared or similar experiences of oppression and struggle was crucial for

the creation of legislation enabling more opportunities for women in the workplace[10] and in

legal representation relating to matters of domestic relationships.[11] The period spanned

roughly from 1968 to 1982 (Mendes, 2012, p. 555), with the beginning occurring during a

time of concentrated increase in women's rights marches, publications[12] and campaigns, and

the end being marked by the increasingly popular notion that feminism had achieved all it

could. If articulation in the second wave was concerned with the formation of connections

and affinity between marginalised groups, then disarticulation describes a 'dispersal strategy'

(McRobbie, 2009, p. 27) by which these alliances are broken down and boundaries between

groups are made more distinct and stable. This has the effect of isolating marginalised groups

to prevent them from working together under a common cause. Disarticulation in

postfeminism works to frame feminism as 'having been fuelled by anger and hostility to men'

(McRobbie, 2009, p. 26), discouraging women from identifying as feminist, and thereby

encouraging them to define their own empowerment through individual choice and

mainstream practices of consumption.

Postfeminism extends the more mainstream goals of second wave feminism (those that

chiefly serve the interests of women from more dominant social groups, for example, white,

middle-class, heterosexual women) to commodity form. It appropriates the language of

feminism and applies it to certain goals that overlook areas where gender equality has not

been achieved. For example, as bell hooks argues, Betty Friedan's phrase, 'the problem that

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[10] For example, Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 1967 Executive Order for Affirmative Action, Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972.

[11] For example, *Griswold v. Connecticut* 1965 (a case in which the Supreme Court decriminalised the contraceptive pill), the Title X Family Planning Program of 1970 and *Roe v. Wade* 1973 (a landmark legal case which resulted in the legalisation of abortion in the first trimester), marital rape, domestic violence and FDA approval of the oral contraceptive pill.

[12] Authors whose works were particularly pivotal to the second wave feminist movement include Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique,* 1963), Gloria Steinem (*A Bunny's Tale*, 1963), Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*, 1970) and Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch*, 1970).

has no name' (Friedan, 1963, p. 15), was used to refer to 'the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women' (hooks, 2000, p. 1) and did not address the issues of black, working-class, queer or even childless/single women. The aim to have something more (beyond having a husband and children and a house)[13], represents leading concerns of the 18–35-year-old, white, middle-class, heterosexual woman: to maintain a successful career. However, hooks suggests that this aim does not discuss 'who would be called in…if more women like herself were freed from their house labour' (2000, p. 1). The postfeminist catchcry of 'having it all' is an updated version of 'having something more', which similarly works to make the plight of a relatively privileged group of women synonymous with the conditions that affect 'all' women. Stephanie Genz critically theorises the postfeminist concept of 'having it all' as similar to the 'new woman' (2010, p. 97). 'New woman' was coined as a critical term by Janet Lee, who argues that women have been positioned by mainstream media to accept a range of subject positions that encourage and valorise certain kinds of femininity as new and empowering ways of being a woman (Lee, 1988, p. 168). Genz argues that 'the concept of the "new woman" serves as "a recurrent sales technique" that promotes and sells a protean but durable image of female "selfhood"' (2010, p. 97). This suggests that with every new generation, a different type of new woman is prescribed in media, but retains most of the attributes of hegemonic femininity. In postfeminist media culture, the new woman wants to 'have it all':

> She faces the dilemma of 'having it all' as she endeavours to reconcile her
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> experiences of being female, feminine, and feminist without falling apart or having
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> to abandon one integral part of her existence. She is simultaneously frustrated and

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[13] 'Having it all' was the catchcry of postfeminism in the 1980s–90s that referred to a desire for the independence and career success made possible by the achievements of feminism, as well as the desire for the 'traditional' feminine pursuits of marriage and children. This phrase is significant as it symbolises a specific cultural context and the postfeminist sensibility of the 1980s–90s.

elated by her contradictoriness and hybridity, wrestling with self-doubt and despair

as well as celebrating hope and confidence. (Genz, 2010, p. 98)

The new woman embodies the perceived contradictions or paradoxes of postfeminism: wanting equality, but secretly craving the more traditional aspects of patriarchal femininity such as heterosexual marriage and having children. This presents the urge for marriage and children as somehow innate and natural to all women, even despite the efforts of feminism to provide opportunities beyond these desires. This archetype is seen in *Sex and the City* (Star, 1998), *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Maguire, 2001), and, more recently, *30 Rock* (Fey, 2006) or *I Don't Know How She Does It* (McGrath, 2011). These are hugely popular texts that are seen as forward-thinking, but the narratives feature the protagonists resolving their stress of 'having it all' by entering stable heterosexual relationships that often include marriage and children. Contemporary postfeminist discourse positions 'having it all' as a crucial pursuit of women, without reflecting on how achievable having it all is, or interrogating its importance as a goal at all. 'Having it all' can be conceptualised as 'emancipated femininity', which Michelle Lazar defines as 'a new kind of femininity that blends with a feminist consciousness' (2011, p. 37). This draws from feminist rhetoric but is presented through prescriptive ideologies of traditional femininity and gender norms. Emancipated femininity promotes new types of feminine practices and behaviours which continue to serve the interests of dominant culture, while evoking feminist rhetoric in a way that makes the new woman archetype appeal to women caught in the contradiction of being both feminist and feminine. At the same time, by addressing a woman who is already more empowered (by virtue of being white, middle class, heteronormative and so on) this narrative conceals more urgent issues of female equality: access to healthcare, equal pay, fair political and judicial representation and so on.

Feminism and commodification

Commodity feminism is another aspect of postfeminism that repackages feminist discourse into commodities and is central to the topic of this thesis. Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath and Sharon Smith contend that these discourses are 'rerouted in the mass media according to the logic of commodity relations' (1991, p. 8), which serves to negate or neutralise the intended meaning that challenges hegemony, as well as exclude certain groups of people from participating[14]. Tools for feminist emancipation are reproduced as commodities, where consumers are positioned to understand that by buying, for example, an anti-ageing cream to reduce the appearance of wrinkles, they are reclaiming their femininity – a process which is irreducible to the single act of purchasing one item. In a study of punk culture in the 1970s and 1980s, Dick Hebdige writes that a potentially resistive subculture can be recuperated into the dominant order of meanings through two possible modes: commodity incorporation and ideological incorporation (1979, p. 94). Commodity incorporation appropriates 'subcultural signs into mass-produced objects' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 94), while the ideological form works to redefine practices or beliefs according to preeminent groups. Central to Hebdige's assertion is that the governing culture can assimilate and repackage subversive cultural artefacts or ideologies to reflect prescriptive attitudes, reducing the culture down to something purchasable rather than something that needs to be experienced, understood and negotiated:

> They [original subcultural signs and their meanings] become 'frozen'. Once
> removed from their private contexts by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion
> interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made

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[14] In the fitness field, for example, an average pair of full-length leggings from Lorna Jane costs AUD$106.99 compared to similar leggings from Kmart at AUD$18. This demonstrates that the empowerment one can access via commodities is limited by one's class. A middle-class woman who can purchase Lorna Jane items can signify membership to the kinds of empowerment denoted by Lorna Jane, whereas a working-class woman cannot.

comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise.

(Hebdige, 1979, p. 96)

This process refers to commodity fetishism, which Karl Marx describes as the belief that cultural objects have an intrinsic meaning, rather than that they have been assigned values that are subject to change by a relative cultural context (1867/1990, p. 165). Commodity fetishism is visible in postfeminist culture, as evidenced by the popularisation of slogans such as 'girl power' in the 1990s, or more recently the hashtags '#girlboss' (used on Instagram or Twitter to signify women in management or business ownership positions) or '#girlgang' (used to describe a group of women or girls who are friends, colleagues or family). These hashtags and slogans, which are commonly linked with commodities such as t-shirts or other products marketed towards women, summon connotations of girl power, and the connection between the infantilising girl motif and postfeminism[15], with words that evoke traditionally masculine attributes (gang, power or boss). The use of these hashtags signifies the user belongs to a so-called feminist collective and holds certain values and ideals about women's rights. Here, the hashtags and slogans are connected to the commodities they represent, interpellating audiences to understand an implicit relationship between the values (for example, girl power) and the product. The message then becomes 'girl power is purchasable', which re-inscribes the potentially subversive message with the organising principles of capitalist marketing.

The relationship between feminism and commodity culture is historically multifaceted and nuanced, and should not be uncritically characterised as exclusionary. There are opportunities

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[15] 'While girlpower emerged within the specific economic, socio-political context of the 1990s where girls *could* be active, in the 2000s they are now *expected/demanded* to be fully self-actualized neo-liberal subjects' (Gonick, Renold, Ringrose and Weems, 2009, p. 2, original emphasis). Here, girl power has evolved from a concept that celebrates the new freedoms of women, to an imperative where women must embrace these 'freedoms'.

for feminism to work through and with commodities, but these opportunities are often bound by the rules of class and neoliberalist individualism, and do not work to interrogate the structures in which patriarchy is entwined[16]. The selling and purchasing of consumer goods has indeed provided many outlets for women to enter the public spheres (especially before the advent of second wave feminism), including home-based sales businesses such as Tupperware and Avon. Nicole Biggart writes that women's 'Direct Sales Organisations' (DSOs) 'might be characterised as pre-feminist, celebrating womanly abilities and values but not challenging dominant social structures' (1989, p. 97). Conversely, Alison Clarke argues that the sale of Tupperware in the 1950s was an 'active rather than passive aspect of the formation of postwar feminine identity' (1997, p. 133). This re-reading of Tupperware's historical narrative suggests that Tupperware sales enabled a kind of 'non-radical feminism' (Clarke, 1997, p. 145) to middle-class suburban homemakers (and importantly, women in minority racial or cultural groups), in that the sales of Tupperware allowed women to seek liberation through 'self-esteem and appreciation of the value of their own thoughts, opinions and experiences' (Clarke, 1997, p. 151). Merl Storr posits a similar argument in a case study of Ann Summers parties, a DSO-turned-retail store specialising in lingerie and other 'adult' erotic products. Storr writes that Ann Summers parties, while espousing the values of heteronormativity, essentialist femininity and traditional gender roles, are also invested in 'rejecting traditional views of women's place in society and in particular of women's sexuality' (2010, p. 30). This is done by asserting the importance of women's sexuality and body autonomy, and also by virtue of creating business for women by women. Storr proposes that the dissonance between Ann Summers parties and their intentions to provide 'pleasure

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[16] An instance of this occurs where companies brand themselves as aligned with feminist philosophy, such as the women's apparel brand Wildfang, which donates a portion of its profits from the sale of a limited edition clothing line to organisations that confront social inequality, such as Planned Parenthood, The Southern Poverty Law Centre, Black Girls Code and others. However, their clothes are often expensive, and rarely cater to plus sizes. Despite their efforts to 'sell' feminism, their own practices contribute to exclusion of certain women.

and self-esteem' (2010, p. 30), and the simultaneous re-assertion of essentialist sexuality and gender roles, serve to characterise these parties as postfeminist. Organisations such as these may achieve their goals of individualised empowerment for a group of otherwise privileged women, but their reduction of feminism (with its broad ideologies and practices that affect people in innumerable subject positions) into a set of commodities fails to confront core causes of inequality, and does little to challenge the continued oppression of women outside of the privileged mainstream.

Second wave feminism is often (mistakenly) characterised for the 'bra-burning'[17] attitude towards consumer culture (Faludi, 1992, p. 100). That is, there is a stereotype of second wave feminists being anti-consumerist in a way that is made to seem irrational and extreme. This is encapsulated by 'bra-burning' perhaps because bras are deemed necessary – so burning them seems ridiculous. This stems from the critical stance towards consumer products and marketing practices that positioned women as sexual objects during the second wave period. This is another example of articulation processes in the second wave, where capitalist processes are questioned in connection to women's oppression. Postfeminism, conversely, has embraced the integration of commodities with the message of women's empowerment. The trajectory from feminist critique of consumerism to postfeminist acceptance and conformity speaks to a capitalist and patriarchal strategy of refocusing the critical lens of feminism away from the idea that capitalism and feminism do not share the same interests, to the idea that the root of Western feminism lies in having 'freedom' to shop. Faludi argues that this is characterised by the way advertising media represented women as 'want[ing] self-

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[17] 'Bra-burning' as a term associated with second wave feminists was coined in relation to a protest of a Miss America pageant in 1969 (Stewart, 2008). Protestors threw symbolic objects, including a girdle, make-up, pots and mops, and a copy of *Playboy* magazine into a trash can outside the pageant venue (no fire was involved). A reporter likened the demonstration to how Vietnam protestors burned their draft cards and the term became popularly linked to feminism.

gratification, not self-determination – the sort of fulfilment best serviced at a shopping mall' (1992, p. 100).

Commodity incorporation can have the effect of neutralising or re-aligning a potentially subversive message into the framework of the dominant culture. Branding is particularly responsible for aligning a product with a certain ideology, which then reworks the meaning of the product. This is an example of *bricolage*, a process by which commodities are appropriated and placed 'in a symbolic ensemble which serves to erase or subvert their original straight meanings' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 103). Genz, in an article about the relationship between personal branding and postfeminism, defines postfeminism as enabled by consumer culture and commodity feminism, and which 'absorbs feminist ideas and rhetoric in a politically ambivalent, media friendly and individualistic ideology and practice' (2015, p. 546). By making the ideology of feminism media-friendly, and arguing for the importance of individual choice over collective action, this type of branding creates visible space for a distorted version of feminism that serves to distract individuals from structural inequality. One of these methods of postfeminist personal branding is the valorisation of 'authenticity' as a selling technique that also naturalises certain feminine characteristics. Genz gives the example of actress Katie Price (formerly known as Jordan, the model), and her public re-branding as 'authentic' in the television show *What Katie Did Next* (ITV2, 2009) about her life immediately following her divorce from Australian pop-star Peter Andre. Price was, until then, well known for her appearance in reality TV shows including *Big Brother* and *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*, and for her participation in a series of shows centred around her and her then-husband Andre[18], during which she gained a reputation as 'headline-

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[18] For example, *When Jordan Met Peter* (2004)*, Katie and Peter: The Next Chapter* (2007) and *Katie and Peter: Down Under* (2008).

grabbing and pathetic' (Genz, 2015, p. 550). *What Katie Did Next* was Price's attempt to correct this image with a more 'real' self. Genz proposes that:

> The affective and commercial appeal of postfeminist celebrity culture depends on the commodification and gendering of authenticity whereby the currency of 'realness' in the current media economy is harnessed to neoliberal and postfeminist expressions of (self)branding, entrepreneurship and feminine agency. (2015, p. 547)

For Genz, the Katie Price brand represents an effort to reaffirm aspirational values of a particular type of 'authenticity' that is related to hegemonic performances of femininity. The branding of authenticity is structured into three core themes – personal narrativisation, class groundedness and entrepreneurial femininity – that articulate ideal femininity in terms of heteronormative attractiveness and sexual subjectivity (Genz, 2015, p. 547). The potentially subversive message here is that femininity can be changed or challenged. However, through commodification (the self-branding process), this has been incorporated to mean that femininity can or should only be challenged in ways that uphold pre-existing values of sexuality, class and race. Price is constructed as the ideal postfeminist subject – young, white, middle class, heterosexual and conventionally attractive. By conflating one person's individual circumstances with overarching themes of authenticity and femininity, viewers are positioned to understand that those circumstances are desirable and should be aspirational.

Personal branding and empowerment narratives used in the 'selling' of postfeminism to young women are often used to reify the significance of conservative feminine roles (for example, being responsible for the upkeep of the home and family). This is often linked with the pursuit of a career one can do from home, where private and economic life converges. This is known as 'entrepreneurial femininity' which has become increasingly popular; more women are supplementing their income by merging parts of their personal lives with their

economic lives. Katie Price is one example, as a celebrity who profits from inviting an audience to her 'private' lives, but even more common examples include blogs dedicated to food, fashion, housekeeping and DIY; make-up video tutorials; or selling handicrafts online using platforms such as Etsy. Brook Duffy and Erin Hund, in an article about self-branding and entrepreneurial femininity on social media, propose that these 'modes of creative self-enterprise' emerge from a cultural context of 'destabilised employment, the concomitant rise of casualised and contract-based work, and the logic of flexible specialisation' (2015, p. 1). Duffy and Hund regard entrepreneurial femininity as a product of changes to the economy. In addition to these factors, it is also important to note that women who are mothers may see entrepreneurial femininity as appealing due to the conditions of motherhood and work – that is, inability to return to work, the cost of day-care, the inflexibility of school hours as well as the loss of self-esteem and the need for a creative or self-motivated outlet. Such roles, often signified by terms such as 'mom-preneur' or 'blogger-preneur' are valorised as examples of feminine empowerment – but they perform important cultural work by reaffirming the role of commerce in empowerment narratives.

Hot feminist? Contemporary expressions of postfeminism

A postfeminist sensibility is most easily recognisable as the kind of 'substitute feminism' McRobbie discusses, where postfeminism invokes feminist rhetoric in a way that undermines and rewrites the goals of feminism. While second wave feminism is portrayed in mainstream media as 'over', the postfeminism succeeding it is highly commodified, media friendly and non-threatening. Contemporary postfeminism draws on aspects of second wave feminism and renders them less radical. McRobbie suggests that this is done through use of postmodern self-consciousness, where representations of women that may seem sexist or objectifying

employ certain signs (such as a smirk, the 'knowing wink'[19] or other playful humour) to make the viewer understand that the objectification is being done self-consciously and with full recognition of how the media 'used to' objectify women before feminism. Exemplary of this is journalist Polly Vernon's *Hot Feminist,* a manifesto for feminists who still wish to retain beauty practices that are criticised by second wave feminists as submitting to an arguably male gaze. Vernon writes on the back of the book's dust jacket that:

> *Hot Feminist* is based on a principle of non-judgement (because there's enough already), honesty about how often we mess this up, and empowerment through looks. Part memoir, part road map, it's a rolling, raucous rejection of all those things we're convinced we shouldn't think/wear/feel/say/buy/want – and a celebration of all the things we can. (Vernon, 2015, n.p.)

Vernon's argument for the integration of beauty practices with feminism is, fundamentally, as long as one participates in feminist issues that address broader social equity concerns, one can still conform to dominant beauty standards. Vernon describes the ethos of second wave 'classic feminism' as a call to 'throw aside the tyranny of all that crap [beauty and fashion practices], grow defiantly fatter and greyer and wrinklier and hairier' (2015, p. 7), a reductive perspective on second wave's functions and ideologies. Although she acknowledges that she is the beneficiary of the work of second wave feminism, Vernon continues to assert that this way of thinking is at odds with an individual's need to construct identity. However, Vernon's acceptance of identity construction through appearance, and her approval of women who are 'looks-obsessed' (2015, p. 9), seems to extend only as far as people who occupy similar roles

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[19] The 'knowing wink' refers to a common rhetorical device in advertising, 'in which an advertisement draws attention to itself as construction' (Abel, 2012, p. 401). Abel argues that the knowing wink is read in postfeminist media culture through adopting the tone of '"we are not sexist anymore, and we can now all laugh at these sexist stereotypes"' (2012, p. 401).

to her: thin[20], young[21], middle-class[22], heterosexual[23] women whose looks conform to narrow ideals of femininity. Thus, she disregards the intersections of minority subjectivities. Furthermore, Vernon's concept of taking 'ownership over the way she looks' (2015, p. 13), as well as the values she believes make her a feminist, demonstrate strict adherence to neoliberal, capitalist notions of individuality and choice: 'as a feminist, I reserve the right to not be offended by the word "chick". Or by almost *everything*[24]' (2015, p. 36, original emphasis). A more nuanced reading of the relationship between feminism and physical appearance may have been that such beauty practices have the potential to be reworked as feminist (for example, through careful consumption of ethical, female-run businesses, or through the notion of self-care), but Vernon does not approach this.

Vernon's book blends incorporated postfeminism with backlash feminism, proposing a return to hegemonic femininity through the consumption of goods, all while espousing feminist rhetoric in a form that fails to challenge the structural inequality of the patriarchy. According to Ronald Berger, Patricia Searles and Charles Cottle, this kind of return to pre-feminist beliefs and practices stems from an aspect of liberal feminism, which champions an older

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[20] Vernon has a clear position on the relationship between weight and beauty: 'I've spent 16 years wondering if I would look better if I were skinnier, and now I know for sure. I do. But then, almost everyone does' (2015, p. 168)

[21] Vernon interpellates the reader as someone who is concerned with the ageing process in regards to beauty, but not other aspects of ageing in society, which suggests that her ideal reader is concerned about ageing from the distance of youth.

[22] The middle-class positioning is evident in the commodities and services she believes to be essential, and through her preoccupation with feminist issues that chiefly affect middle-class women, particularly those in the United Kingdom.

[23] While Vernon does raise the issue of sexual liberation ('I consider fancying people to be a feminist act' [2015, p. 35]), she makes it clear that she is heterosexual ('I think of myself as "boy-crazy"' [2015, p. 13]) and does not mention how queer people fit in this context.

[24] Vernon gives examples for 'everything' to mean catcalling; the common practice of airbrushing images of women's bodies in magazines; having men open doors for women;, the lack of women in panel shows and reporting of female politicians that focuses on their outfits. She argues that being offended by 'things that vaguely irritate us' will result in being taken less seriously when speaking out against the things that do offend her, which for Vernon include the gender pay gap, the high incidence of rape and the lack of access to safe and legal abortion.

form of individualism, 'presum[ing] it is possible for one to observe the social world without the subjective biases generally associated with questions of value' (1991, p. 51). Critics of this kind of postfeminism argue that the 'choice' inherent in these practices is undermined by the historical context and language of the practice itself, and therefore serves to reaffirm the norms that inform such activities. Miranda Kiraly and Meagan Tyler propose that 'liberation cannot be found at a purely individual level, nor can it be forged from adapting to, or simply accepting, existing conditions of oppression' (2015, p. xiii). This challenges those goals of neoliberal postfeminism that advocate choice as a way of tailoring the context of patriarchal practices. Additionally, Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter write that this kind of strategy ensures the continuance of dominant ideology 'by neutralizing threats from oppositional ideologies, through acknowledging some of their elements in an apparent show of tolerance' (1995, p. 112). Tolerance here refers not to acceptance or even critical awareness, but is merely an acknowledgement that oppositional ideologies exist. While *Hot Feminist* initially seems to suggest that the book takes a thoughtful stance on how women can feel deprived of agency through feminism's condemnation of 'feminine' activities, her work offers no criticism of feminism beyond surface observations and assumptions based on anti-feminist representations. *Hot Feminist* is exemplary of contemporary postfeminism, designed as co-existing comfortably with the ideology of capitalism and patriarchy, while presenting empowerment as that which can be generated through individual thought and choice.

The mainstream form of postfeminism represented in popular culture is arguably an amalgam of substitute feminism and backlash discourse. The latter is represented in texts that portray a more or less equal standing for men and women, arguing that feminism is over because of government legislation surrounding equal opportunity, and that feminism has in some cases 'gone too far', resulting in women becoming stressed and unhappy with having it all. Also at

the core of this unhappiness, according to the mainstream media, is the work done by postmodern feminists to expose gender as something constructed and performative, calling into question the arbitrary nature of the boundaries surrounding gender and sexuality. Postmodern feminists are perceived to have caused unhappiness by critiquing the boundaries of gender that have been long-internalised and naturalised. The postmodern destabilisation of social constructs can lead to overcompensation, where consumer products, practices and behaviours are being represented as a remedy or return to traditional femininity from a time in which those models were seen as stable. At this point, backlash postfeminism begins to overlap with incorporated postfeminism.

#Idontneedfeminism: The online mobilisation of postfeminism

Digital media has become integral to the dissemination of postfeminist ideology, bound by similar narratives of authenticity, subjectivity and surveillance. The policing of authenticity in offline and online worlds becomes entangled with the policing of authenticity in terms of gender roles: women are under greater scrutiny online to portray a 'real' self, but the criteria that defines what is real is underpinned by hegemonic femininity. Women experimenting with activities or appearances not associated with normative femininity are disciplined in different ways according to what kinds of subversion are taking place. Women displaying confidence in their appearance and feminine beauty practices on the internet, for example, through posting selfies or make-up tutorials, are accused of being vain, self-centred and attention-seeking, while women attempting to access spaces traditionally reserved for men (gaming, geekdom, skateboarding and so on) are called 'posers' and are again accused of trying to get attention from men. The internet provides an effective site for this policing to occur through the panoptic function of social media, which positions viewers to willingly present themselves for approval to the public, inviting their behaviour to be monitored and

altered according to social norms. While the accessibility of the internet may make it a potentially subversive tool for feminist activists in terms of community and visibility, ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism are still prevalent in digital media. These ideologies are enacted and conveyed through framing 'empowerment' as a commodity available to certain socio-political groups, presented through highly commodified and media-friendly spaces, such as the internet and social media networks. Concepts of authenticity, surveillance, 'new' femininity, subculture and policing are enmeshed on the internet to construct restrictions around 'normal' social behaviour, in a way that encourages compliance in the individual.

As demonstrated by the Women Against Feminism movement, postfeminists form online communities on social networking websites, creating groups or clubs dedicated to sharing the postfeminist message. Mostly consisting of young, white, middle-class women, postfeminism on the internet appears as videos, pictures and blog posts that aim to popularise the sensibility of postfeminism through playful, anti-victim narratives and stories of personal liberation couched in empowerment rhetoric. Postfeminism is informed by narratives of individual freedom and choice, as well as 'emancipated femininity' (Lazar, 2011, p. 39) and commodity feminism. These narratives are particularly effective and visible through digital media because of shared ideologies between postfeminism and digital media: namely, the emphasis on authenticity, choice and individual autonomy and empowerment. In the following section, I aim to explore why the internet is effective as a conduit for postfeminism and how it is being used, drawing from examples on the internet as well as self-production theory from Amy Shields Dobson's publication, *Postfeminism and Digital Cultures* (2015). I will also extrapolate this to the topic of fitness culture, including the use of mottos on social media

websites such as Instagram, and the use of Facebook as dialogue between user and producer of fitness products and services such as gyms, apparel, equipment and nutrition.

The internet may serve as a potential platform for grassroots feminist activism and the subversion of patriarchal interests, suggesting that there is space on the internet for feminist work beyond that which is concerned with commodities, neoliberalist empowerment narratives or the paradox of authenticity. Numerous blogs, websites, groups and other online communities exist for the purpose of questioning the patriarchal system through posting experiences of daily 'microaggressions'[25], sharing tips for self-care strategies, critiquing sexist media materials or other activities that involve negotiation and feminist criticism[26]. The internet is the ideal site for the surveillance and incorporation characteristic of postfeminism because it is a ubiquitous public space, populated by willing subjects drawn to those beneficial aspects of being online (convenience, communication, self-expression and so on). Subjects hold themselves up to be viewed and commented upon through profiles, images and blogs, and whether they are praised, ignored or chastised is dependent on how their self-representation measures up against a hierarchy of preferred behaviours, beliefs and practices. The internet can here serve as a system for upholding social norms and privileged subject positions, and disciplining or punishing those who transgress them.

<u>Policing authenticity on and offline</u>

The paradox of authenticity online is crucial to the efficacy of digital postfeminist narratives.

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[25] 'Microaggressions' refer to everyday incidents of casual harassment or sexism.
[26] Some of these websites include Bitch Media (https://www.bitchmedia.org/), Jezebel (https://jezebel.com/), Everyday Feminism (https://everydayfeminism.com/), Guerrilla Feminism (https://www.facebook.com/guerrillafeminism/) and Feministing (http://feministing.com/).

Authenticity online can be interpreted 'as a content strategy carried out to gain readers and differentiate oneself' (Marwick, 2013, p. 249). There is a shared myth about authenticity being 'a moral ideal' (Marwick, 2013, p. 249) in self-representation, that supposedly distinguishes the individual from others, allowing one to 'be yourself'. Similarly, new femininities, differentiated from older models of femininity, are being created in popular media that maintain existing structures of capitalism, patriarchy and whiteness. Narratives of authenticity practise exclusion through inclusion, refuting not only that which was once considered the unrealistic ideal, but furthermore continue to exclude certain marginalised groups. Personal beauty brand Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign, which featured mostly plus-size female models of different skin colours and ages, has been criticised by scholarly and grassroots feminist commentators for employing an aesthetic of authenticity to convey a seemingly feminist critique of mainstream beauty ideals, all while continuing to exclude certain bodies, such as trans women, women with visible disability, women outside of the 'healthy' boundaries of body weight. The campaign comprised videos and print advertisements that bemoaned traditional standards of beauty, intentionally replacing professional models with 'real women'. The kinds of women featured in this definition of 'real' include women with freckles, wrinkles, grey hair, and women who are overweight. Dara Persis Murray contends that the advertising campaign invokes authenticity through the paradigm of real beauty, which 'underscores neoliberal self-improvement benefiting the corporation's power' (2013, p. 98). That is, women are positioned to understand that through their consumption of Dove Real Beauty products, they reproduce themselves as subjects of real beauty. The reaffirmation of the neoliberal value of individualism paradoxically serves to benefit a large corporation like Dove.

Authenticity is frequently gendered, with an expectation on women to portray their 'true' selves. Genz argues that 'women are called upon by postfeminist neoliberal economies to articulate their selfhood in terms of pre-set scripts of femininity, beauty and sexiness' (2015, p. 545), and that these performances must be enacted using 'the currency of realness' (2015, p. 547). This becomes aligned with the dominant ideology of female objectification and sexual availability, where authenticity is connoted by a youthful, fun archetype that has a liberal attitude towards (heterosexual) casual sex and bodily display. Amy Shields Dobson found in her research of young women's self-representations online that to be authentic is often constructed as a youthful, confident postfeminist femininity or 'gendered randomness'[27] (2015, p. 114). She analysed a selection of Myspace pages where girls and women posted short paragraphs in their online profiles to describe themselves to users. They signalled their femininity by their looks, but characterised themselves with 'flawed' qualities (identifying as 'crazy', 'rude', 'opinionated' and so on) that constructs a self that is 'confident enough to be transparent' (Shields Dobson, 2015, p. 118). By constructing a persona of randomness and transparency through juxtaposing preferences or traits that seem to conflict with other listed traits, the subject 'performs an obliviousness to the demands of the social context' (Shields Dobson, 2015, p. 115). Examples of this include stream-of-consciousness-style writing, listing likes ('karaoke, necklaces, being loved, tiled floors, Jessica Simpson' [Shields Dobson, 2015, p. 115) and dislikes ('liars, bourbon, babies, muddy feet, spew, macaroni and cheese, having your glasses smashed' [Shields Dobson, 2015, p. 115]). Being random or enjoying randomness in these profile descriptions constructs a 'multidimensional self' that is laid-back, quirky and authentic. Shields Dobson proposes that likes and dislikes such as these reaffirm the desired aspects of traditional femininity such as girlish fun and consumption

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[27] Randomness in this context is taken to mean spontaneity, eclectic style and having a fun and carefree nature.

while rejecting aspects associated with motherhood or domesticity ('babies…spew'). Shields Dobson attributes the attractiveness and desirability of this type of authenticity to its innocence and its connection to youthfulness.

Postfeminist mottos online are short but powerful narratives that reproduce (and are produced by) the false consciousness of authenticity. Shields Dobson describes these mottos as a means to 'construct a self that is fluid and open to revision, and yet also "authentically" youthful and feminine, and stable in its gendered attributes' (2015, p. 14). These kinds of mottos therefore reproduce what it means to be feminine, and authenticity is invoked as part of a rhetoric that naturalises and internalises these rules. The notion of authenticity is significant to the sensibility of postfeminism as a tool that is used to police the boundaries of the different kinds of femininity. These types of mottos are used in women's fitness culture both digitally (on social media such as Tumblr and Instragram, or on the websites of fitness institutions such as gyms or fitness apparel stores) and offline (on apparel items, or on posters in physical shops or gyms). They generally refer to commitment, self-acceptance, independence and capability, often set against an abstract background (florals, colours) or photography (landscapes, female subjects in a gym environment and so on). These conventions connote a particular assortment of feminine traits that align with values of openness, confidence, youthfulness and a stable sense of self that is open to improvement:

> Be happy, be bright, be you. (Lornajaneactive, 2015a)
>
> Live what you love. (Lornajaneactive, 2015b)
>
> Happiness is realising your smile is your best accessory. (Lornajaneactive, 2015c)
>
> Sweat more, complain less. (Lornajaneactive, 2015d)
>
> Once you have accepted your flaws, no one can use them against you. (ljclarkson, 2015a)

If you don't go after what you want, you'll never have it. (ljclarkson, 2015b)

The above is a selection of mottos taken from the official Lorna Jane Active Instagram account and the personal account of founder Lorna Jane Clarkson. All six mottos are non-attributed, and are printed in font that takes the appearance of handwritten script. The appearance of the font in itself reflects the construction of authenticity: implying that a person handwrote it, denoting a sense of realness, while simultaneously (and most likely unintentionally) communicating the contrived nature of authenticity through the fact that the font is computer-generated. Although the mottos are vague enough to be applicable across multiple contexts, the intention of these Instagram accounts (along with the promotion of fitness lifestyle and fitness apparel) is for the reader to apply them to their own fitness. The two mottos from Clarkson's Instagram are aligned with individualism and a kind of 'positive thinking' consistent with white, middle-class empowerment narratives. Empowerment narratives, according to Shelley Budgeon, require 'a denial of the effects that external influences have on the individual's success and as such the classed and raced constitution of the "successful" feminine subject is obscured' (2011, p. 285). Therefore, to identify as empowered is to ignore the fact that prevalent identities are already privileged to succeed where marginalised identities are not. For example, 'once you accept your flaws, no one can use them against you' is only inclusive of certain kinds of flaws and excludes other subject positions that may be used against an individual. It is much easier, for instance, to accept and ignore one's flaws concerning personality or appearance rather than 'flaws' that make it difficult to negotiate the demands of a white, middle-class, heterosexual society, including being a person of colour, from a lower socio-economic background, or queer or gender diverse. These marginalised subjectivities may find it more challenging to 'complain less' in favour of 'sweat[ing] more'. Mottos such as the ones presented above embody this problematic, individualised approach to motivation that overlooks social power imbalances.

The antithesis of the ideal 'authentic', 'random' femininity is exemplified by the poser label, often used in subcultural communities to describe a person who consumes products related to the subculture, but does not embody what is seen as the key activity or ideology of the group. For example, women and girls who embrace geek identities that have traditionally been understood as 'white and masculine' (Reagle, 2015, p. 2865) are under intense scrutiny to prove their identities as authentic in ways that their male counterparts are not subjected to. This inauthenticity is associated here with the problematic assumption that girls who are interested in pursuing a pastime that is traditionally regarded as masculine are only motivated by gaining the attention of men or boys. Non-conventional femininities, particularly those that combine masculine characteristics that may potentially be attractive to men, such as the geek girl or the random girl, are constructed here as desirable and acceptable only when performed under certain motivations, making their restrictions almost as limiting as conventional femininity. Joseph Reagle writes about the culture of policing in self-identified geek communities and how this policing is heavily gendered. Women in geek communities are frequently rebuked for perceived infractions against authenticity, and for anything that might expose them as fake geeks. This was exemplified by an article Reagle discusses by technologist Tara Tiger Brown titled, 'Dear fake geek girls, please go away', in which Brown encouraged girls 'who genuinely like their hobby or interest…to help others, not garner attention' (Brown, quoted in Reagle, 2015, p. 2863). Reagle proposes that his research found that:

> in a discourse started by a woman to encourage other women to be geeky, some of the loudest voices were those judging women's bodies and brains according to traditionally androcentric and heteronormative values…a critique by a woman rebounds into a scrutiny of women by men. (Reagle, 2015, p. 2863)

Women are disciplined when they are seen as paying attention to the 'wrong' thing – that is, for having motivations to participate in geek culture that do not conform to the norm. Desires seen as feminine (such as sexual desire for a male character in a geek text) are an example of these incorrect motivations, and are policed by male geeks (Reagle, 2015, p. 2865).

A clear case of masculinised gatekeeping and criticism of women in 'male' digital spaces is the recent 'Gamergate', an infamous incident of harassment of women in gaming, which initially targeted game developers Zoë Quinn and Brianna Wu, and feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian. Gamergate harassment was initially seen as being caused by a 'perceived lack of ethics within gaming journalism', but evolved into 'a campaign of systematic harassment of female and minority game developers, journalists and critics and their allies' (Massanari, 2017, p. 330). Women (including the three examples above, but many more) were harassed online through threats of rape and death, and were 'doxxed' – a term that refers to the practice of revealing the home address of an online personality. The mainstream 'gamer' is constructed as a white, heterosexual male (Braithwaite, 2016, p. 1) as evidenced by the prevalence of white, heterosexual male protagonists in mainstream games. Marginalised groups are under-represented in these games because gaming companies do not acknowledge that these groups play games (Shaw, 2011, p. 28). Adrienne Massanari proposes that Gamergate is 'emblematic of an ongoing backlash against women and their use of technology and participation in public life' (2017, p. 330). She argues that the structures of the online forums from which this movement emerged and grew (specifically Reddit) 'may enable and/or implicitly encourage these spaces to become hotbeds of misogynistic activism' (Massanari, 2017, p. 329). She argues that this is accomplished through the reification of the desires of ruling groups, while minority groups are marginalised. This is enacted through the way the site is designed, which Massanari argues presents an example of a 'toxic

technoculture' (2017, p. 330). For example, the 'karma point system' (where Reddit users receive a score reflecting how their contributions are valued by other users) favours the dominant set by creating 'herding' behaviour, 'biasing individuals to mirror the voting behaviour of others' (Massanari, 2017, p. 337). This type of design not only confers power to those whose voices are already privileged, but actively discourages and silences those from marginalised groups. Gamergate is an example of contemporary backlash discourse at work against the emergence of feminist critique and involvement in gaming culture, where proponents argue that feminism has 'ruined' gaming.

In response to the influx of digital masculine spaces where women's authenticity is continually questioned, it is not surprising to see an emergence of factions of women who pre-emptively choose the side of the gatekeepers to avoid criticism themselves. If the stereotypical, reductive image of feminism is as a movement promoting misandry (men-hating), pettiness or bullying, then it is possible to understand why it is more appealing to disassociate oneself from the movement. In the context of Women Against Feminism, the women from these internet communities distinguish their criticism of feminist ideology by constructing an Other they are alternative to: in this case, the stereotypical feminist who hates men or disregards men's issues and internalises victimhood. The treatment of posers, and women perceived as posers in geek communities, reaffirms categories of how women are allowed to participate in geekdom as a predominately male designated space. Only women who adhere to a certain balance of attractiveness, geeky knowledge and authenticity may have the title geek conferred to them, and then only through a constant process of gatekeeping and identity policing. Similarly, the Women Against Feminism movement is legitimised by other anti-feminists (most notably the Men's Rights Movement) as educated, outspoken women only when their views match those of the hegemonic culture. McRobbie's

theory of disarticulation in postfeminist media culture is applicable here, where groups such as these foreclose on 'the possibility or likelihood of various expansive intersections and inter-generational feminist transmissions' (2009, p. 26). The Women Against Feminism movement exhibit traits of Lazar's emancipated femininity, referred to earlier in this chapter, by being conferred power by anti-feminist, patriarchal media and men's groups for their outspoken agreement with hegemonic rules, despite the perceived pressure to identify with feminism.

The confessional and *Women Against Feminism*

One of the prevalent modes used on the internet to deploy postfeminist rhetoric framed by authenticity is the confessional, which has implications for the construction of an authentic self. The internet is often treated as a confessional, which is a practice that Foucault describes as 'one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth' (1979, p. 59). The confessional is pervasive in public and private spheres in a variety of contexts, and is so naturalised in society that the obligation to confess is now conflated with freedom, contrasted with the perception of silence as oppressive (Foucault, 1979, p. 60). This means that the urge to confess a view or a secret, although still historically embedded in the exertion of power, seems to have 'an original affinity with freedom' (Foucault, 1979, p. 60). The Women Against Feminism movement is an example of this, featuring videos, blogposts and photographs of women confessing why they do not need feminism (see figures 1 and 2 below for examples). The texts are framed as contrary to the mainstream, and aim to reveal the true nature of feminism to others. Coming out against feminism as a woman is constructed as authentic and as a sign of liberation, so that other women are positioned to aspire to this revelation.
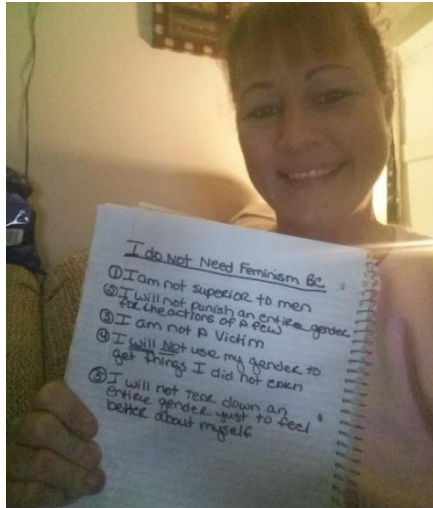
Fig. 1 – User submission photos from womenagainstfeminism.tumblr.com (Accessed 2018).

Left: 'I do not need Feminism BC [because]: 1. I am not superior to men. 2. I will not punish an entire gender for the actions of a few. 3. I am not a victim. 4. I will NOT use my gender to get things I did not earn. 5. I will not tear down an entire gender just to feel better about myself.'

Right: 'I don't need feminism because: It isn't the 50's anymore. We're already equal. I don't want special privileges over men.'
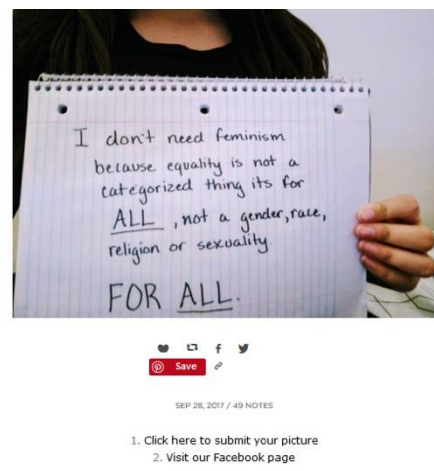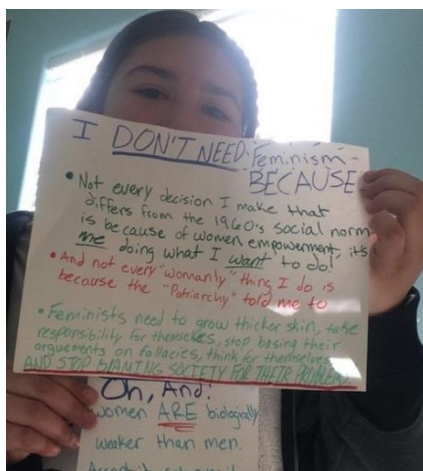
Fig. 2 – User submission photos from WomenAgainstFeminism.tumblr.com (Accessed 2018).

Left: 'I DON'T NEED Feminism BECAUSE: not every decision I make that differs from the 1960's social norms is because of women's empowerment, it's me doing what I want to do! And not every "womanly" thing I do is because the "patriarchy" told me to. Feminists need to grow thicker skin, take responsibility for themselves, stop basing their arguments on fallacies, think for themselves, and STOP BLAMING SOCIETY FOR THEIR PROBLEMS. Oh, and: women ARE biologically weaker than men. Accept it, get over it.'

Right: 'I don't need feminism because equality is not a categorized thing its [sic] for <u>ALL</u>, not a gender, race, religion or sexuality. FOR <u>ALL</u>.'

The use of feminist rhetoric and notions of authenticity through the confessional is explored in Fiona Handyside's study of authenticity, postfeminism and female sexuality through the trope of diary-writing. Handyside compares *Bridget Jones' Diary*[28] with a nonfictional response, *Bitchy Jones' Diary*, a blog by a sexually dominant woman active in the BDSM[29] community. Handyside notes that while *Bitchy* is meant to serve as an antithesis to *Bridget*:

> Both use a variety of rhetorical strategies to create the impression that they are giving an authentic account of a marginalised subject position, and use this 'authentic' voice to denounce mainstream and subcultural attempts to exclude as worthless or irrelevant aspects of their sexual tastes, practices and experiences.
>
> (Handyside, 2010, p. 41)

Handyside argues here that the authentic voice of each text is used as a tool to express to the public the lived experiences of the author from their (perceived) marginalised positions in alternative lifestyles. The confessional medium is easily accessible on the internet (compared to the confessional through traditional media, for example a novel), allowing users to display confessions of their lived experiences to the public. The confessional medium constructs a sense of intimacy where the reader is among the privileged few with the opportunity to read the truth about a person, group or issue. Confessing something construed as a secret highlights the significance of what is being admitted and grants individual power to the confider as the gatekeeper of truth. Confession on the internet occurs in various degrees, from

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[28] *Bridget Jones's Diary* here refers to the 1996 novel by Helen Fielding, not the film produced in 2001, although both portray the exploits of a single, 30-year-old woman living in London.
[29] BDSM stands for bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism, and refers to a group of sexual practices based on sexual gratification through controlling or being controlled. BDSM is also referred to as 'kink' and regarded as an alternative sexual practice.

intimate blog posts to curated anonymous collections of confessions, such as those found on

PostSecret, a popular blog where users submit anonymous secrets which are then posted

publicly. Frank Warren developed the project in 2004, inviting the public to write 'a secret

that is true and you have never shared' on a postcard and send it to him, where he would scan

the card and post it on the PostSecret website. Anna Poletti illustrates a connection between

the confessional narrative mode in PostSecret and Foucault's theory of confession as a means

for constituting subjects through 'the resilient normative power of the confessional form'

(Poletti, 2011, p. 28). Foucault argues that:

> The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so
>
> deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that
>
> constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that the truth, lodged in our most secret
>
> nature, 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint
>
> holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be
>
> articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. (Foucault, 1979, p. 60)

According to Foucault, the concept of confession has permeated so many institutions that it

becomes naturalised and 'common-sense' to view secrets and truths as things that must be

revealed. Privileging the authentic 'truth' here becomes an imperative to exist in the social

order. The confessional narrative constructs whatever is being confessed as inherently true

because it is being confessed. Framing an anti-feminist stance within a confession in Women

Against Feminism reifies the idea that confessions are true and liberating, and positions the

reader to accept the secret in a way that is both intimate and public.

Online surveillance is a crucial point of connection between postfeminism and digital media.

Contemporary postfeminism relies on surveillance as a way of producing self-policing

subjects, and digital media mobilises surveillance in a way that positions subjects to enjoy

being watched. Foucault proposes that the 'spectacle of public punishment' has been mostly

replaced by surveillance and training as a mode of discipline (1991, p. 8). This is consistent

with Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a metaphorical prison structured

so that every prisoner is visible to each other and to the guard tower stationed in the centre of

the circular building, with windows that allow guards to look out but which prevent prisoners

from looking in (Foucault, 1991, p. 9). This results in the prisoners never knowing when they

are being watched, therefore causing them to behave as if they are always being observed. On

the internet, this constant observation (or at least the feeling of it) combines with a

dominantly male space resulting in a gendered Panopticon that disproportionately polices

women's activities online. Anne Burns argues that the visibility and ubiquity of women's

photographs[30] on the internet 'enables the expression of misogynistic sentiments, and

legitimises the control of women as a form of correction' (2015, p. 1). Burns' use of the term

'correction' here implies that, from the perspective of those who enact the 'correction', there

is something wrong with women's behaviour that needs to be fixed. Burns contends that this

assumes many forms, including instruction, coercion and threats of physical harm, as well as

the humiliation caused by distributing nude photographs without the subject's consent.

Foucault argues that the spectacle of punishment, which was largely public before the

nineteenth century, is now hidden from the public (1991, p. 9). The system of policing and

harassing or 'flaming' someone online who commits a social transgression (such as being a

poser in a subculture, or portraying oneself in a way that is markedly different to how one

appears offline) seems to contradict this. Flaming and other online abuse is a public spectacle

of punishment that functions to reaffirm cultural norms and narratives around gender roles,

authenticity and other cultural norms. Disciplining a woman through ridicule, abuse or threats

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[30] This includes selfies (photographs one takes of oneself) and 'revenge porn' (nude photos of women exchanged during a relationship, disseminated on the internet – usually by men – after the relationship ends).

for posting a selfie, or humiliating her for ending a relationship, may be directed on an individual level, but the visibility of these taunts and abuses acts indirectly as a warning or instruction to others. Furthermore, they speak to a paradox or double-bind of participation in digital spaces, where a postfeminist imperative encourages women to be visible and available for critique on the internet, at the same time that digital spaces often remain policed by hegemonic, misogynistic voices.

This chapter has defined postfeminism as a concept that is not necessarily in direct opposition to feminism, but rather incorporates positive, populist aspects of feminist theory and practice and draws it back into the framework of consumption and individualism. This will be the central basis for my argument that women's fitness culture invites, performs, and is constructed by a postfeminist sensibility. The space of women's fitness culture is increasingly extending to the digital world: fitness Instagram accounts, blogs, Facebook communities and so on. The way these digital spaces are constructed is informed by the ideologies of surveillance, discipline and the imperative to hold oneself up for critique that I have discussed here. It is my argument in this thesis that these digital fitness spaces are legitimated through the way these values connect – especially through the paradox of authenticity as it exists in both digital and postfeminist (and digital postfeminist) discourses. Authenticity is consistently used in both online and offline spaces of women's fitness culture to assert a particular array of feminine traits that invoke empowerment rhetoric while reaffirming conservative gender roles. There is potential to resist these interpellations – but often, when these discourses are couched in the language of commodification and are as ubiquitous as they are, the dominant readings remain so until the reader can become critically aware of the processes by which this subject position is enforced.

Chapter Two

Working up a Sweaty Selfie: Gym Selfies, Surveillance and the Construction of a Fit Identity

The first time I had a personal training session, in 2015, my trainer had me working out on new equipment with which I was unfamiliar. He pushed me hard, and after ten minutes I discreetly retreated to the bathroom to vomit. I called the rest of the session off and sat in my car to rehydrate before the drive home. Reflecting on what I felt was an amusing failure at getting fit, I took a selfie of my dishevelled, sweaty face and posted it to Instagram tagged with #believe and #blessed, tags that are often associated with the language of women's fitness culture. I had a small following of approximately fifty people, most were friends who I expected to understand my ironic appropriation of the tags and read the post as a self-deprecating, satirical commentary about how fitness is represented on social media versus how it can sometimes unfold in the lived experience. However, that day I received likes and follows from a handful of fitness-related accounts which had presumably found me through my tags and had not parsed the ironic tone. The experience prompted me to consider the role of the selfie in fitness culture. How are gym selfies used to construct a fit identity online? What ideologies are being conveyed and reproduced through the gym selfie?

The selfie is a complex genre of digital photography that does important work towards nuancing the politics of self-representation and identity formation in digital space. The gym selfie, particularly for women, is an ambiguous subgenre of the selfie that is produced at the intersection of the discourses of fitness and key characteristics of postfeminist digital culture, such as the imperative of surveillance and the role of 'choice' in objectifying or subjectifying women's bodies. As such, the gym selfie reinforces a fit

feminine subject that is in line with neoliberalism, heteronormativity and whiteness. Individuals can find pleasure and agency through the production and distribution of gym selfies, but this pleasure is imbricated within a structure that legitimises certain kinds of bodies and practices while de-legitimising others.

This chapter is significant for this thesis because the gym selfie extrapolates the previous chapter's work on the relationship between postfeminism and digital media, and relates it to fitness. The gym selfie is a vehicle for understanding how representation of the body carries meaning about the self as *project* and *product*. The first section of this chapter will evaluate the various discursive frameworks surrounding definitions of the selfie and the cultural work it performs. This section will draw from theories of identity formation, power relations and the textual elements of a selfie as a genre of photography. I maintain that the cultural work of a selfie is dependent on its context. For this thesis, this means that the gym selfie may have a unique set of characteristics and effects that distinguish it from other subgenres of selfie[31], because the ideological underpinnings of women's fitness culture will shape the function of the selfie in a particular aspect. I will evaluate the selfie as simultaneously a text, a practice, and a site of conventional power relations and contestation.

The second section explores notions of looking at the self and being looked at, drawing upon Lacan's notion of the mirror phase, and new modes of the gaze. This is where the discussion of selfies and what work they perform becomes more precise in terms of how they are employed to construct a sense of self that is presented and consumed. Knowing they will be viewed is part of a disciplinary project of selfhood. The mirror phase is a helpful concept

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[31] Other subgenres include funeral selfies, bathroom selfies, butt selfies, and more.

through which to theorise selfies because it demonstrates how images of the self are integral to the construction of identity, and the fantasy of the whole self. In this section, I unpack concepts of the gaze as they relate to selfies beyond the male viewer/female object dichotomy, and present how the gaze may become problematised in the selfie. Given that women are positioned as viewers of selfies as well as subjects in them (and that these categories generally overlap), it is possible to interpret the selfie as a text that creates a female gaze. Concepts of the postfeminist gaze or the selfie gaze further complicate the effects of a female gaze. It is my position that these overlap in the gym selfie to construct a postfeminist selfie gaze, which encourages readings of the fit body in the context of transformation.

The third section focuses on the gym selfie, applying the theories introduced in the first section to unpack the cultural significance of this subgenre. I claim that gym selfies reinforce the importance of the physical appearance of the body within a context of transformation and self-work. The foundations for this argument are partly influenced by the Lacanian mirror phase and the 'mirror work' that sociologist Roberta Sassatelli sees as crucial for the construction of a fit identity in physical gym space (2010, p. 116). I will also draw from Sarah Riley and Adrienne Evans' work on how digital fitness media deploys a postfeminist 'transformation imperative' (2018, p. 207) that interpellates viewers not only to understand the importance of self-work but also its alignment with mainstream ideals of physical appearance. This positions women as agents of their own subjectification, and conceals the process of objectification through the rhetoric of choice and empowerment. As my thesis is concerned with the development of new means of social media and how individuals in a subculture employ self-production technologies, the research encompasses not only scholarly

literature but also my own observation of selfies through Instagram (using tags as search criteria), as well as research blogs and online magazines as sources of information.

Through the digital looking glass: the cultural work of the selfie

Gym selfies can be considered among existing discussions of the means and methods used to project a highly symbolic image into a wider public space. This section introduces central academic discourses of the selfie, including varying and often competing speculations on how the selfie is defined and what it may do. I also evaluate theories of self-representation in digital and public spaces, including drawing from Erving Goffman's work on the presentation of self in everyday life, and adaptations of this work that account for the role of social media in structuring daily interaction and self-making. This section explores the diverging and overlapping notions of selfies as texts, practices, and most importantly and productively, as sites of contestation and power. Selfies represent a point along a cultural continuum in terms of the individual subject responding to their own representation, which changes in response to technological development. This basic premise allows the gym selfie (that will be explicated later in the chapter) to be understood as a unique cultural artefact that exists at the nexus between emerging and parallel discourses of postfeminism, self-branding and individual empowerment, as well as the unprecedented development of new technology.

Selfie textual conventions

Reading the selfie as a text may reveal not only what kind of cultural work it performs, but exactly what role the viewer plays in looking at a selfie. The term 'selfie' denotes 'a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media' (Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year, 2013, p. 1). Selfies can be found on most social networking websites that allow photographic content, such as

Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram (the last of which hosts visual content only, although captions are permitted with a photographic submission). Often presented as a key component of online culture, the power and value of the selfie has been fervently debated in terms of identity politics (including gender, race, class and sexuality) in numerous blogs, websites, magazines and newspapers[32]. One of the shortcomings of viewing the selfie purely as a text is that it diminishes the role of the selfie producer, and may reduce the visual signifiers in a manner that erases the meaning that the producer intended (a point that will be discussed shortly in an exploration of the selfie as embodied performance or practice).

Although selfies have particular physical aesthetics, their legibility as a genre is also dependent upon the relationship constructed between photograph and subject. Selfies are often constructed with a 'snapshot aesthetic', represented by images that 'often appear rushed, carelessly composed, taken almost by chance, thus revealing subjects (relatively) unposed, natural' (Iqani and Schroeder, 2015, p. 5). This aesthetic constructs an authenticity that positions the viewer to understand the image as 'true'. Matthew Bellinger proposes that the selfie is constituted 'not only by a particular set of visual markers but also by a specific relationship to photographic representation as such – a relationship that foregrounds staged self-reflection' (2015, p. 1809). This means that a selfie is read as the relationship between generic conventions – visual markers – and a unique manner of looking at the self. Some of the generic conventions of the selfie are encapsulated in a compilation listed by popular media website Buzzfeed called '37 people who really need selfie lessons', whereby the author displays a curated collection of 'bad' selfies that undermine the (staged) authenticity of the subject and selfie. Some examples from this list include: a selfie of a girl in her

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[32] See Bennett, Jessica (2014) 'Our bodies, our selfies: the feminist photo revolution'; Ryan, Erin Gloria (2013) 'Selfies aren't empowering, they're a cry for help'; Tatum, Erin (2014) 'Selfies and misogyny: the importance of selfies as self-love'; Schwarz, Rafi (2015) 'Is it time to rethink the selfie as a feminist political statement?'

bathroom with a dildo on the vanity next to her; a girl who captioned her selfie with 'before funeral'; and a picture of a man taking a selfie with his arm fully extended, gazing away from the camera as if he is unaware it is there (Esposito, 2014, n.p.). In relation to the latter, Bellinger explores the tension between the supposed conventions of a selfie and its legibility as a genre. This image is an example of the meme 'Bae caught me slipping', which refers to a selfie where the subject is looking away from the camera and seems to be oblivious to the camera's presence, if not for the view of their arm holding the camera. Bellinger argues this image 'highlight[s] the selfie's emphasis on staged, rather than candid, self-presentation' (2015, p. 1809). A 'good' selfie, that is, one that may more likely avoid ridicule, is staged so that it does not expose the mechanics of production of the photograph. Faux pas such as the aforementioned instances signal to the viewer that the person who took the selfie failed to conceal the aspects of the photo's composition that are normally hidden. Furthermore, if their construction is exposed, the farce of authenticity is threatened and able to be interrogated.

When the generic conventions of a selfie are contravened, the response to this transgression is revealing for the disciplinary aspect of the selfie. The selfie interpellates the viewer as a subject who always-already knows what kinds of public daily behaviour 'should' be posted online, and implicitly invites them to share their own selfies to further confirm this. The examples of 'bad' selfies mentioned above exhibit a lack of cultural literacy about what behaviour should be made public, or a failure to comply with generic conventions. These kinds of selfies also seem to attract criticism, being 'disciplined by society through ridicule and pathologising' (Walker Rettberg 2014, p. 1). By ridiculing the transgressor, other users neutralise the threat of exposing what the selfie performs – surveillance and discipline. Anne Burns, in her research blog entitled The Carceral Net, suggests that this form of discipline exhibits 'regulation…dissipated laterally, across peers, rather than simply imposed from

some sort of controlling authority' (2014a, n.p.), resonating arguments by Foucault about social policing, where discipline comes not from authoritative figures, but is constructed and enacted laterally across groups. One of Burns' most potent examples is her case study of the 'duckface', a type of pose where the selfie-taker 'emphasises the chest area, pursing her lips, tilting her head and looking up towards the camera' (2014b, n.p.). Women who 'duckface', Burns writes, are often bullied by their peers for their pose and the perceived exhibition of narcissism and attention-seeking it conveys. By mocking certain behaviours, social groups can isolate and condemn that which is deemed distasteful, unacceptable or inappropriate, embodying discipline from inside the group. While it may seem a reasonable assumption that the selfie inherently requires a degree of vanity, this example shows how the selfie is a display of online appropriateness – one's presentation must be sophisticated enough that the inherent narcissism is hidden.

Presentation of the self(ie) in everyday life

The power relations between the selfie producer and consumer can be explored through the critical framework of performing and expressing the self. Seminal theories of self-presentation, such as Erving Goffman's work, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), may be applied to theorise the methods that users employ to control their self-representation, yet are also encouraged to self-police. Goffman proposed that individual interactions may be understood as theatrical presentations, and that individuals express themselves as a performance. From a sociological perspective, Goffman stated that the individual 'will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally *expresses* himself, and the others will in turn have to be *impressed* in some way by him' (1959, p. 2, original emphasis). This was initially studied in the context of face-to-face communication between two or more people, without the mediation of technology. The expresser aims to control the

impression he or she gives by 'influencing the definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1959, p. 3), manipulating aspects of the interaction to lead others to respond favourably. Furthermore, 'when an individual is in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to…convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey' (Goffman, 1959, p. 5). The power balance of this relationship is constantly shifting as each participant works for control over the situation.

This vacillating power balance means that the selfie creator is in a unique position to represent themselves while interpellating an audience of their peers (who also have the ability to become 'producer') to accept the ideal reading of the photograph. The Goffmanian power relations between the individual who expresses and the viewer who forms the impression are similar to those involved in the process of interpellation and interpretation. Interpellation refers to the process by which 'ideology…"recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all)' (Althusser 1971, p. 174). Through texts, the reader is addressed or 'hailed' as if they already accept and understand the ideal reading. This naturalises the ideological work of interpellation, making the ideal reading seem 'common-sense'. Interpretation or negotiation describes the role of the reader as subject to make sense of, and to question, what the text represents in the context of their own cultural backgrounds (Fiske 1990, p. 3). Creators of selfies are able to access the position of 'producer' of texts, who interpellate the viewer as a subject so that the subject may accept the preferred reading. Unlike a traditional media producer, the selfie creator is the consumer *and* the product. People who produce and distribute selfies on social media are also enacting their consumption of social media itself, including any selfies posted there by others.

Selfies are a practice of identity formation that may negotiate with prescriptive ideologies of how femininity should be performed. Goffman's work, while pivotal for earlier theoretical research through which to investigate social groups, has limitations in terms of application in the current socio-cultural milieu. New technologies and cultural movements, such as postfeminism, have impacted on the dynamics of human interaction. Because of the ubiquity of digital media, individuals and groups have new opportunities to negotiate the expression/impression relationship. Amy Shields Dobson addresses this in her 2015 work, *Postfeminist Digital Cultures*, where she expands upon Goffman's theory of interaction and applies it to the study of women's 'self production' online. She argues that the kinds of expressions taking place on the internet are more intentional, that 'it is important to distinguish between the performance of self as something we do all the time and "self-representation"' (2015, p. 8). Using media to represent the self is read as having 'a higher degree of consciousness' than face-to-face presentation (Shields Dobson, 2015, p. 9). Shields Dobson suggests that this genre of self-production is illustrative of a postfeminist sensibility because the self-representations are primarily by women for other women – as opposed to by men about women (and not necessarily for them), which 'has made it seem "empowering"' (pp. 10–11), even though it may reaffirm sexist gender stereotypes. The examples she cites include 'heterosexy' selfies on social media sites such as MySpace. In these selfies, the users employ conventions borrowed from representations of women in advertisements and pornography, such as an emphasis on the mouth (open, pouting or puckered lips), and wearing swimwear or other 'flesh-revealing clothes' that highlight the midriff and torso. Shields Dobson suggests that through posting these selfies online, 'young women are negotiating complex a priori cultural calls to postfeminist sexual subjectification on one hand, and imperatives on the other from peers, adults and via media discourses, to manage their sexual reputations' (2015, p. 70). Here, postfeminist subjects are confronted with a double-

bind where they are encouraged to contribute to their own sexualisation online as an expression of agency, but then disciplined by others for sexualising themselves.

The selfie and the body

In the selfie, notions of identity are implicitly bound with notions of the body. The conventions of selfie production demand that the body is inherently still, which means the selfie may position viewers to understand representation of the body as a metonym for and extension of the self. Paul Frosh posits that in selfies, the body can be simultaneously 'mediating (the outstretched arm executes the taking of the selfie) and mediated (the outstretched arm becomes a legible and iterable sign within selfies of, among other things, the selfieness of the image)' (2015, p. 1611). The blurred boundaries between the camera as medium and the selfie user as subject describes a reciprocal relationship between the body and the camera as objects and subjects which simultaneously inscribe meaning, and are inscribed upon: 'Just as the moving body is the platform for the smartphone, so the device is the picturing agency that motivates, justifies, and disciplines the body's performance' (Frosh, 2015, p. 1614). According to Frosh, selfies as texts can be read as 'gestural images', where the composition of the selfie is an invitation for viewers to adopt a physical position in relation to the user, to imagine themselves in the image (2015, p. 1617). This further distorts the boundary between medium and subject, which allows for readings of the body as extension of the self in the image. The idea of selfies as gestural is significant for examining how selfies, and the relationship they construct with the body, may interpellate viewers to understand the body and the self as conflated.

The consequences of selfies being centred on the body are different for women than they are for men. Given this thesis focuses on women's fitness, and therefore on women's bodies and

women's gym selfies, it is important to acknowledge this distinction. The self is often

presented as a dualism between body and mind as incapsulated in Rene Descartes' 'Cogito

ergo sum'/'I think therefore I am', which 'assumed a strong distinction between the mind, on

the one hand, and the body's senses, on the other, and prioritized the former over the latter for

[Descartes'] assessment of what it meant to be human' (Shilling, 2016, pp. 2–3). Susan Bordo

claims that this assumption is followed by a characterisation of the mind as male/masculine

and the body as female/feminine, which devalues both the body and the feminine. She argues

that:

> If the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that
>
> negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from
>
> God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death.
>
> (Bordo, 1993, p. 5)

Following Bordo's logic, if the selfie is the body – and especially a woman's body – it

automatically becomes a negative entity that, to become positive, must be subjected to

discipline (as seen in Burns' reading of the duckface above).

The process of disciplining women's selfies speaks to the broader project – 'the pursuit of an

ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity' (Bordo, 1993, p. 66) – of

transforming female bodies into 'docile bodies'. Bordo proposes that female docile bodies are

'bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection,

transformation, "improvement", and that 'through the exacting and normalising disciplines of

diet, makeup, and dress…we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally

focused on self-modification' (1993, p. 166). This claim is applicable to selfies in that the

body is central and still (it does not capture the body in motion), externally regulated through

being policed against an ideal femininity, and users are interpellated to focus on the project of the self.

The selfie may simultaneously contest and reaffirm dominant ideology through incorporation. In terms of resistance, critical awareness and reflexivity brought to the selfie can allow for the active negotiation of meaning. John Fiske proposes that messages conveyed through texts are never sent from A to B, but that reading is a constantly dynamic process between the reader, producer and 'external reality' (1990, p. 3). What Fiske means here is that meaning does not reside solely in authorial intent, but must also take into account the reader's interpretation and understanding of the text as well as the medium through which the text is presented. For the selfie, this suggests that as 'external reality' changes (for example, the advent of social media and front-facing cameras on smartphones), the relationship between reader and producer will change, and subsequently so will the meanings. The #nomakeupselfie event in June 2014 reiterates how the selfie can be empowering when adopted by individuals who engage critically with the meaning of representation, and how not doing so can produce a selfie that reproduces patriarchal ideology. The #nomakeupselfie event invited women only to produce and post pictures of themselves without make-up, ostensibly for the purpose of raising awareness about breast cancer (Deller and Tilton, 2015, p. 1788). Feminist blogs and online communities such as Jezebel, Guerrilla Feminism and Feminist Current debated the value of this event and whether it encouraged debate about what 'beauty' was, or whether it simply reaffirmed the idea that women should be wearing make-up at all times, and that not doing so was a notable moment. The #nomakeupselfie trend may have affected individualistic meanings of make-up (and its absence) on a private, personal level. However, individual intent is not sufficient to negate ideology. The #nomakeupselfie prompted applause for participants who were called 'brave' or variants thereof, suggesting that the event

inadvertently reproduced conventional concepts of beauty. This example illustrates how the power dynamics of the selfie as a mode of representing the self are fluid and may work to reaffirm some dominant ideologies, even as they subvert others.

The continuum of the gaze in selfie practice

Selfies are situated within a collective of means of seeing and representing the self that has been theorised long before the introduction of smartphones, digital cameras or social media. Theories such as the gaze in visual media are useful concepts that predate the technology that makes the selfie possible, but are well-established in discourses of identity construction and representation through other media. This means that they can be appropriated and nuanced here. The selfie is a mirror where one can see and construct one's self-image, and importantly, this image can be made permanent and shared, which is not possible with an actual mirror. This control is powerful, particularly for women, in that it allows women to have autonomy over the creation and distribution of their images. This also allows control over the manipulation of the gaze and the power relations that structure who is looking and who is being looked at. However, as I will posit in this section, these processes may be subject to existing prevailing ideologies of what women's bodies should look like, as well as which bodies should be visible and in what context. That is not to say that the politics of selfies is entirely informed by dominant ideology, nor is it to say that resistive practices of selfies will consistently work to challenge the norm. Rather, the argument I make in this section asserts that the selfie offers multiple meanings that become more dependent on the context in which selfies are read and produce changes. This section also provides a transition from thinking about selfies as mirror images to thinking about gym selfies as analogous (with key differences) to physical mirrors in a gym.

If the framework of selfies-as-text examines the codes and conventions of the selfie genre (or the 'what' of selfies), the selfie-as-practice theory investigates the reasons for the emergence of selfie culture in this particular context, and the ideologies underlying selfie practice. This subsection will apply theories of the gaze and the Lacanian mirror phase to investigate what the selfie taker may (or may not) achieve and aspire to in the production of selfies. This chapter approaches gym selfies as both a genre that communicates meaning about the context from which it emerges, and as a practice imbued with connotations of choice and empowerment by selfie producers. This illustrates the tension between critique of selfies (for example, the 'common-sense' discourse of selfies as vain or objectifying) and what selfie users experience in the process of self-representation.

The gaze and its iterations

The gaze is a crucial concept in critiquing the complex power relations of the selfie because the boundaries between who is looked at and who is looking are not fixed. The feminist potential of the selfie arguably lies in the abstraction of boundaries between producer, consumer and product that change and challenge the dominant expression of the gaze (women as objects, men as subjects). The gaze, as Laura Mulvey contends in her essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1975), describes how 'being looked at' constructs and is constructed by patriarchal power. Mulvey's work, although concerned with cinema and relatively out-of-date in relation to new technology through which the gaze is mediated, is foundational for the discussion of how women are viewed in media. Mulvey writes of women in cinema as objects of the gaze, whereby 'women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' (1975, p. 62, original emphasis). Here, the female figure in a film or visual text is positioned as passive and the male viewer as active.

The viewer can gain pleasure from scopophilia (voyeurism), Mulvey contends, in two modes: through scopophilia as an act of empowerment whereby the subject renders that which is looked at as object; and scopophilia in the 'narcissistic aspect' whereby the viewer's pleasure in looking is derived from recognising likeness (1975, p. 62). The female characters in traditional Hollywood cinema are coded so that they can be viewed as either one of two fantasies: 'voyeuristic (which sees the rebel woman as temptress and prostitute) or fetishist (the docile and redeeming woman represented as the Virgin Mary)' (Sassatelli, 2011, p. 124). Mulvey proposes that viewers are interpellated to occupy the position of the male viewer, regarding female characters as archetypes or objects, especially in contrast to the male hero who performs the action central to the plot of the film. In retrospect, Mulvey extended the original theory of her essay to theorise the position of women as audience members, questioning if 'the female spectator is carried along, as it were by the scruff of the text, or whether her pleasure can be more deep-rooted and complex' (Mulvey, 1989, p. 29). Mulvey suggests that the female viewer gains pleasure through the fantasy of themselves as the masculine character rather than through an assumed objectification of the women on screen through a male point of view. While this may still operate within a male/female gender binary, this argument demonstrates the instability of the gaze and the potential of the image as a site for contesting power relations.

It may be possible to challenge the gaze in selfies to an extent by making alternative bodies and identities visible. Recent evidence of this is the community of 'not safe for work' (NSFW) 'self-shooters' – male and female bloggers who post nude or sexual selfies. Katrin Tiidenberg's work on self-shooters claims that through posting selfies, the community negotiates 'community specific issues of control, power and the gaze' and by doing so, 'they

are able to construct a new, empowered, embodied identity for themselves' (2014, n.p.). The selfies, although all sexual in nature, depict various body types beyond what is conventionally 'sexy' and as such contests standards of beauty. By consciously advocating for and encouraging bodies of all types to post selfies, the 'cultural scripts of what is sexy' become destabilised, 'as people claim control not only over their own sexual storytelling, but also the narratives of sexiness in a wider sense' (Tiidenberg, 2014, n.p.). As self-shooters may at any time occupy the role of producer and consumer, they have varying degrees of control over the definitions of what should be visible within a supportive community. What is missing from Tiidenberg's critique of the self-shooting community, however, is recognition of the possibility that the NSFW selfies may be affirming the importance of the body as an object of beauty. This is because these communities arise from the same culture where sexually explicit images are virtually common-place; the ideology that interpellates the NSFW participants positions them to have always-already been aware of and complicit in the culture of sexiness as worthy of visibility. The NSFW self-shooting community is trying to negotiate what is sexy beyond what is dominant, and to rewrite the definition of 'sexiness' to include alternative body types. However, in doing so, they are not interrogating why being seen as 'sexy' is important, nor whether or not the significance of 'sexiness' should be dismantled instead of made available to more subjects. This illustrates how the selfie has potential for individual empowerment at the same time as it may reaffirm normative ideals.

Controlling or reversing the gaze does not in itself inherently mean that the selfie or the selfie user is being subversive. The concept of the gaze as essentially male has been problematised through selfie research. Some scholars have theorised the selfie as demonstrative of a female gaze (Murray, 2015), a postfeminist gaze (Riley and Evans, 2018), and a selfie gaze (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015). Considering new types of gazes – and therefore diverse

power relations between the viewer and that which is 'to be looked at' – is important for a nuanced definition of the selfie's cultural work. Gazes that are invited and constructed through the selfie demonstrate how the selfie offers multiple subject positions that may simultaneously challenge the status quo and also reaffirm other iterations of it. Derek Conrad Murray proposes that young female artists construct a female gaze through taking selfies, 'aggressively assert[ing] a specifically female visual experience and aesthetic point of view' (2015, p. 500). This is done through the creation of selfies taken from the perspective of the women, positioning the viewer to adopt their perspective. This female gaze, Murray writes, is 'as political as it is personal' (2015, p. 511) and challenges the binary of the male subject and the female object, because both the object and the subject of these selfies are women. This has potential for inviting alternative ways of looking and may present subversive readings for both producer and consumer.

Some types of selfie may enact a 'postfeminist gaze' that contributes to the normalisation of conventional, conservative modes of constructing and representing the female body. This is similar to the female gaze in that the ideal viewer is also female. However, what characterises it as 'postfeminist' as opposed to 'female' are the power dynamics. Riley and Evans posit that 'Women are foregrounded as viewers of other women, in a socio-historical context that is heteronormative, consumer oriented, and in which femininity is understood as a bodily practice' (2018, p. 212). The postfeminist gaze, like the male gaze, makes demands on the object of the gaze to fulfil certain criteria aligned with patriarchal beauty standards and gender roles. A postfeminist sensibility is invoked through this gaze by destabilising the assumption that the active subject is male and the passive object is female, but the gaze still works to assert that women's bodies are crucial signifiers of value. Selfies that reproduce a postfeminist gaze reaffirm the idea that selfies are modes of identity construction disguised as

expressions of social causes such as feminism. This is significant for the postfeminist processes of disarticulation, by which potential connections between groups challenging social issues are dissolved or disguised by drawing focus towards the individual. The purpose of discussing different kinds of gaze is to demonstrate how the construction of different ideal audiences of the selfie contributes to narrowing the prescriptive reading of the selfie as a form of constructing identity.

The selfie as a mode of identity construction is not inherently negative. Selfies may, however, become problematic through processes of category confusion, where identity construction is renamed as 'humanitarian' or 'feminist' without working to interrogate or expose the oppressive structures that supposedly underpin these campaigns. Ofra Koffman, Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill write of the 'selfie gaze' as a set of aesthetics and intentions that convey a form of depoliticised, postfeminist 'sisterly solidarity' (2015, p. 162). The term 'selfie gaze' was coined in a study of a social media-based humanitarian project called Girl Up, in which girls in 'the global North' (that is, developed countries such as the USA and the UK) were asked to upload selfies with an app – for each selfie that was contributed, the makers of the app would organise a donation towards sending girls in 'the global South' (developing countries) to school. The Northern girls are positioned as active subjects of the selfies, where the passive Southern girls are the objects and recipients of the depoliticised 'humanitarian' work performed by the selfies. Koffman, Orgad and Gill claim that the selfie gaze is:

> one in which the spectator/donor remains centre stage and is not invited to turn her camera or thoughts to those that need help. The donor's own interior life is presented as infinitely more interesting and relevant than the conditions faced by those of the donor she purportedly seeks to help. (2015, p. 163)

The selfie gaze is described here as an inwards one, enacting individualised performances of humanitarian work that gesture to a politics of the self. This is similar to the #nomakeupday event in that the conditions for the campaign – such as the apparently 'common-sense' myth of make-up as an essential experience of being a woman, or the practices of Othering between 'Northern' and 'Southern' girls – remain unquestioned, while images of the self and projects of identity construction become the main focus.

Mirror phase and mirror work: selfies at the gym

Gym selfies are a prominent medium for representation and construction of a fit identity in digital space. The above sections have drawn attention to how the work performed through selfies is dependent upon cultural context. I have also questioned whether the selfie as a mode of identity construction conceals processes of reaffirming dominant ideologies about how the body is interconnected to the self, and how selfie users are subject to discipline as docile female bodies. The popularity of the gym selfie demonstrates how this has mutual aims and underpinnings with women's fitness culture itself: namely, both selfies and women's fitness culture represent a form of category confusion where feminism has been conflated with the desire to see and transform the self. This desire becomes problematic when it is entwined with normative paradigms about the body, while simultaneously concealing this function. The following section will examine this in detail by linking the theories from the previous section – namely the Lacanian mirror phase and the postfeminist gaze – with theories related to fitness culture, such as Sassatelli's concept of 'mirror work' in the gym, and Riley and Evans' study of how fitness culture enforces a postfeminist 'transformation imperative' for women. I will ultimately propose that while there may be potential for individual empowerment, the gym selfie enforces and portrays a variety of textual codes to encourage

an unambiguous reading about the importance of a particular kind of body and femininity that discourages alternative readings.

<u>Mirrors and the self</u>

The concept of the mirror phase can be applied to critically approach the selfie as a practice of identity formation. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan describes the 'mirror phase' as the moment in development where the child recognises itself in the mirror. The mirror image of the self is theorised by Lacan as the 'Ideal I', a 'primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject (1977, p. 2). The Ideal I 'situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination' and leads to identification of others in relation to the subject itself (Lacan, 1977, p. 2). The mirror stage presents the child with 'the promise of (self) mastery and control the subject lacks' (Grosz, 1990, p. 32), now that the child recognises itself as an independent being with its own identity. Julia Kristeva, in a feminist reading of Lacan's work, proposes that the mirror stage destabilises the concept of a unified self, and exposes the subject to the role of language in the construction of the self (1984, p. 46). This allows the subject to explore and construct its identity in relation to the world around it. When the mirror is combined with the camera, allowing women to photograph themselves as they view themselves (and adjusting their appearance according to their mirror image), women 'become the observer of *me*' (Lee, 2005, n.p., original emphasis), and possess the power of the gaze over themselves. Kristeva's explanation offers a solution to the pleasures of looking and of being looked at without reaffirming the dynamic of active male subject/passive female object that Mulvey describes. The image of the self in the mirror, recorded and distributed as a

selfie, represents the idealised 'whole' subject, as well as the promise of mastery and the subject's recognition of itself. Additionally, the selfie blurs boundaries of looking/being looked at, because the viewer of the selfie is aware that the creator has actively intended this image of themselves to be viewed by others. The selfie acts simultaneously as a mirror and as a recorded image, making the selfie-creator both spectator and object (according to Mulvey's model), and making the spectator identify with the image as a likeness (rather than an object, due to the fact that the spectator has the potential to produce their own selfies).

Lacan's mirror phase, referred to in a previous section, may be applied to the gym selfie genre. The mirror phase invokes the mirror as a tool of reflection that allows self-awareness and identity construction. Mirrors play a significant role in gym space by facilitating processes of body-work, critique and fantasy. Roberta Sassatelli, in her ethnography of gyms in Italy and Britain, outlines the principle of 'mirror work' that is performed in gyms by using the mirrors in the space to check form and technique when exercising. Sassatelli describes mirror work as 'watching oneself in the mirror and observing the trainer with the view of carrying out the exercise through self-challenge and the display of strenuousness' (2010, p. 117). Here, she contends that the gym users are viewing their bodies through the lens of discipline and surveillance. Sassatelli describes a type of self-surveillance that is 'prismatic', in that the mirrors in a gym 'symbolise and encourage multiple angles (and agents) of surveillance' (2010, p. 116). Mirror work allows the participant to use their lived experience of working out to negotiate the standards of 'fitness' that are outlined in images that constitute fitness media. The mirror user in a gym, like the subject of the mirror phase, is made aware of a sense of anatomical lack through mirrors. Where Lacan may interpret this lack as related to sexual difference and castration narratives, I posit that mirror work in the gym makes the user aware of the body's incompleteness as a fit subject, and encourages the

user to work. The mirror-self in the gym is an analogue of Lacan's 'Ideal I' (Lacan, 1977, p. 2) – an aspirational figure, even as it signifies lack. When fixed as a gym selfie, the 'Ideal I' may represent a desire for transformation in the context of fitness.

The symbol of the mirror and one's reflection is associated with the desire and fantasy of an ideal identity, and the relationship between how an individual sees themselves and how they want to be seen. In any kind of body-work, desire and fantasy for an improved self are key motivators and tools in the construction and conceptualisation of an ideal self. Debra Gimlin evaluates the body-work performed in aerobics classes with mirrors as particularly empowering because the mirrors would allow the class participants to 'rejoice in their strong muscular bodies' (2002, p. 66), fixating intensely on their reflections as they performed the aerobics routines. Gimlin proposes that this image is uplifting for these women because it subverts the harmful ideal of 'thinness' prescribed by patriarchal oppression (2002, p. 67). This reaffirms the idea that finding pleasure in looking in the mirror is dependent on an internal comparison the subject makes with an ideal image they have in mind, whether their reflection conforms to or rebels against this. When a gym member sees their reflection while working out, their lived experience of the workout becomes an image, which they can then utilise to construct their sense of identity. If this image becomes fixed, in the form of a selfie, the same gym member can reaffirm this identity, and have it reproduced and affirmed by others. Sassatelli proposes that the lived experience of fitness is a dynamic process through which participants can negotiate the problematic ideals depicted in fitness images (2010, p. 15). While I agree this is possible, the negotiative possibilities of the gym selfie become compromised when the lived experience and images combine. In bridging this gap by offering an image that captures this lived experience, the gym selfie potentially reduces any

resistive aspect of working out to a static picture that can be compared and contrasted with images of other fit bodies.

From mirror work to selfie work

Selfie work appears at the gym alongside mirror work and creates meanings and functions of surveillance. Here, the lived experience has become the image. The main difference between selfie work and mirror work is the involvement of others: selfies are taken to be shared in a way that one's mirror image (without the assistance of technology) cannot. Russell Belk proposes that sharing other users' content and subsequently 'co-contributing' online alters the meaning of such content (2013, p. 487). That is, the images online are constantly reinscribed through how they are read and by whom. In the case of Instagram, comments, likes and follows will change how an uploaded image is read. If an Instagram user shares a selfie among a following of 1000 and receives no likes, the context of this selfie has changed – possibly to connote failure to gain popularity. When looking at a mirror at the gym, however, the image is more individualised (rather than shared), and is less available for feedback from other gym users, resulting in the image's meaning resembling the owner's interpretation more closely.

In digital space, outside of the physical 'gym' space, gym selfies are often embedded in the language of 'fitspiration', a genre of social media texts that inspire the fitness community. The term fitspiration stemmed from a response to 'thinspiration', which refers to a pro-anorexia community, mostly online, where members anonymously share photographs, tips and blog posts about how to be anorexic. Fitspiration, by contrast, addresses this movement

as problematic and instead promotes the more 'realistic' goals of a toned body and feeling healthy. Mebbie Bell describes thinspiration and the construction of anorexic identity as 'embracing the self-disciplinary imperatives of contemporary femininity' (2014, p. 49). Bell sees this as an extreme hyper-conformity to the means by which women are positioned to discipline themselves. While anorexia is a debilitating mental health issue, fitspiration is arguably a milder form of this 'embrace of self-discipline' (Bell, 2014, p. 49). Participants in fitspiration culture can produce selfies that exhibit physical strength (for example, flexing biceps or lifting weights) to create a subversive aesthetic while reaffirming socially sanctioned modes of body-work and physical appearance. At a basic level, both thinspiration and fitspiration communities encourage changing one's body to become the 'real' self. Criticisms from fitspiration communities of the thinspiration movement tend to compare the two movements with phrases, such as 'strong is the new skinny' (Riley and Evans, 2018, p. 208). However, juxtaposed with images of slim, 'feminine', bodies that reproduce ideals of the male gaze, statements such as these may be undermined by the messages conveyed by the visual texts. While fitspiration has the potential to be empowering by discouraging its members from aspiring to become thin and encouraging them to instead work towards being healthy, its members are interpellated to work towards a certain lifestyle deemed acceptable or legitimate. Where fitspiration fails to differentiate itself from thinspiration or other unmarked/naturalised attitudes about women's appearance is where fitness culture becomes incorporated back into the dominant culture. Fitness selfies represent the type of incorporation that Fiske refers to (mentioned earlier in this chapter), as images that can be commodified or ideologically realigned to neutralise its resistive potential. It is important to reiterate that most selfies tend to depict passive bodies: that is, posing intentionally as opposed to being caught in movement. One of the key claims of fitspiration is that the process of being healthy is what should be encouraged, not any particular result (Riley and

Evans, 2018, p. 207). However, the fact that selfies must be taken at a moment when the subject is still, and can only capture the full body if the subject uses a mirror, reaffirms the importance and centrality of the physical result.

Through the practice of gym selfies, women are interpellated to view themselves through a postfeminist selfie gaze, where they become agents of their own objectification, and actively comply with practices that construct the female self as a consumable body. Frigga Haug proposes that women play active roles in their construction as objects, and that by doing so they retain some 'subjective aspects within being as objects' (1987, p. 131). In other words, by engaging in practices that objectify women (applying make-up, cosmetic surgery, dressing 'right' and, of course, working out), women are able to gain pleasure by exerting control over which practices they engage in and how. Ultimately, they are reaffirming their roles as objects of the gaze, but they do so in a manner that is postfeminist – willingly and with individual benefit to themselves. Writing in the 1980s, Haug's argument did not have the language to name this as postfeminism, but the central claim of her work – that women are positioned to adopt a 'male' gaze upon themselves – is characteristic of postfeminism and aligns with postfeminist critique. One of the distinguishing factors of gym selfies from advertisements is that the women in the photos are also the photographers, which blurs the boundaries between subject and object and reaffirms Haug's theory of 'subjective aspects within being as objects'.

Gym selfie work signifies a narrative of transformation, as it both creates and reaffirms the desire to work on the self. The ideal self that is constructed through selfie work is symbolic of the 'transformation imperative' of fitness culture. Riley and Evans, in their study of fitspiration content on blogging website Tumblr, propose that 'transformative bodywork is

understood as a part of a postfeminist sensibility because it represents an agentic self that produces itself into its most desired self' (2018, p. 208). They claim that fitspiration content should be read as postfeminist, because it intersects with characteristics of postfeminism, as well as neoliberalism and healthism[33]. The transformation imperative, they state, constructs mind and body as synonymous. One of the techniques with which this is achieved, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is through the conflation of mind and body in the selfie medium. According to Riley and Evans, through this perspective, 'a healthy person is understood as someone who is able to transform both mind and body; healthy bodies are predicated on healthy minds and psychological transformations, and vice versa' (2018, p. 209). The imperative to transform the self works to legitimise 'historically sexist discourses, whereby a woman's worth is located in her appearance and a disciplined body' (Riley and Evans, 2018, p. 212). The 'disciplined body' concept is particularly important here because it means that women who do not (yet) represent the ideal feminine body (such as women who are overweight) are still recruited as subjects by the transformation imperative.

Before/after selfies and the transformation imperative

Gym selfies have the potential to become problematic as texts that reduce the lived experience of working out to an image with strict codes and conventions concerning how the body is displayed. These images are situated in the context of transformation of the body, which has consequences for restricting how women should look and behave. Exemplary of this are the before/after selfies submitted to and circulated through Kayla Itsines' Instagram account as part of participation in her 'Bikini Body Guide' program. Members of this program submit 'before', 'during' and 'after' full-body pictures of themselves, clad in gym

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[33] Riley and Evans characterise healthism as a discourse where responsibility for health lies with the individual and that this responsibility is a moral duty, as well as a site of identity formation (2018, p. 207).

wear, underwear or swimwear taken through various stages of the program. Itsines then reposts a selection of these selfies with her own comments. An analysis of the demographics of individuals from a selection of 26 of the most recent selfies from Itsines' Instagram reveals the narrow parameters of 'acceptable' bodies: 20 of the 'before' selfies were slim-looking bodies, 23 were white, 20 had long hair (of 21 pictures where the hair was visible), and 14 wore bikinis. Collecting these signs together suggests that Itsines, for the promotion of her brand, preferences images of white, slim, young-looking women who present traits signifying traditional femininity. These characteristics are consistent with Riley and Evan's interpretation of the conventions of fitspiration images: 'slender, toned yet voluptuous (in sense of defined breasts), young, white women dominated' (2018, p. 213). These bodies are also exemplary of Bordo's description of docile bodies, where women are encouraged to pursue an unattainable ideal femininity and are shaped by external 'regulation, subjection, transformation and improvement' (1993, p. 166) through this transformation narrative. By employing these images to promote her product, Itsines takes the lived experience of the participants in her program as a commodified image, and adds them to a database which can then be compared and contrasted to the viewer's own body, as well as images from similar body transformation programs. Here, bodies are rewarded with praise for their success; however, these bodies are all on the path to weight loss or body-work, suggesting that only certain types of bodies are praiseworthy. This is supported by Riley and Evans where they claim that larger bodies are only seen as acceptable in fitspiration content as a representation of the start of a journey to transformation, 'pre-empting the transformation to take place' (2018, p. 213).

How Itsines presents herself on social media and how she aligns her brand with values of a certain type of fitness is important in understanding the gym selfies she reposts. Itsines is a

fitness blogger from Adelaide, South Australia, who sells copies of her fitness program, 'The Bikini Body Guide' (referred to as 'BBG' in social media shorthand). The guide, according to Itsines, aims to achieve 'bikini body confidence', using nutrition and exercise to develop 'inner thighs…toned arms…a flat stomach and nice abs' (Itsines, 2015). In addition to selling the guide, Itsines disseminates supplementary material on Instagram and Facebook to motivate new and existing BBG participants. This material includes progress photos of herself or her clients; pictures of meals and activities she associates with a 'healthy' lifestyle, and images of motivational sayings, such as, 'I've got a thing for genuine people' (kayla_itsines, 2015a) or 'change for yourself not for someone' (kayla_itsines, 2015b). Itsines' program and social media campaign are successful worldwide with 1.7 million likes on Facebook, 2.9 million followers on Instagram and over a million customers of her twelve-week BBG program. What makes her online presence attractive, according to Itsines, is that she centres posts on her clients, not herself, and therefore creates an environment that more people can relate to (Kimmorley, 2014, n.p.).

Itsines' body-work project is a form of category confusion where she purports to 'help' the consumer, but is in fact promoting her agenda and products. Understanding how Itsines achieves this elucidates how gym selfies can be constructed and distributed to promote unambiguous readings of the bodies they depict. Itsines is 'Instafamous', a term Alice E Marwick associates with 'microcelebrity': 'a mindset and a collection of self-presentation practices endemic in social media, in which users strategically formulate a profile, reach out to followers and reveal personal information to increase attention and thus improve their online status' (2015, p. 138). The achievement of 'Instafame' relies on the ability to 'reproduce conventional hierarchies of glamorous celebrity culture' (Marwick, 2015, p. 138). This suggests that Instafame is not as democratic or egalitarian as it may initially appear.

Despite outwardly not being interested in presenting herself for the consumption of her followers, Itsines' public persona is what interpellates viewers to trust the premise of her program. By invoking postmodern, self-aware branding and constructing herself and her clients as 'genuine' and 'real' through reposting client selfies, Itsines' followers are invited to accept the values of 'realness' in the context of fitness and healthy living. Itsines then attaches this concept of being 'real' to commodities: principally her program, but also the equipment and food the program requires customers to purchase. By affiliating her microcelebrity persona and a desire for authenticity with the purchase of commodities, Itsines deploys the sharing of her clients' selfies as a marketing technique.

Gym selfies, even the ones employed as examples in this chapter, are not necessarily fated to reaffirm dominant ideologies of women's objectification and commodification. Having control of the construction and representation of one's own images is important and powerful, even if it does not actively challenge the status quo that foregrounds the value of (particular) female bodies. However, gym selfies exist within and are shaped by a postfeminist sensibility that encourages women to submit images of themselves for public surveillance in a digital space where patriarchal disciplinary voices are afforded attention. Significantly, postfeminist media incorporates ideologies of feminist emancipation in a process of category confusion that results in women's empowerment being conflated with the visibility of women's bodies and an eagerness to participate in physical, visual cultures. When these ideologies are made visible, there may be potential for resisting normative readings of the gym selfie. This is illustrated in Instagram user melvfitness's posting of a pair of before/after images taken fifteen minutes apart that gives the illusion of having been separated by several months of rigorous body-work. The visual deception involves a pair of slimming black bather bottoms, tensing the stomach muscles, fake tan and the more flattering pop-the-hip pose that exposes

the codes and conventions of a typical gym selfie and the transformation narrative that is invoked.
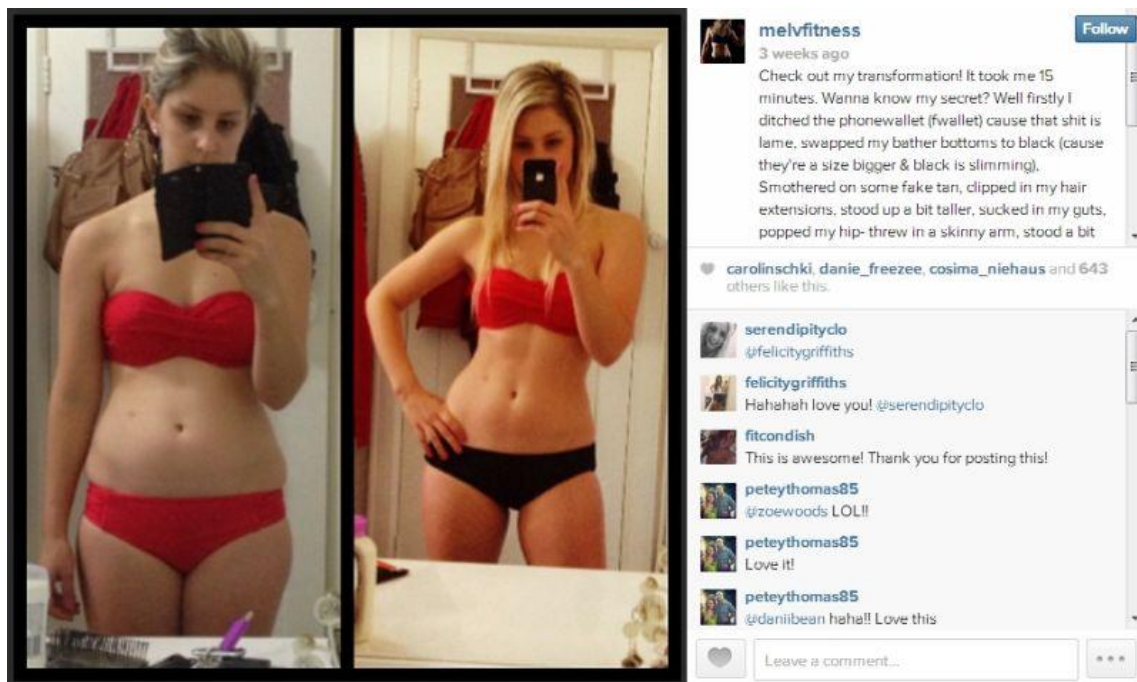
Fig. 3 – Screenshot from the Instagram of melvfitness (2013)

Check out my transformation! It took me 15 minutes. Wanna know my secret? Well firstly I ditched the phonewallet (fwallet) because that shit is lame, swapped my bather bottoms to black (cause they're a size bigger & black is slimming), Smothered on some fake tan, clipped in my hair extensions, stood up a bit taller, sucked in my guts, popped my hip- threw in a skinny arm, stood a bit wider, stood a bit wider #boxgap, pulled my shoulders back and added a bit of a cheeky/Im so proud of my results smile. Zoomed in on the before pic- zoomed out on the after & added a filter. Cause filters make everything awesome. What's my point? Don't be deceived by what you see in magazines & on Instagram. You never see the dozens of other pics they took that wernt [sic] as flattering. Photoshop can make a pig look hotter then [sic] Beyonce.
#selfy #fitness #transformation #fake #only15minutes .

This selfie, and melvfitness' critical reflection on its construction, demonstrates a potential for the negotiation of the gym selfie as a mode of representation that constructs and represents a postfeminist, fit sensibility. Here, melvfitness has shown an ability to analytically read gym selfies as conveying a certain ideology of how women should look, and

has creatively and playfully engaged with the prismatic selfie work that users undertake. This knowledge may be helpful for selfie users, such as those who participate in Itsines' Instagram posts, but it notably does not discourage individuals from participating in the first place.

Gym selfies are an important sign of postfeminist women's fitness culture in that they carry and contest meanings about the fit feminine body and its role in the construction of a fit feminine subject. The commodification of fitness through the gym selfie supports the notion of a shift from critiquing broader cultural inequalities by appeasing the desire to see and work on one's self. The gym selfie is ambiguous as a mode of representation because it promises empowerment, self-work and body confidence while simultaneously asserting preference for slim, white, young, conventionally 'attractive' bodies. The restricted conventions of the gym selfie means that most gym selfies tend to portray a homogenous selection of selfie users. Fitness in the gym selfie is connoted almost exclusively by how the body looks because this is what the photos capture and what the viewers are interpellated to understand. The gym selfie is also highly commodified in the marketing of fitness products and services as user testimonials. The images are compared and contrasted with each other for signs of improvement, and users encourage self-policing and discipline of the unruly female body by rewarding transformed postfeminist subjects with likes and reposts.

Chapter Three

**Fit is the New Fashion: Interrogating the 'Empowering' Functions of Fitness Apparel
and Branding**

In July 2015, fitness apparel company Lorna Jane released an advertisement on job-seeking

website Seek requesting applications for a 'size small fit model/receptionist'. The position

was described as a split role: the successful applicant was to alternate as a fit model (acting as

a real-life mannequin, trying on samples to assess fit) and as a front-of-house receptionist

(answering phones, preparing coffee and greeting visitors). One of the requirements for this

position was a set of precise measurements: 'bust: 87-90cm, waist: 70-73cm, hip (at widest

point): 97-100cm, height: 165cm or taller' (Agius, 2015). In the following weeks and months

that culminated in the withdrawal of the advertisement and a tearful apology on national

television from the company's chief creative officer and founder, Lorna Jane Clarkson, Lorna

Jane consumers and critics left a barrage of comments on the establishment's Facebook

page[34] and other social media accounts, including Instagram, Twitter, and the Lorna Jane

blog, Move Nourish Believe. Commenters accused the company of overemphasising the

value of women's appearances and of using the 'fit model' descriptor as an excuse to hire an

attractive receptionist, as well as discriminating against their own target market. The

company issued a response, reminding consumers that:

> We certainly pride ourselves on hiring healthy, active women of all different shapes
>
> and sizes, but as we hope you can understand, a fit model must have certain
>
> dimensions to help with our garment measurements. (Lorna Jane quoted in Agius,
>
> 2015)

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[34] Since the incident, the function that allows users to post on the Lorna Jane Facebook page has been disabled.

Clarkson, in an interview on news program *60 Minutes*, explained that her goal for the business has always been about 'empowering all women' – a comment quickly seized by critics of the brand for its hypocrisy. Although Lorna Jane purports to empower all women, the 'size small' fitness model appears to be a deliberate choice to reflect narrow body ideals, similarly expressed by the company's limited and conventional size range. The company not only excludes a range of bodies deemed undesirable or unworthy of its products, but furthermore shows preference for those bodies that do fit into the clothing. Problematically, the latter are aligned with the term 'all women', 'active women' or 'healthy women'. What the incident and subsequent public reaction revealed was that Lorna Jane, and other fitness apparel companies, are bound by the same operating and marketing conventions as a mainstream non-fitness fashion label. Lorna Jane is exemplary of the type of fitness fashion brands this chapter addresses because it is globally popular, targets a female audience only, and its tension between empowering ideals and restrictive practice is more visible. Despite the ardent branding work to portray these stores as an alternative to mainstream fashion, fitness labels reinforce dominant ideology espoused by typical fashion labels in regards to physical appearance and gender identity.

This chapter explores the strategies deployed by fitness apparel stores to distinguish themselves from a fashion label, as well as who they target as ideal consumers and how. Through shop design, advertising and the product range, apparel brands and outlets cultivate themselves as fitness institutions, supplementing, or in some cases replacing, the gym as a site where fitness is produced and performed. Shops such as Lorna Jane and Lululemon host fitness classes such as yoga, Pilates and hula-hooping instore; hold public, fitness-themed events that include samples of health food and organic beauty products; organise wellness retreats; and even host fitness celebrities. These activities extend beyond the function of a

traditional clothing store and instead construct a lifestyle. The individuals and groups

involved with these fitness labels release public statements that are at odds with the

'wellness'-centred lifestyles portrayed through branding. The fit model incident showcases

how certain bodies are excluded from the banner of 'fitness'. Similarly, Lululemon's CEO,

Chip Wilson, following a sixty-seven million dollar recall of yoga leggings that became

transparent when worn, blamed the defect on women's thighs stretching the material (Lustrin

and Patinkin, 2013). Wilson's statement appears incongruous with the representation of the

Lululemon brand – with its explicit marketing rhetoric of acceptance, mindfulness and self-

care – and may generate questions for some consumers about the brand's commitment to its

ethos[35]. While inflammatory comments or incidents associated with fitness brands such as

these are overtly critical of women's bodies, the everyday activities of the brands and

companies are implicitly and covertly prescribing preferred ways of constructing the self

which align with patriarchal, white, heteronormative and capitalist society.

This chapter will review the strategies that fitness apparel brands use to construct desirable

lifestyles that reaffirm normative gender roles, body image and divisions of race and class.

The first section will explore fashion and ideology as a site where branding, identity and

fashion intersect. This section draws from research on sociological concepts of habitus,

cultural capital and embodied practice, specifically as they relate to the field of fashion, to

discuss processes of identity construction. The second section performs textual analysis of a

range of email newsletters received between 2014 and 2015 from Lorna Jane, Lululemon and

Running Bare to demonstrate the representational tools these companies employ, and what

these strategies convey about their engagement with dominant gender roles and body ideals. I

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[35] Lululemon's philosophy is 'to empower people to reach their full potential through providing the right tools
and resources, and encouraging a culture of leadership, goal setting and personal responsibility' (Lululemon,
2018).

employ a methodology similar to that used by Shari Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs in their study of women's sports and fitness magazines featured in *Body Panic* (2009). This methodology focuses on analysing how the models in photographs are positioned, their physical appearance and how they use body language and facial expressions. The third part of this chapter utilises Lorna Jane as a case study, and investigates how the brand utilises shop design, public events and social media to communicate a neoliberal, postfeminist sensibility. This part will draw on and expand the concepts of personal branding mentioned in the first section, to investigate how Lorna Jane deploys notions of postfeminist femininity and authenticity to interpellate consumers as specific individuals, while creating and reaffirming hegemonic and traditional gender values.

Writing (on) the body: Clothing, identity and ideology

Fashion allows individuals and groups to convey (consciously or not) their cultural values and status, and to dress their bodies in ways that may engage with or resist the ideologies attached to certain types of clothing or modes of dress. This section focuses on the role of fashion in constructing identity, and provides examples of how particular genres of fashion contribute to the creation of a 'lifestyle', bringing together leisure and the cultural work of consumption. It is important to note that fashion is not solely a capitalist practice, as this would minimise the experiences of groups organised in a different socio-economic framework. According to Jennifer Craik, this tendency to assume fashion is exclusive to capitalist consumer culture works towards reproducing a binary of Western fashion as contemporary and 'civilised', and non-Western fashion as traditional costuming (1994, p. 3). However, as this chapter is focused on activewear, an overwhelmingly capitalist and middle-

class genre of fashion[36], this section will concentrate on how fashion operates in capitalist Western culture.

Clothing and habitus

The supposedly primary purpose of clothing to cover and protect the body acts as an alibi for its secondary role of actively constructing the body and identity. This has the result of making clothing and taste appear 'common-sense' and unquestionable. Roland Barthes writes that all purported 'functions' of commodities such as clothing are actually ideological, and can therefore always be analysed semiotically: 'once a sign is constituted, society can very well refunctionalise it, and speak about it as if it were an object made for use: a fur-coat will be described as if it served only to protect from the cold' (Barthes, 1977, p. 42). The ostensible role of clothing to protect from the elements obfuscates what is actually signified. The types of clothing and the ways individuals can access them are 'an active process or technical means for constructing and presenting a bodily self' (Craik, 1994, p. 3). Clothing is often deliberately chosen to convey to the world a person's sense of self, although its intended use may not match its function as determined by the wearer. Even a work uniform, chosen not by the wearer but by the employer, signifies the individual's belonging to a certain work community, which in turn may convey class and gender connotations. The multiple subject positions signified by the cultural practices an individual participates in is known as 'habitus'. Habitus is simultaneously a means of producing categories and a product itself of culture and the rules of culture (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). This is applicable in the observation of how an individual's roles in society, shaped by their gender, class, race, sexuality and other subjectivities, work in concert to inform their tastes and how they embody or practice them.

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[36] Fitness culture itself emerged from a context of middle-class consumer culture, and is marketed largely to middle-class consumers who can afford such products and services.

Additionally, their tastes reinforce and legitimise their roles. In terms of fashion, habitus refers to the roles an individual occupies that inform and legitimise their taste in dress and style. Craik writes of the habitus of clothing as the performable face, 'which positively constructs an identity rather than disguising a "natural" body or "real" identity' (1994, p. 5). This means that while clothing may be represented to seem like an addition or accessory to an a priori body and identity, it actually actively constitutes both.

The availability of taste practices that constitute habitus may be limited according to the different types of subject positions an individual may occupy, and how the positions interact with each other. These restrictions are clear in the case of personal branding, where an individual (often a celebrity) with enough status and power to launch a set of products and services markets them by interpellating consumers through a desire to assume the identity of the celebrity associated with the corporation. Lee Barron employs the concept of habitus to investigate model and actor Elizabeth Hurley's professional activities as a designer and producer of her own clothing and accessories called Elizabeth Hurley Beach. Barron proposes that Hurley 'represents a potent contemporary purveyor of a specific habitus', by creating a brand 'built entirely on her persona, image, and upon the centrality of her body within the promotion of the range' (2007, p. 444). While this allows fans of Hurley to consume, internalise and engage with the idea of 'Elizabeth Hurley' through her clothing line, it becomes problematic where the clothing line interpellates its consumers as if they occupy the same 'habitus' as Hurley, constructing tension and power imbalance between producer and consumer. That is, just as Elizabeth Hurley Beach invites consumers to experience the Elizabeth Hurley habitus, it simultaneously excludes certain consumers from this experience on the basis of class, gender, and body shape or size.

Parallels can be drawn to other companies that employ personal branding, including Lorna Jane. The name alone immediately suggests a connection to an individual – not only is the brand title a name, it is a first name, as opposed to a surname like Gucci or Armani, or a full name like Michael Kors. The reader is positioned to understand the brand as both an extension of a particular individual – in this case, the founder – and as a person or persona in its own right, one whom the reader/consumer can relate to on an intimate level. From the 'About our Brand' page on the company's website, the establishment describes its mission as follows: 'To empower every woman to lead her best life through the Active Living philosophy and the daily practice of Move, Nourish and Believe' (Lorna Jane, 2016a). Furthermore, the website positions its founder at the centre of this philosophy: 'The Active Living philosophy is how Lorna lives her life; by moving, nourishing and believing everyday' (2016b, Lorna Jane). Clarkson's habitus is as a white, married, heterosexual woman (because those signifiers refer to roles she herself occupies) who possesses the privilege to enact the practices of self-care and self-improvement she encourages her consumers to adopt. However, by combining interpellative statements such as 'empower every woman' with a range of expensive activewear[37] that only runs in sizes from UK/Australian 6 to 16 (XXS to XL), and endorsements of activities and meals that are similarly expensive[38], the Lorna Jane brand excludes working-class women and larger-size women.

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[37] An average pair of tights from Lorna Jane, such as the 'Ultimate Support ¾ Tight', cost AUD$96.99 full price. For the purpose of comparison, a pair of workout tights from Kmart (for example, 'Active Panel ¾ Leggings') cost AUD$14 full price.

[38] For an example, see https://www.movenourishbelieve.com/diy/the-diy-face-mask-lorna-swears-by/ and https://www.movenourishbelieve.com/diy/the-easiest-diy-body-scrub/

Cultural capital and activewear

If habitus refers to a set of practices which connote an individual's many roles in society and culture, then cultural capital behaves as the currency with which the individual 'purchases' and maintains these roles. In the context of clothing, for example, wearing a fur coat not only projects a sense of wealth and power, but actively earns power and reifies the relationship between signifier and signified. Pierre Bourdieu defines cultural capital in the context of different types of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. Broadly, the definition of capital is 'accumulated labour which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 241). Applied in the cultural sense, 'accumulated labour' may refer to any cultural work performed by an agent to attain and maintain a particular role, and the 'reified or living labour' is the result of that work, that is, the reaffirmation of the role. It is important to note that cultural capital is not exclusive to the wealthy, and does not necessarily involve purchasing goods. Practices which confer and exhibit cultural capital are specific to cultural or subcultural groups, and may involve explicit or implicit knowledge of the norms and conventions to which those groups adhere.

Activewear brands facilitate cultural capital at different levels, and involve an overlap of cultural capital in other subjectivities, such as gender, class, body shape, able-bodiedness, and age. As the brand becomes more widespread, its categories of activewear become more stratified, and the work its consumers must do to maintain status becomes more precise. For example, it is not enough to know that Nike gym shorts are more 'suitable' activewear than pyjama shorts – one must also be aware of the particular activities this piece of clothing is suitable for. Wearing gym shorts to a yoga class would be regarded as a faux pas because it demonstrates a lack of awareness of the kinds of poses that yoga requires, which, when wearing shorts, may result in an embarrassing display of the wearer's underwear, buttocks or

genitals. Choosing the 'correct' activewear garment for a situation therefore performs and reifies knowledge of fitness, fashion and social conventions. Lifestyle clothing contributes to the shaping of an identity that is aligned with a particular set of values, and earns cultural capital among the lifestyle subculture. Lifestyle retail brands, therefore, are 'aimed at a particular social group and tr[y] to reflect the cultural values of this group' (Pettinger, 2004, p. 171). Surf dress, according to Jon Anderson, is an example of this. While certain products associated with the surfing lifestyle are essential for performing the activity (such as a surfboard or a wetsuit, or running shoes in the case of activewear), 'many non-surfing products have been injected with a dose of surfer culture in order to add economic and social value' (2016, p. 213). These products include clothing and accessories from 'surfing' brands such as Rusty and Billabong, and convey the ideological values traditionally associated with surfing, such as hedonism, risk-taking and participation in counterculture. The appeal of these values means that active surf dress, beyond its primary function of protection from the elements and enhanced performance, has 'come to symbolize and re-present aspects of this lifestyle sport to others, both contributing to the identities of those choosing to wear them and creating solidarity between individuals in broader surfing collectives' (Anderson, 2016, p. 214). It should also be noted that lifestyle wear expands the market of a company primarily dedicated to technical and activity-specific garments. Activewear shares this goal as a dress code for a lifestyle that conveys certain ideological values – in this case, concepts of self-improvement, self-investment and discipline. While these values are not solely communicated through the consumption of activewear, maintaining an activewear dress code when not engaging in fitness activities – that is, the actual physical work of fitness, such as going to the gym, running at a park, attending a yoga class and so on – constructs a 'fit' identity and conveys membership to the fitness community.

<u>Dressed bodies</u>

It is crucial to interrogate the role of the body in fashion as a product and producer of meaning, because the physical, felt and lived aspects of clothing are loaded with signifiers. The same outfit could be worn by two different people, and the meaning conveyed would change depending on factors such as the wearer's race, gender, class and body shape. This is because fashion is an 'embodied practice' (Entwistle, 2000, p. 325), meaning that dress and the body cannot be understood without the other: 'dress works on the body, imbuing it with social meaning, while the body is a dynamic field that gives life and fullness to dress' (2000, p. 327). Catherine Connell, in a study of queer, fat fashion bloggers, concurs with this notion of dress as embodied practice, proposing that a shift in analysis from 'fashion as cultural artefacts' to 'fashion as *styled bodies'* (2013, p. 210, original emphasis) facilitates a reading of fashion that acknowledges and legitimises the role of pleasure, which Connell contends can allow for the possibility of subversion and counter-discourse. Connell employs a fashion blog project, Fa(t)shion February for Femmes and Friends, as a case study. Fa(t)shion February focuses specifically on fashion for fat, 'femme-identified queers', meaning that it occupies unique, contested territory in the fashion blog scene, and as such may challenge 'mainstream fashion politics, which tend to privilege thin, white, heteronormative and gender normative, able bodies' (Connell, 2013, p. 211). Bloggers who identify as fat and femme are able to upload images of themselves in their 'outfit of the day', appropriating fashion discourse that preferences normative bodies. Here, counter-discourse is generated by the celebration and proliferation of 'images of *unruly bodies*' (Connell, 2013, p. 212), demonstrating how bodies can affect the meaning of dress.

Entwistle's account of dress that is more inclusive of the lived and phenomenological experience of dressing the body allows an analysis of activewear beyond the semiotic

approach of clothing as text. Although there is much to be said about so-called 'inspirational' tank tops that proclaim mantras and instructions like 'Think Fit/Be Fit' (Lorna Jane, 2015a) and 'Gonna Run Till I Don't Jiggle' (Rebel Sport, 2015), the physical sensation of wearing activewear is equally meaningful. Entwistle proposes that dressing uncomfortably (for example, clothing that does not fit, or high-heeled shoes that require the wearer to pay attention to how they walk to prevent falling) causes an 'epidermic self-awareness', that 'makes us aware of the "edges", the limits and boundaries of our body' (2000, p. 334). The 'edges' here refer to the boundaries between clothing and body – where one ends and the other begins. Entwistle describes dress as lying 'at the margins of the body, mark[ing] the boundary between self and other, individual and society' (2000, p. 327). When these boundaries become more 'leaky', in the case of second-skin fitness clothing, those regulations and pronouncements become concealed. As the 'edges' of comfortable clothing are less noticeable, the wearer is less aware of how their bodies interact with the materiality of the clothing. One of the primary purposes of activewear is to be as close to the skin as possible to allow for a full range of movement of the body. Comfortable, second-skin activewear may include tights that cling to the legs and buttocks, a sports bra that minimises movement of the breasts but does not have underwire or a hook-and-eye clasp, running shoes with cushioning insoles, and a formfitting tank top. Additionally, the clothing items are generally manufactured from synthetic fabric that wicks away moisture and prevents overheating. Because sweat is the body enacting homeostasis[39], these clothes are examples of a technological amplification of homeostatic processes which are not needed, but which add a certain 'scientific value' to the clothes, making them tools of athleticism, as well as accessories.

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[39] The process of homeostasis is the means by which the body maintains internal equilibrium.

The performance-enhancing benefits of activewear may have an effect of reducing the awareness of the 'edges' of the body; where bodies end and clothing begins becomes blurred. In activewear, although leggings are tight, revealing and formfitting, they are also comfortable, potentially allowing the wearer to feel confident and supported in their bodies while at the same time revealing to others the contours of their figure which baggier clothing may hide. The lived experience of comfort contributes here to the construction of a naturalised experience of clothing. Furthermore, comfortable clothing with instructive messages printed on the front interpellates the wearer to internalise such messages and approach exercise and fitness with the prescribed attitude – if the clothing acts as a second skin, then the messages are inscribed upon the body, not just the clothing. Clothing with slogans, such as inspirational tank tops, create a liminal space between the body and the clothing, the internal and the external. Mary Douglas writes that the boundaries of the body are 'dangerous' (1984, p. 93); therefore, dress is 'subject to social regulation and moral pronouncements' (Entwistle, 2000, p. 327). The slogans, facilitated by the comfort of the clothing upon which they are written, slip into the 'dangerous' realm between internal and external, meaning that the wearer may become less aware of what the slogan says and what connotations it may have over time, as they become used to wearing the garment.

Women's fashion is a site where contested feminist politics of consumption are negotiated. Second wave feminists in North America in the 1960s–70s condemned fashion and beauty products and practices, holding the perspective that 'femininity was something that women had been forced to apply, to dress up in: liberation and the search for an authentic self meant taking it off, getting out of it' (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p. 1). This categorical rejection of fashion is problematic because it suggests that women who engage in such practices are

passive, manipulated consumers who mindlessly buy products because they are told that they need them to be conventionally attractive, and precludes any pleasure or agency a consumer might draw from constructing their identity. Furthermore, the efforts in the 1970s to represent an authentic, 'natural' self were often based on a masculine model of appearance: short or unkempt hair, body hair, no make-up, pants instead of skirts or dresses and so on (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p. 12). While conventional femininity was framed as negative, 'the validity of a masculine model went unquestioned' (Evans and Thornton, 1989, p. 12). Since the feminist backlash of the 1980s–1990s, postfeminist fashions have become increasingly inflected with notions of empowerment. Hilary Radner and Natalie Smith write that 'fashion was…a lifestyle that was widely available, associated with a sense of autonomy, independence and self-actualisation, an idea promulgated by cross-media promotions for products such as scent and cosmetics' (2013, p. 281). Postfeminist fashion actively reproduces prescriptive femininity while interpellating consumers to engage with this ideal under the premise of self-determination and independence. Rosalind Gill associates this with postfeminist sensibility, which I have addressed in Chapter One. In the context of fashion, Gill writes that the marketing of 'thongs, belly tops and t-shirts bearing sexually provocative slogans' (2007b, p. 151) to girls as young as five represents a shift from the passive, sexual objectification of women towards a construction of women as 'desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so' (2007b, p. 151). This means that this type of postfeminist fashion constructs women to actively represent themselves in ways that would once be considered objectifying, but are now read as exemplary of sexual liberation.

Guests, educators and manifestos: The fitness retail experience

The shopping environment, including physical retail stores and online shops, facilitate experiences that can be read semiotically and as processes of embodiment. Instore, retail outlets represent and reproduce their brand/s through their staff and their expectations of their employees, as well as the store layout, the music played and other multisensory characteristics. Online branding is performed through graphic design choices, images of models and clothing, 'action' photosets, site navigation, toolbars and user interactivity. Stores dedicated to fitness apparel construct a space where fitness identities are performed and negotiated. From the purchasing of goods and participation in fitness activities held or promoted instore, to interacting with the employees, signing up for rewards programs or picking up pamphlets produced by the store to take home as part of the shopping experience, the boundaries between where consumption ends and domestic/private life begins become obscured. This section explores how the fitness shop, both instore and online, produces and addresses fit feminine subjects. By addressing the lived experience of shopping as well as the signifiers chosen by the company to address and position consumers, I produce a critique of fitness shopping culture that accounts for the relationship between individual agency and the prescriptive ideology deployed by practices of consumption.

The meaning of store interiors

A company performs its philosophy through how it employs and manages its staff, and how the staff and store interact with its customers. N.J. Graakjær (2012) analyses the role of music as a prominent element in the construction of a particular aesthetic and brand of American clothing giant Abercrombie and Fitch (A&F), and how music works with shop design and staff behaviour to create a multisensory experience that differentiates the company from other similar clothing retailers. While A&F is not a fitness brand, and there are some key differences which I will discuss later in the chapter, this example is helpful in theorising and

contextualising the ways in which clothing stores construct a specific kind of experience that conveys the values of a certain lifestyle. Graakjær writes that the music played at A&F (what he terms 'dance pop') is drawn from its well-known context as party or dance music in night clubs or private parties (2012, p. 397). This is interpreted by Graakjær as establishing a connection in the shopper's mind between the fun, carefree and exclusive atmosphere of a club with the A&F brand. This is compounded by other aspects of the store layout and staff. For example, when one enters the store:

> Usually, a stunning young man will welcome you in the reception area with a smile and a naked trimmed upper body. He, and a model-like girl next to him, will greet you with an American-accented 'Hey, how's it going (or 'Hey, how are you') – Welcome to A&F', and you are asked to have your photograph taken together with the guy. (Graakjær, 2012, p. 399)

Additionally, the interior is constructed of dim lighting, perfume, minimal signage, winding corridors, and common-room style décor such as pot plants, a moose-head mounted on the wall, and paintings of virile, young men playing sport. Although some of the set design features mean that the actual experience of shopping may be difficult compared to more open and accessible layouts (such as budget department stores like Target or Kmart), these features suggest that 'A&F is not "just" a retail store' (Graakjær, 2012, p. 400), but a purveyor of a particular lifestyle. This in turn interpellates customers to feel that by shopping at A&F, they are accessing and performing an identity associated with a specific lifestyle. In the case of A&F, customers access a fun, youthful, attractive, fraternity-style environment that also conveys a particular status in society.

Fitness apparel stores employ various methods of branding, many of which involve creating a specific instore experience that reproduces and reflects the brand's perceived values. When a

customer enters a typical Lululemon store[40], they are greeted with warm lighting, soft, low

tempo music, scented candles, pot plants, an open layout offering a clear view of the entire

store, a display of clothing folded neatly on a table among candles, yoga mats and

accessories, and, occasionally, an array of 'coffee table' books. This 'living room' style not

only creates a space that evokes fitness, but also one that evokes domesticity, leisure and the

'feminine' role of homemaking. By doing this, Lululemon is highlighting the aspects of both

the home and the process of fitness as leisurely, rather than labour-oriented. Robyn Dowling

states that in the construction of shops, 'images of femininity reconstituted by advertising are

important in maintaining an objectified femininity, and commodities are central in shaping

the contours of domestic labour' (1993, p. 295). Compared to the dimly-lit, labyrinthine, frat-

house design of A&F stores, the living room aesthetic of Lululemon stores evokes a

particular image of 'objectified femininity' and the link between domestic labour and leisure

for women. Lululemon takes a literal approach in expressing their values, printing 'the

Lululemon manifesto' (a collage of mottos, sayings and reminders) on its walls and on the

shopping bags each customer receives with a purchase. Some examples include 'creativity is

maximised when you are living in the moment', 'do one thing a day that scares you', and

'listen, listen, listen, then ask strategic questions'. Christine Lavrence and Kristin Lozanski

describe these slogans as mapping out 'the brand identity through appeals to self-betterment'

(2014, p. 77). Although this is not specifically about femininity, these slogans reflect the

brand's neoliberalist, hyper-individualised approach to exercise and self-care, which form an

integral part of the kind of femininity being constructed and addressed in women's fitness

culture.

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[40] This is represented here by my visits to the Lululemon stores in the Perth CBD and Cottesloe in Perth, Western Australia.

<u>Store employees: Consumers or producers?</u>

Sales staff members are trained to interact with customers in a specific way which is based on the brand's 'philosophy' and contributes to the atmosphere of the store. Additionally, retail staff in the apparel sector become living models and are given discounts or clothing allowances to model the latest season (which is sometimes part of their contracts). This is ostensibly done for the benefit of customers, so they may see how the product can be styled and worn. However, dressing staff members in the company's product also has the effect of creating a liminal role between producer and consumer, where the seller of goods is also a buyer, and 'appears as a consumer as well as a worker, signalling what is fashionable to customers, and how they might look in the "right" clothes' (Pettinger, 2004, p. 178). An anonymous former employee (henceforth referred to as Anon) of Lululemon wrote an article for feminist news website Jezebel, titled 'My life in an exploitative libertarian happiness cult' (2015). In the article, Anon describes the workplace culture and rules employees are expected to adhere to. For example, Anon explains that for training purposes, Lululemon has constructed a 'muse' or ideal customer named Ocean:

> Anything you do, you appeal to that ideal, imaginary muse. Ocean makes six figures, she doesn't want to have kids, she has a master's degree, her core workout is yoga and she also likes running and spinning. The whole idea is that your guest is never going to actually be Ocean. It's aspirational. (Anon, 2015)

Ocean is a vehicle through which Lululemon instructs their staff to behave. Anon's description of Ocean indicates a clear intention to interpellate customers according to classed and gendered ideals, where the ideal customer is wealthy, highly educated, active and does not have children. The fact that the staff members are made to understand that Ocean does not exist, does not mean that Lululemon customers will not have this idealisation imposed

upon them. The description furthermore highlights the importance of staff and training as tools for disseminating the brand's philosophy.

The quality of customer service provided by staff members is both indicative and constitutive of the type of store and its philosophy. This is visible in the difference between the behaviour of, for example, a staff member who works at the checkout register of a major department store, and the sales assistant at an upmarket lifestyle fashion brand such as Lululemon and Lorna Jane. Although both are expected to be polite, friendly and efficient in their tasks, there is a higher expectation on the latter to ask more questions about the customer and their shopping needs (Pettinger, 2004, p. 176), whereas the former might be expected to process each customer as fast as possible to maintain good flow of traffic and prevent queue build-up. Pettinger discusses the role of retail workers in blurring the boundaries between production and consumption, arguing that:

> By focusing on those who work at sites of consumption, locations for other people's leisure activities, it is possible to explore the relationship between production and consumption; how consumption relations are influenced by, and in turn influence, those of work and production. (2004, p. 166)

Her argument focuses on how retail staff members bridge the gap between production and consumption to become embodiments of the brand. Pettinger examines the difference between a budget women's clothing store Cheap Chic and the expensive, high-fashion retailer, Distinction. Pettinger pays close attention not only to the 'emotional labour' performed by the staff for the customer (2004, p. 172) but to the various ways in which customer service is embedded in the physical store. One example of this is the concept of 'self-service', where a customer browses, makes choices and tries on garments without having to interact with a sales person. For the customer to experience this level of perceived

autonomy, the employees are required to dedicate a large amount of time to unpacking stock, arranging it on the shop floor, tidying the rails and keeping the space clean. This form of labour, also called 'the silent salesman' (Bowlby, 2001, p. 36), is one of the ways corporations utilise staff to reflect the values of their brand. Pettinger illustrates this by comparing 'the clean, white and pale wood lines of the sparsely arranged highly designed Distinction to the neon-lit, crowded rails of the value fashion Cheap Chic' (2004, p. 173). Here, class status of the stores' target markets is encoded in the design of the store, and into the kinds of labour expected to be performed by their workers. At Cheap Chic, 'rails were usually messy because not enough workers were employed to keep them tidy. This meant fewer people were available on the shopfloor to provide personal service' (Pettinger, 2004, p. 176). In Distinction, the service culture meant that 'workers present on the shopfloor tidying rails (and hence facilitating self-service) provide customers with someone able to give individualised customer service' (Pettinger, 2004, p. 176). Here, behaviour and training of staff denotes the 'quality' and the class of the establishment.

The labour at Lululemon is typical of an upmarket fashion retailer with some key differences that highlight a specialisation for yoga and the particular philosophy of the company. Upon entry, customers (referred to as 'guests' by the company) are cheerily greeted by Lululemon staff members (called 'educators') (Lululemon, 2016). If a customer picks up an item, the educator will typically offer to bring the item into an available change room. If the guest accepts, the educator leads the guest to the change rooms, where they ask for the guest's name and intention for the garment (yoga, running, Pilates, gym), which they then write down on a small blackboard hung from outside the door. Once the guest has changed into the garment, the educator will ask about fit and comfort, and may even suggest particular movements to make to test the garment's suitability. For example, I entered as a guest

enquiring about a sports bra to wear during yoga, and was offered a yoga mat on which to perform a short sun salutation[41], to check the suitability of the bra I had tried. The educator led me to a spot in the fitting room area (not visible from the main shop floor), out of my particular cubicle, and laid down a mat for me that had been stored under a bench. Although he stood by while I went through the motions of the sun salutation, he did not look on or offer comments about my performance of the sequence, and only inquired on the feel of the garment after I had finished. The training that the educators have and the way they are positioned to interact with the customers distinguishes this experience from other clothing retailers. In the job description section of the 'educator' role on the Lululemon website, potential candidates are reminded that, among standard requirements of retail employees (good people skills, teamwork and so on), 'We expect that you will be enrolled in participating in weekly fitness activities in and out of the store with the store team' (Lululemon, 2016). These expectations compel team members to not only be interested in fitness, but to continue to maintain their activities and integrate them with their work environment. This further blurs the boundaries between work/private life and seller/consumer.

Lululemon's branding works to create a specific experience of fitness consumption that is linked to pleasure, identity, neoliberalism and an ideal femininity. From the examples above of Lululemon's branding techniques, three stand out as most overt in the portrayal of specific yoga/fitness lifestyle values to customers: customer-employee interaction, the 'Lululemon manifesto', and the dual function of the store space as a fitness class studio. Christine Lavrance and Kristin Lozanski posit that despite Lululemon's relatively small advertising

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[41] A basic yoga sequence primarily involving variations of bending down at the waist and rising up.

budget, the modes of branding they do employ are powerful in the way they link distorted yogic principles of 'social and spiritual activism' (2014, p. 77) to the neoliberalist tenets of self-actualisation and body-work. The concept of wellness, as Lululemon performs it, is defined as 'a personal, obligatory, and moral achievement to both self and community' (Lavrance and Lozanski, 2014, p. 78). Through the conflation of social and economic performance with self-discipline and self-care, the kind of wellness Lululemon encourages is one that locates the body as the site of personal responsibility and production of wealth, espousing the idea that if an individual does not have what they want, it is because they did not work hard enough. This discourse fundamentally ignores social structures like race, class, gender or sexuality in favour of shifting blame onto the actions of an individual. Lavrance and Lozanski observe this in parts of the Lululemon manifesto. For example: 'effectiveness is predicated by replacing the words "wish," "should" and "try" with "I will"' (2014, p. 83). The design of the Lululemon space, as well as its dual function as a yoga studio, strives to make shopping at Lululemon 'not merely an act of consumption, but a spa-like experience and a transformative purification ritual' (2014, p. 86). This encourages consumers to adopt the values of the brand, specifically a commitment to investing in the project of self-improvement and self-discipline.

Email newsletters as branding tools

The structure of an online store is equally as important as a brick-and-mortar store in the interpellation of the ideal consuming subject. Email newsletters featuring new products or promotions, or occasionally blog posts aligned with the brand's values (and therefore the values of its ideal consumer) are one of the primary online interfaces between a company and its customer base, akin to the instore interaction between a staff member and a browsing

shopper (Reimers, Chao and Gorman, 2016, p. 311).[42] From a range of fitness apparel promoters that distribute a regular e-newsletter, I have selected Lorna Jane, Running Bare and Lululemon (their Australian websites) as my subjects for analysis. The reasons for my selection include popularity and visibility, a focus on apparel (rather than equipment) and an emphasis on marketing towards women (compared with a fairly equal division between men and women exemplified by Nike or Rebel Sport, for example). After signing up to receive emails from these companies, my methodology consisted of reviewing all emails sent between July 2015 and February 2016 to obtain a manageable representative sample for the purpose of undertaking close readings of the texts. I also chose to group data by time rather than quantity because the amount of emails sent by each company is integral to their marketing scheme. In eight months, Lorna Jane sent 110 emails, Running Bare sent 105, and Lululemon sent 38. The purpose of the emails was largely to alert recipients of upcoming sales or promotions and the arrival of new product lines. This was consistent across all three companies, with the notable exception of Lululemon which rarely advertised sales and promotions or discounted products, using the emails to communicate the launch of new products or to promote 'must haves' that are part of a more permanent collection.

During the first review of these emails, I aimed to identify recurring themes, which were then examined in closer detail after the preliminary review. I have chosen to analyse only the photographs of models and products, because this is a key mode of communication in these emails along with minor subtitling or subject headings. Consistent with the conventions of other apparel model casting, I found no images of women with body hair, women with disabilities, older women (women who looked visibly over thirty years of age) or overweight

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[42] See blogs for Lululemon and Lorna Jane: http://www.lululemon.com.au/features/_/N-1z141mk and https://www.movenourishbelieve.com/

women (with the exception of Running Bare, who featured one 'plus-size' model who was still relatively slim, accompanied by the phrase 'up to size 22'). Additionally, the ratio of non-white to white models is on average 1:4, again conforming to the convention of most fashion advertisements. More surprising was the exclusion of women with short hair, and the small quantity of women with visible muscle definition (with the exception of abdominal muscles or glutes), given that muscle definition is one of the generally expected outcomes of becoming fit, and that short hair may be practical for women who workout often, in addition to the ponytail hairstyle that often featured in the images. The following table presents regularly occurring themes and the number of instances in which they appear in each set of emails throughout eight months. The percentages represent how often each theme appears out of the total number of emails.

	Models smiling	Pictures of customers wearing product	Muscle definition (not abs or glutes)	Activity (not posing)	Wearing Jewellery	Models with tattoos
Lorna Jane (110 emails)	45 (49%)	6 (5%)	32 (29%)	16 (14%)	40 (36%)	5 (4%)
Lululemon (38 emails)	10 (26%)	0	26 (68%)	31 (81%)	14 (36%)	10 (26%)
Running Bare (105 emails)	3 (2%)	7 (6%)	5 (4%)	6 (5%)	59 (56%)	10 (9%)

Table 1. Email newsletter analysis

This method of analysing data has been borrowed from Shari Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs' *Body Panic* (2009). The ways in which women are portrayed in visual advertisements for fitness apparel can indicate the ideal reading of the text. This kind of framing can be represented in multiple ways, including through body positioning, accessories worn, how the clothing fits on the model, the model's body type, hair, skin colour and age, as well as production technology such as tanning, make-up and Photoshop. In *Body Panic,* Dworkin and Wachs analyse the magazine *Women's Sports and Fitness* (*WSF*) throughout its lifetime as a

text that was once the product of second wave feminism (2009, p. 131), but was then bought by publisher Condé Nast (responsible for *Vogue* and *Allure*) and subsequently republished under the new title *Self*. Dworkin and Wachs argue that the transformation from *WSF* to *Self* signalled a shift from a feminist sports magazine for women to a fitness-themed commodity feminist text. Instead of a wide variety of articles concerning equal pay and representation in sport and competitions, and interviews with female athletes, the content of the *Self*-era magazine offered more workouts, and its focus on sport was limited to fitness and 'leisure/travel oriented' activities (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009, p. 152). They contend that this demonstrates an emphasis on appearance-based goals rather than health or performance goals. Dworkin and Wachs presented a qualitative study of the kinds of representational strategies deployed by the magazines that addressed the kinds of action being portrayed, the race of the models, whether the models were smiling, if the abdominal muscles were exposed, and other smaller aspects of body language (including 'head tilt', 'hands on prop' and 'torso twisted' [2009, p. 43]). For example, in *WSF*, Dworkin and Wachs found that 50% of images of models on the front page were in 'active' poses, 29.5% in 'action implied' poses, and 20.5% in passive poses. In comparison, *Self* and the Condé Nast-era *WSF* featured 0% models in active poses, 21.4% in 'action implied', and 78.5% in 'passive', suggesting that these covers 'reinforce stereotypical sex differences' (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009, p. 155). I have drawn from several of these categories to inform my categories, and have also created my own to explore different modes of how the body is represented in marketing communication.

From Dworkin and Wachs' categories, I have chosen smiling, action shots, and muscle definition (similar to 'abs exposure'). As my own study is smaller in scope, I have omitted subcategories such as body language and have consolidated them into more specific

categories, such as 'active pose' instead of 'hands on hips'. Smiling is an important signifier because it is often used to soften or feminise the appearance of a woman with masculine traits; in this case, the appearance of a strong, muscled body. This is because 'women are often publicly responsible for a continuous display of pleasantness and amiability' (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009, p. 44). Smiling appears most commonly in Lorna Jane emails (49%), which is in line with the brand's values of optimism, energy and happiness. I have included action shots because activity 'implies subjecthood: that one is an active subject' (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009, p. 40). Lululemon featured the most images (81%) where the model was participating in an activity (including various kinds of individual and team sports, and adventure or travel activities such as hiking or rock climbing). Running Bare offered the lowest number of images which, with the lack of smiles, constructs a passive subject consistent with how high-fashion runway models are represented. Muscle definition and being 'toned' are constructed as major goals of women's fitness because although the bodies shown in the emails are all slim, muscle definition is almost always restricted to abdominals (the six-pack) or the glutes. Defined biceps, quads or back muscles were rarely featured as they are associated with masculine musculature. Again, this invokes dominant markers of femininity and rejects the ways fit female bodies may contest what is acceptable for women's bodies. Interestingly, Lululemon's emails resulted in the highest number of images featuring muscle definition (68%), despite their focus on yoga, a mode of exercise that typically does not produce such strong muscle definition (especially when compared to the strength training that Lorna Jane aligns itself with).

In addition to Dworkin and Wachs' categories, I have also selected tattoos, jewellery, and user-submitted images. The display of tattoos was significant because although tattoos are becoming increasingly widespread and considered more socially accepted than in previous

decades, tattoos still connote masculinity (Atkinson, 2002, p. 220) and an alignment with an 'alternative' culture that Lululemon in particular is trying to espouse. This is supported by Lululemon featuring the highest quantity of tattoos displayed in their emails (26%), and Running Bare – being the most closely associated with 'high fashion' – having the lowest (0.9%). The connotation of jewellery in these advertisements changes in each context. While the jewellery in Lululemon and Lorna Jane emails is mostly limited to small, subtle bracelets (including silicone bands, string bracelets and watches) or rings (including wedding rings), Running Bare styles their models with chunky bracelets, rings and necklaces and dangling earrings. I analyse jewellery because it is not practical for exercise, and so its presence suggests an emphasis on (feminine) appearance rather than utility. Running Bare's use of jewellery (56%), paired with its lack of smiles, muscle definition or active poses further reaffirms its tendency to address and construct an ideal feminine subject who carries traditionally 'feminine' signifiers and who is seen as non-threatening. User-submitted photos were selected as a criterion because they operate as a form of product representation that, although moderated, is not produced by official channels. Users are invited to submit their 'action shots' to social media, after which operators of the company's pages will select certain images and include them in the newsletters. This works to acknowledge the importance of the customer in the brand's 'community', but also has the underlying effect of affirming some bodies and uses of its product and not others, similar to how Kayla Itsines selects user-submitted progress shots from Chapter Two. All three of the brands have presented low instances of this, suggesting that user-submitted content is only a minor component of their marketing. This may also suggest that the customer base of these companies may not match the image of ideal customers as portrayed through their models.

Fig. 4 – A typical photo from the Lululemon newsletter titled 'don't rush it' (Lululemon, 2015).

Fig. 5 – A typical photo from the Lorna Jane newsletter titled 'Open ME for Happiness ☺' (Lorna Jane, 2015b).

Fig. 6 – A typical photo from the Running Bare newsletter titled 'Power play…shop the NEW ARRIVALS!' (Running Bare, 2015).

The above photos exemplify the images received through newsletters from each brand, representing the categories I have identified. All three models are white, slim, toned and have long hair. In the Lululemon image, the model's face is obscured. Her pose suggests activity that requires some level of knowledge and experience with yoga, as well as physical ability to perform a handstand. The colours behind her are cool and muted – similar to the minimalistic interior of Lululemon stores. In the Lorna Jane image, the model is smiling and looking away from the camera, posing with a jump rope as a prop. While her pose suggests activity, she is not actually undertaking an exercise as the Lululemon model does. The Running Bare image is set outdoors, with the model looking away from the camera, unsmiling, mouth slightly open. She does not hold props or pose in a way that suggests activity, and she is wearing jewellery. All three photos are similar to the dominant image found in Dworkin and Wachs' study of *Self* – styled and designed to imitate high fashion modelling photographs rather than the sport and fitness images represented in *WSF*.

From the analysis of e-newsletters sent by three fitness apparel brands, I have identified some prevalent codes and conventions employed by activewear companies. These in turn construct and interpellate an ideal fit female subject – white, young, able-bodied and with traditional cultural markers of (post)femininity – smiling, passive posing, jewellery, lack of tattoos, long hair, slim body without severe muscle definition. When images such as these are the main form of communication between a company and its customer, there is less space for alternative readings of the messages they convey. If a company purports to intend to empower all women, but then only represents a very small minority of female bodies wearing their clothing, customers are being implicitly positioned to understand that this is what they

themselves should look like. This kind of category confusion is constitutive of the ideologies conveyed by postfeminist culture to construct and recruit postfeminist subjects. Subjects who cannot or do not aspire to have a body as reflected in these advertisements are then marginalised from participation in this culture. They are not recognised or legitimised by the 'official' institutions that reproduce and circulate fitness culture.

Empowering all women?: The politics of Lorna Jane branding

The final section of this chapter combines the theoretical discourse of fashion studies referred to above – personal branding, consumer-producer interaction and identity construction – to conduct a case study of Lorna Jane activewear. The purpose of this analysis is to determine to the extent the brand engages with its own philosophy of 'empowering every woman' in the pursuit of physical health and fitness. I will critique the role of the company's marketing strategies in perpetuating stereotypes of gender and body size through constructing a brand that is specific to Lorna Jane Clarkson's individual habitus, and through the way she (and her public relations team) publicly handles conflict directed at the Lorna Jane brand. The specific examples I will address include the 'fit model' incident described at the beginning of this chapter, as well as an incident involving a former manager who was allegedly bullied by the company. These incidents have been represented in social media and traditional media (television news and newspapers, both in print and online), and have influenced the way the Lorna Jane brand engages with social media to interact with its customers. I will supplement these case studies with a more in-depth examination of the type of clothing Lorna Jane sells, and what these pieces communicate about the ideal fit subject.

Lorna Jane's brand philosophy to 'move, nourish [and] believe' represents an individualistic, postfeminist fitness lifestyle. 'Move, nourish, believe' are the fundamental principles that

map out the Lorna Jane brand, and are encapsulated in a separate website/blog called Move Nourish Believe (also referred to as MNB by the company). 'Move' refers to a goal of daily exercise and movement, for example 'by running 4km instead of 3km'; 'nourish' denotes the intention to eat healthy food (also called 'clean eating'); and 'believe' describes a desired attitude of positivity, self-care and self-improvement: 'BELIEVE may be something as simple as choosing a more positive outlook, or as big as quitting your day job and following your dreams' (Lorna Jane, 2016b). By constructing this dogma and the online content that reinforces these principles, Lorna Jane reasserts the idea that its brand is more than clothing; it is a lifestyle that permeates (or should permeate) all aspects of its consumers lives, including eating, thinking and moving. The company buttresses its online efforts to create a branded lifestyle, with regularly updated instore pamphlets, specially designated 'Active Living Rooms' (Lorna Jane stores with in-house studios that host exercise classes, food, meditation workshops and other 'MNB' activities) and the behaviour and appearance of its staff in line with the Lorna Jane philosophy. Additionally, in 2012, Lorna Jane launched a campaign for a nationally recorded 'Active Nation Day' in September, asking its supporters to sign a petition to have a day of 'move, nourish, believe' officially recognised in the Australian calendar of public holidays. The purpose of this day, according to the Active Nation Day website, is 'making a commitment to living actively and authentically, letting your actions speak louder than words and inspiring others to move towards a fitter future' (Active Nation Day, 2016). Similarly to Lavrence and Lozanski's (2014) assessment of Lululemon, Lorna Jane is here linking social responsibility (in this case, working towards eradication of select public health issues) with self-improvement and the Move Nourish Believe philosophy.

<u>The clothing itself</u>

The Lorna Jane product is coupled with the underlying brand values (empowering all women to be active, embracing a fit lifestyle, improving and caring for the self and adopting a positive attitude), so that to purchase an item is to at least engage with, if not subscribe to, these values. One of the most visible ways Lorna Jane apparel links its values to its product is through its line of 'inspirational tanks' – workout singlets with short 'inspirational' mottos or directives printed on the chest. Examples include 'OK – but first, yoga', 'Obsession – I call it dedication', 'Yes sweat' and the infamous 'You go girl' (Lorna Jane, 2016d). This trend has also been adopted by department stores such as Kmart, Target and Big W, as well as fitness apparel competitors like Running Bare. These tanks externalise internal mantras and motivational phrases, and have the dual role of being a reminder to the wearer and an instruction to those she encounters. The messages connote a commitment to improving and disciplining the physical body, and suggests to the reader that the body of the wearer is in a constant state of progress and construction.

Although the inspirational tanks are seemingly the most obvious form of interpellation given their written phrases, more basic garments such as sports bras and leggings address and shape particular ways of thinking about the body. Leggings or tights are considered a quintessential gym staple, and are also a key component of 'everyday' activewear that one might see being worn at a café or shopping centre. The skin-tight nature of the fabric means that the body is simultaneously revealed in its silhouette, including curves, bumps, rolls and panty lines, yet is covered in material. Lorna Jane organises the sale of its leggings by function – specifically, by which body parts are restrained, lifted, kept dry, or supported. The 'Prime Booty Support 7/8 Tight' features a specific kind of fabric ('internal power mesh') 'in the front and back waistband and carried down over the Booty, down the back of the thighs to give you the lift and support so you can work hard' (Lorna Jane, 2016c). Other tights promise 'core support',

'full coverage so you can bend, squat, lunge and run with confidence', and strategically placed power mesh to 'shape and smooth key areas' for a 'flattering silhouette' (Lorna Jane, 2016e). This is similar to David Kunzle's description of the symbolism of the corset, which is inherently ambivalent by 'objectively oppressing the body, and simultaneously…subjectively enhancing the body' (1982, p. 2). Tights offer a dichotomy of exposure and concealment. These descriptions construct the body as something to be disciplined, hidden or transformed, reinforcing a mode of femininity that is altered and regulated rather than 'natural'. This discourse is particularly prominent concerning female bodies that are undergoing visible and tangible change, including ageing, puberty and pregnancy. Fitness is similar to this in that it promotes a state of physicality that, to transform the unfit body into a toned, slim, fitter version of itself, the body must first become sweaty and smelly. Kathleen Horton, Tiziana Ferrero-Regis and Alice Payne write, in their analysis of Lorna Jane activewear, that 'the body that has been shaped by the exercise is not so much dressed but "contained" via the clothing, merging the aesthetics of performance with control and discipline' (2016, p. 187). Fitness clothing represents an answer to this problem so that the unpleasantness of being unfit (and sweaty and smelly) is minimised as much as possible. It is important to remember that while these items may be responsible for promoting a certain type of streamlined, smooth body that is open to scrutiny in its near-nakedness, they are also comfortable and facilitate the full range of movement experienced in a fitness activity. The merging of comfort with an 'ideal feminine' aesthetic may conceal the ideology at work, passing off tight, revealing shapewear clothing as merely functional and minimising their purpose to change how the body looks.

Social media and public impressions

Not every Lorna Jane shopper identifies with how the company's philosophy is enacted in its product or advertising, and indeed some participants of fitness culture (particularly those who Lorna Jane excludes) are actively opposed to the company's concept of the ideal fit woman. Social media can act as a space where consumers can voice their compliments or concerns about a company's product, marketing, advertising or service, and the company can respond (Ramsadan-Fowdar, Roshnee and Fowdar, 2013, p. 76). Since the fit model scandal in 2015, however, Lorna Jane has prohibited public posting to its page. This means that customers can no longer openly approach or confront Lorna Jane in a way where the company's response is visible to others, except if the comments are in response to a post the page has made, which makes them less accessible. The company has more control over how it is perceived through interactions with the public, but also represents the brand as infallible to criticism and unwilling to address customer complaints, which reinforces boundaries between producer and consumer.

The publicity a company receives can often prove to be revealing in terms of potential rifts between the brand's portrayed values and its goals for economic performance. The repercussions Lorna Jane has encountered in response to several incidents has been helpful for this thesis in highlighting the Lorna Jane 'Move, Nourish, Believe' ideology and its shortcomings as an 'empowering' lifestyle and business. In the aftermath of the 'fit model/receptionist' incident, Lorna Jane received complaints from fans and customers who believed that the job advertisement was incongruent with the brand's proclaimed inclusivity. However, given the brand's implicit exclusion (limited size range, models all being young, white, thin and long-haired), their explicit desire for someone who fits their criteria seems consistent with how they market their product. In the wake of this incident, a story was released on the news from the perspective of a former Lorna Jane manager who sued the

company over allegations of bullying because of her weight. Her claims included that senior staff members 'constantly suggest I skip lunch, or make offhand comments about my lifestyle choices' (Deutrom, 2015). Her story was aired on Australian news program *60 Minutes* and gained coverage from national newspapers. Lorna Jane's response was to post an image to Facebook that read '#tellthetruth'. The post was immediately derided by the public for bullying a victim and for jeopardising their own court case. Following this, Lorna Jane posted a response:

> The hash tag post 'Tell The Truth' has been removed as this was aimed at the media to tell the truth and facts about the case, not an individual. We are confident that the truth and facts will prevail in due course. Thank you everyone for your overwhelming support. (Lorna Jane, 2015, September 17)

Lorna Jane's responses to public negative feedback are aligned with the kind of behaviour they promote in women through their slogans (on clothing and in marketing texts): being confident, assertive, and focused on narratives of honesty, authenticity and individuality. Lorna Jane constructs a clear boundary between itself as authoritarian 'producer', and critics of the brand as cynical 'consumers'. Scandals like these and the ensuing interactions between company and the public are a means of personal branding that Lorna Jane employs throughout its business efforts. This is important for the questions I ask in this thesis because it exposes the underlying messages of discipline, surveillance and group-policing that are inflected in the more overt messages of the importance of working out, of loving yourself (in a particular way) and maintaining an imagined 'sisterhood'. That is, publicly disciplining an individual for accusing the company of bullying may make Lorna Jane consumers more aware of the company's practices of encouraging a certain kind of behaviour.

Fitness apparel is the public 'face' of female fitness culture. Indeed, when I describe my area of research to those unfamiliar with it, I lead by asking them if they are aware of the brands Lorna Jane or Lululemon, or if they have seen such brands being represented in cafés, shops and bars (the answer is usually 'yes'). This is because fitness apparel has crossed the boundaries of fitness space, exiting the gym and permeating public sites. This omnipresence produces new modes of cultural work. Clothing is often assumed to be 'common-sense', and the logic of dress and fashion becomes internalised. When clothing is comfortable, it is easier to dismiss its underlying ideological function – for example, minimising 'unsightly' bulges, skin or cellulite in the pursuit of the ideal feminine fit body. Activewear has several explicit and implicit tasks: to control or hide the unruly female body (for example, moisture-wicking, skin-tight compression clothing to mask perspiration, skin rolls and so on); to verbally instruct and inform (for example, inspiration tanks reminding the wearer and the public to have a particular attitude or to behave in a certain way); and to be comfortable, which works to conceal the processes described above. Here, the embodied experience of the clothing works together with the semiotic connotations of how the clothing contains and constructs a body.

In addition to the clothing itself, the marketing of activewear is equally loaded with the communication of a particular habitus. The neoliberalist, postfeminist use of personal branding has the effect of interpellating subjects to agree to a position of uniform ways of being. In the case of activewear, this uniformity refers to the subjects who are considered under the umbrella of 'women', who are allowed access to activewear and fitness, and which ones are marginalised, ignored or criticised. Branding is enacted instore and online in various ways that create a multi-sensory experience: through shop interiors that are designed to emulate spas, yoga studios or domestic spaces; interactions with employees hired for their

alignment with the company's values; pamphlets and blogs offering recipes, mantras, challenges and workouts, as well as sales promotions; and the solicitation to upload customer photos of the product in action. Personal branding normalises narratives of hyper-individualism typical of a neoliberalist society, so that by consuming items from a personal brand customers are reproducing the importance of investing in the self, perhaps at a cost to the collective. When personal branding is paired with empowerment discourse that promises a niche type of liberation, empowerment for people and groups other than the self (and those relatable to the self) is made to seem less important, or at least less achievable. It is crucial to remain aware of the function of items like clothing that are taken for granted to highlight the processes of cultural homogenising at work.

Chapter Four

Cardio Bunnies and Women Who Lift: Embodied Narratives of Femininity at the Gym

As part of my methodology for this thesis, I visited several gyms as a member and through free trials. I did this to gain a unique understanding of women's fitness culture through participatory observation and to access texts in environments which are exclusively 'members only'. These approaches allowed me to experience a wider range of texts and practices rather than conducting interviews or relying on secondary source material. The types of gyms in which I worked out varied widely: mixed and women-only, chains and independent, small and large, 24/7, university gyms, community centres, luxury health clubs and budget gyms[43]. Mainstream gyms often share the same layout – the cardio machines (treadmill, stationary bike and elliptical machines, as staples) are separated from the weight machines and free weight stations, and are usually positioned closest to the gym's entrance or the entrance to the locker rooms in full view of the rest of the gym. The weights areas tend to be situated further back on the gym floor, often in corners and concealed by the bulkier machines. Through participatory observation, I noticed that these areas are heavily gendered[44]: women dominate the cardio stations and men dominate the weights area.

Even with my research background in fitness and critical perspectives, I too was subject to the codes of conduct and site-specific rules as a new gym member learning to negotiate my place in the gym and the type of work I could or should perform. Here, gyms represent a

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[43] The more expensive gyms I visited offered membership from AUD$22-25 per week, whereas the gyms that were marketed as more 'budget' offered memberships from AUD$10 per week. Budget gyms tended to be 24/7 access with less staff, smaller changing/shower facilities, less equipment or less advanced equipment and smaller spaces. The more expensive gyms often had more space, more advanced equipment, and offered more amenities like a crèche, spas and saunas and a free breakfast station.

[44] With the notable exception of the female-only gym, although during my visits I noted that even here, more gym-goers were using the cardio stations than the weights machines or free weights.

unique nexus of body and space, where physicality (and all the various meanings that it may produce) is expressed in and through the organisation of space. According to Henri Lefebvre, 'it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced' (1991, p. 162). Space is significant to the exploration of the body in fitness culture because the fit body is constituted by the fit space, and vice versa. From a specific fitness perspective, Jennifer Smith Maguire alludes to the concept of social space in fitness gyms (or 'health clubs' as she refers to them), because they 'provide a social setting in which to display one's consumption and to participate with similar peers' (2008, p. 104). This assists an understanding of the environment of various fitness spaces in terms of what kinds of bodies are idealised or marginalised, and what practices contribute to this process.

In fitness media, a person who spends most of their workout on a cardio machine (generally a stationary bike, a treadmill or an elliptical machine) is referred to as a 'cardio bunny' or 'cardio queen', an arguably feminising and derogatory term. For example, in a fitness article titled '8 strength secrets for cardio bunnies' the author addresses cardio bunnies directly: 'Yes, you, the cardio queen on hour 2 of elliptical training and a *Real Housewives of New Jersey* marathon' (Baird, 2015, n.p.). Here, linking the consumption of reality television (which is itself often constructed as vapid and feminised) with extended sessions of cardio constructs the 'cardio queen' through a problematic, stereotyping paradigm. Women who cross the imperceptible gender boundaries of the gym's internal organisation and use free weights or weight machines, however, are able to refer to themselves with the more authoritative title of 'women who lift' (hereby referred to as WWL). This term is not as homogenous or widely-used as cardio bunny and is often interchangeable with 'girls who lift' and 'ladies who lift', arguably because this term is not meant to be used as a slur as it confers power and signifies strength. This term can be seen in a range of fitness media, including

blogs, websites and magazines dedicated to fitness, and usually addresses the reader as a subject of a private group reading a confession: '10 things all girls who lift do but will never admit to' (Del Turco, 2015), '21 secrets girls who lift won't tell you' (Bass, 2014) or 'Real life advice from women who lift' (Hill, 2015). It is important to note that being a 'woman who lifts' is usually fraught with an ongoing process of being patronised, attracting unwanted sexual attention or being seen as having ulterior motives[45], such as pretending to be interested in masculine activities to impress men (an idea broached in Chapter One in relation to women as 'posers'). Both the cardio bunny and the woman who lifts represent postfeminist fitness figures in that they internalise and negotiate with a postfeminist sensibility. Women who lift are caught in a paradox of participation in masculine fitness spaces: they are culturally encouraged to transgress gender roles to demonstrate they are empowered, but are then disciplined to conform to binary, essentialist paradigms of the body and gym-specific social protocol. This is related to the postfeminist double-bind that encourages women to embrace their so-called liberation, but only in modes that are already acceptable to normative ideologies of femininity.

The gender imbalance of these areas reinforces the value of strength in the masculine and the characteristics of weakness or worthlessness in the feminine. Weight lifting for women is increasingly encouraged in women's fitness media and institutions. Articles in women's fitness blogs and magazines are critical of a cardio-only workout in favour of strength training, arguing the latter is more effective in yielding certain results, such as weight loss or muscle tone. Many articles suggest that women's perceived lack of participation in weight

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[45] See Hussein (2015) '9 types of women you will definitely meet at the gym'.

training is a result of a fear of becoming 'bulky'[46], but few recognise or address the intimidation of asserting the self into an unspoken male-dominated environment. This suggests that women see themselves as responsible for their own exclusion, rather than external intimidation by men as authorities in a masculine field. Women who do utilise the 'masculine' areas of the gyms are granted some cultural capital and respect, whereas the 'cardio queens' are routinely feminised and are criticised as lazy, inauthentic or vain. Despite this, I argue that the female body, upon entering certain spaces that have particular connotations attached, has transformative potential for the spaces she occupies. Does a slim woman wearing make-up and a ponytail in the cardio station always signify conformity to pre-established gender stratification? Does a muscular woman 'working out with the boys' always signify resistance to the dominant? I intend to investigate these questions, arguing that there are resistive *and* compliant discourses in each cultural figure, and that fitness media is largely responsible for tailoring these archetypes to meet preconceived notions of 'appropriate' female practices, space and behaviour at the gym. For the purpose of this thesis, I am interested in how and why these archetypes resist some aspects of traditional gender roles and conform to others.

The female body has potential as both a site of conformity and resistance to gender roles. In order to articulate this, I analyse the cardio bunny and woman who lifts as dynamic cultural figures that are constantly represent and negotiate binary understandings of gender and sexuality roles. It is important to note that these two body types, while representing contrasting types of work and approaches of women's fitness culture, are not excessive or spectacular in appearance (as opposed to, for example, female bodybuilders). The ideal

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[46] See Beattie (n.d.) 'Why women don't lift weights: but should'; Richards (n.d.) 'Why aren't more women lifting weights?'; and Zacarese (2014) 'Confessions of an ex-cardio queen: 5 fitness myths that made me skip the weight section'.

physical appearance for both these archetypes is toned, lightly muscled and, most importantly, not 'fat'[47]. There are negotiative strategies available as means to resist sexualisation, policing and objectification of women participating in activities – such as those undertaken at the gym – that are seen as appearance-based, including new modes of thinking about the materiality of the body and the relationship between transgressing gender roles and socially acceptable gym behaviour. The methodology of this chapter is grounded in my participatory observation and narrative inquiry of fitness magazines, blogs and other websites. This is then applied to diverse and competing theories of embodiment, space and performance. The first section of this chapter will establish the broader context of how female bodies are seen as vehicles both for the reproduction of prevailing discourse, and for counter-discourse. This section will employ case studies from practices and subcultures that have attracted contention in feminist critiques, such as pole dancing and fat-acceptance subcultures. I draw from Foucault's theory of docile bodies, as well as theories of embodiment that centralise networks and reflexivity (Crossley, 2006) and materiality (Butler, 1993), to explore how women's bodies are read and interpreted in practices that appear to reinforce governing power relations, but whose practitioners experience pleasure and empowerment. I will also explore Lefebvre's concept of social space (1991, p. 162) as it relates to how bodies are disciplined in certain physical spaces. The second section will present a study of the cardio bunny to interrogate how 'succeeding' to comply with one socially constructed category can result in 'failing' to comply in another. Additionally, I will examine the concepts of 'bodily matter' and 'intra-action' proposed by Rachel Colls (2006), in an effort to draw a distinction between what the body 'is' and what it can do. The third section will focus on the woman who lifts and the CrossFit scene as a set of archetypes that

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[47] Women who lift have more freedom to be larger in size, but t-shirt slogans such as 'thick thighs save lives' imply that it is not the size of the body that is important – it is that the body is muscular, not 'fat'.

typically display resistance to traditional gender roles, but have the tendency to reaffirm the privileging of masculinity over the feminine. Lastly, I will also argue for the queer potential of female masculinity in the CrossFit and women's bodybuilding subcultures.

Female bodies and ideology: Debates of empowerment

The concept of embodiment as either a mode of resistance *or* conformity is highly contentious among sociologists and cultural theorists. As a result, the array of varying embodiment discourses seems to vacillate between agency and structure, producing works that attempt to negotiate the nuances of the body's physical functions and the numerous meanings inscribed on the body. Broadly, embodiment refers to 'thinking, feeling *bodies,* rather than disembodied minds unaffected by their senses and habits' (Shilling, 2005, p. 9, original emphasis), which includes the physical enactment or performance of any form of identity, practice, belief or discourse. Women's embodiment is particularly contested because of the regulations imposed on women's bodies by patriarchal systems, from the construction of an ideal feminine appearance to the legislation of women's reproductive rights. This section will explore multiple conceptualisations of embodiment from several diverse theoretical frameworks, applied to case studies where women use their bodies in ways that reinforce, contest, or blur socially constructed boundaries. These case studies refer specifically to patriarchal constructions of gender and the 'appropriate' behaviour ascribed to certain gender roles, but these critiques can also be expanded to account for embodied experiences of class, race and sexuality.

This section will be organised into two schools of embodiment discourse: embodiment as a mode of conformity and reinforcement of dominant ideology, and embodiment as a mode of

resistance. Through these categories, I will explore the concepts of bodily matter – that is, the physical substance of the body – and embodied practices and performances, where the body performs action. However, it should be acknowledged that the theories and examples expressed within these categories are irreducible, meaning they are not entirely 'conforming', nor entirely 'resistive'. Indeed, the main argument of this chapter will be to demonstrate how bodies as matter and as performance are nuanced and complex paradigms with the potential to simultaneously exhibit compliance and contestation.

Docile bodies

Theories of embodiment identify the body as a key locus of power relations. Theorists such as Michel Foucault perceive embodiment as an act of acceptance of or compliance with a governing ideology that focuses on what the body does – how it works, moves and looks. Conversely, theories of embodied resistance focus less on the body as a whole and more on discrete parts, as well as the relationship between anatomical functionality or physiology and the cultural meanings ascribed to such parts. Foucault's concept of docile bodies is a seminal foundational theory of embodied power relations for this thesis. The term is defined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1991) to describe how institutions create subjects primed for obedience of authority and for conducting self-regulation. Foucault posits that 'a body that is docile may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' through systems of discipline and punishment (1991, p. 136). This definition suggests that docile bodies are shaped by and for a specific institutional agenda, but it is important to remember that for Foucault (and indeed for this thesis), oppressive power may be productive in constructing resistance to oppression.

While Foucault's articulation of docile bodies is helpful because it facilitates discussion of embodiment and power, there are limitations that must be taken into account. Pirrko Markula and Richard Pringle apply this concept to exercise to exemplify the significance of space in the construction of docile bodies (2006, p. 74). They suggest that the distribution of power in fitness culture is visible through the organisation and categorisation of body types (and the activities that produce those bodies) in the space of the gym. Markula and Pringle critique the docile bodies theory, stating that it contributes to the erasure of agency and the conceptualisation of subjectivity as inescapable. Nick Crossley similarly evaluates docile bodies, arguing that for Foucault, the only avenue of resistance to being constructed as a docile body is 'hyper-conformity', that is, to embrace the 'identity imposed upon them and mount a form of political resistance upon that basis' (2006, p. 23). Crossley implies that this mode of resistance does little to challenge or change the power relations that make such impositions, but rather internalises an individual struggle for autonomy through a rudimentary awareness of how those power relations operate. Susan Bordo exemplifies this criticism in her feminist analysis of docile bodies, arguing for their transformative potential:

> The woman who goes on a rigorous weight training programme in order to achieve a currently stylish look may discover that her new muscles also enable her to assert herself more forcefully at work. Or…'feminine' decorativeness may function 'subversively' in professional contexts which are dominated by highly masculinist norms. (1993, p. 192)

Here, 'the woman who goes on a rigorous weight training programme' gains new awareness and pleasure from conforming to societal standards of physical appearance, which has produced the unexpected result of a more masculine appearance, in turn resulting in more respect in the workplace. However, the subject's awareness in this case is limited to finding out that being muscular has a privileged cultural meaning she had not experienced before.

The cultural dominance of masculinity, the imperative of a favourable appearance and the instability of the gender binary that constitutes the basis of her awareness remain unnoticed, unquestioned and unchanged. The 'feminine decorativeness' functioning 'subversively' is similarly individualistic. If the subject of the 'feminine decorativeness' lacks awareness of the power structures that render femininity inferior or Other in the context of 'masculinist norms', then the subject risks being incorporated into normative understandings of 'typical' female behaviour and representation.

What is missing from the concept of docile bodies is a reflection on the process between interpellation and the individual's negotiative reading. Pole dancing is a useful example to show how practices can be viewed as both empowering and problematic. Kally Whitehead and Tim Kurz suggest that pole dancing 'can be constructed as empowering through the extent to which it affords women the opportunity to exercise a form of "choice" and "control"' (2009, p. 241). This is further complicated by the advent of 'stripper-cise' or pole dancing exercise classes that remove the sexual or objectifying aspects of stripping or pole dancing and instead convey a sanitised but 'sexy' exercise for women that promotes empowerment, weight loss and pleasure. Samantha Holland explores pole classes as sites where traditional gender roles and the feminist critique of associated 'feminine' practices are contested. Holland argues that pole classes present an opportunity for women to engage in sport without entering into a realm dominated by maleness (2010, p. 45), as would be the case if these women were to join a more masculinised sport/fitness class, such as boxing or soccer. It is important to note, however, that Holland's argument for the empowering potential of pole dancing classes is premised on the idea that pole dancing is *not* stripping. That is, pole dancing classes for exercise are not sexual or objectifying, but instead indicate a capacity for women's agency to recontextualise a practice beyond its historical or

contemporary origins. Holland acknowledges the association between pole dancing and stripping or sex work, but proposes that 'If we cannot ignore its [pole dancing classes'] ties to lap-dancing clubs then, by the same token, we cannot ignore the consistent narratives of transformation, jubilation, increased confidence and exuberance' (2010, p. 178). She argues here that pole dancing should be thought of not in binary terms as either empowering or exploitative (through connections to sex work and pornography), but that it must be both. Although Holland's work in this area is neither uncritically celebratory of pole as exercise, nor unwaveringly dismissive of its pleasures on the basis that it is also practiced as a mode of sex work, Holland does little to problematise the pleasures and discipline of exercise or the concept of 'empowerment' itself. Rather, Holland positions pole-as-exercise as an empowering foil to the perceived sexual subjectification of pole-as-stripping. That is, she works to legitimise pole dancing as a feminist practice by placing it in the category of 'exercise', rather than interrogating why exercise is seen as more legitimate than leisure. Nonetheless, pole dancing as a case study illustrates the complex relationship between practice and practitioner. Similarly, the cardio bunny and the woman who lifts need to be critiqued from a perspective that seeks to challenge the legitimacy of certain exercises and the postfeminist discourse of individual empowerment.

Individual resistance in physical cultures

Postfeminist physical culture and embodied practice, as mentioned in more detail in Chapter One, is often driven by an individual desire for personal pleasure or empowerment without awareness of how such activities contribute to maintaining inequality between dominant and marginalised groups. Matthew Atencio and Jan Wright explore how embodiment through dance class in a high school setting reinforces racial difference, Othering and narratives of inferiority. The subject of their study is a ballet class at an American high school. They write

that dance is divided into 'high' and 'low' forms, which are analogous to divisions of class and race. Ballet, as a form of dance historically associated with whiteness and aristocracy, is categorised as a classical art form, whereas hip-hop styles, typically associated with blackness and the working class, is designated as 'low' culture or vulgar (Atencio and Wright, 2009, p. 31). Atencio and Wright's work draws from Foucault's docile bodies and Lefebvre's concept of social spaces to demonstrate how institutions incorporate racial and classed hierarchies into prevailing understandings of femininity, movement and cultural taste. 'Social space' is a useful term for this thesis as it could denote the space of a gym. According to Atencio and Wright, Lefebvre's perspective suggests that 'spaces are constructed by and constitutive of social identities, practices, and power relations… [spaces are] linked to the social construction of dominant ideologies and to the politics of identity' (2009, p. 33).While this means that spaces may, through design, encourage certain normative practices and understandings of identity, it also allows for contestation.

Atencio and Wright see the social space of high school ballet classes as fundamental for the reification of race, class and gender norms, defined through the narrative of individual pleasure. Despite this apparently oppressive institution, the potential for bodies that are excluded from what is normal or 'preferable' (in this case, black bodies) to resist extends beyond the 'hyper-conformity' of the docile bodies theory. Atencio and Wright term this type of resistance as 'self-formation', where the differential treatment of the two black high school girls who were the focus of their study was not internalised but rather consciously recognised and negotiated. The subjects, Carrie and Darlene, identified how the white instructors and white students engaged in 'policing' their bodies, measuring their black bodies against white standards and criticising any discrepancy. For example, Carrie reported that her teachers had asked her to 'lose weight' and 'work on her body' to have a similar body type to her (white)

classmates, with the ostensible reasoning that this would allow her to perform higher jumps and better footwork 'of a particular kind' (Atencio and Wright, 2009, p. 39). Carrie's resistance here against these strategies was not to police her own body in an attempt to 'hyper-conform' to the white-aligned culture of ballet, but to become more aware of her identity as an African American and to embrace her difference by participating actively in African-American dance communities. In other words, their resistance was shaped by 'investing in an "ethical" self that was aligned with and supportive of their peers' (Atencio and Wright, 2009, p. 40). For the white students and teachers, their experience of embodiment was one of internalisation, by virtue of embodying the identities (white, middle class) and practices (high-culture activities and education, as well as self/group surveillance, discipline and policing) privileged in dominant power relations. This argument is useful in exploring the principles of re-inscribing bodies that are constructed as inappropriate and non-normative in a fitness environment.

Avenues of resistance through embodiment tend to call for a shift in focus, from how the body is passively affected and inscribed upon through discourse (and the individual's illiteracy of these hidden and internalised processes), towards new ways of seeing or knowing the body, specifically those bodies or parts of the body that are Othered. Judith Butler's account of performativity, and her revision of it through concepts of materiality, have been influential in understandings of embodiment. Butler writes, 'Gender is created through the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, to a natural sort of being' (1990, p. 33). Performativity here refers to how practices related to the body – dress, sexual activity, labour, fitness and so on – reify the concept of gender as 'natural' as they become 'common-sense' over time. Notions of performativity and the understated role it plays in producing and

reproducing 'common-sense' knowledge of gender will, according to Butler, work towards

making room for bodies, identities and practices that do not fit the normative prescription of

gender and sexuality. Critics of Butler's concept of gender performativity accuse Butler of

relying too heavily on the role of discourse, and ignoring the fact that bodies are 'concrete

entities' (Colls, 2006, p. 255). Butler attempts to address these criticisms in *Bodies That*

Matter (1993), a follow-up to the pivotal *Gender Trouble* (1990) in which performativity is

first introduced. *Bodies That Matter* focuses on the notion of materiality and the role the body

plays in performativity – both in terms of reiterating gender norms through repeated

'invisible' practices, and in terms of bodies that disrupt that order by not fitting into it. Butler

argues that 'the fact that matter is always materialised has, I think, to be thought in relation to

the productive, and indeed, materialising effects of regulatory power' (1993, p. 9). In

suggesting that bodies as matter undergo a constant process of materialisation (or embodied

performativity) which works to reaffirm regulatory gender and sex norms, Butler proposes

that sex and gender are equal parts socially constructed and performative. Here, resistive

potential is drawn from using the body reflexively, where the actions individuals perform in

or with their bodies that constitute gender identities are done self-consciously, and with

awareness, exposing gender as a social construct.

Butler's position on materiality is a formative baseline that has been expanded through

critique and nuance. Further development of Butler's concept of matter and materiality is

derived from the theory's failure to see matter as dynamic, focusing instead on bodies as

static forms. Rachel Colls proposes a politics of intra-action, which has two main tenets:

firstly, that 'matter does not refer to a fixed substance and is always dynamic; a substance

that is "intra-active" in its becoming' (2006, p. 357). Secondly, that 'matter is produced

through the relations between its very physicality…both material and discursive components

of matter are mutually implicated in the intra-action of matter but neither is privileged in implicating the other' (Colls, 2006, p. 357). Colls applies intra-action to fat bodies, where fat is represented as liminal and transgressive, and as discrete parts of the body, rather than through the broader representation of fat bodies as shorthand for social immorality and irresponsibility. Specifically, she proposes a change in thinking, from what fat *is* – that is, what it signifies socially about a fat person – towards what fat can *do* physically, and therefore its role in producing its own materiality. The examples she gives include how skin folds can be folded, rippled and moved around without crossing the borders of the body. This perspective may contribute to breaking down the invisible and assumed 'common-sense' processes of how certain body types and shapes are ascribed with particular moral values. Applying this to a fit body, which I will expand upon in the next section, will help to uncouple body archetypes (such as the cardio bunny) from what they *are* (or rather, what they are seen as, for example inauthentic, weak and vain), by shifting focus onto what these bodies can *do*. Importantly, this will highlight assumptions about fit bodies that reflect normative attitudes towards gender roles.

Another important mode of resistance through embodiment is via reflexivity in one's relations with others, whereby individuals are able to reflect on how their bodies and embodiment are both a product and producer of their selfhoods, and are constantly in flux to maintain identity. Crossley (2006) interrogates theories of embodiment forwarded by Foucault and Bourdieu, and addresses the gaps in these frameworks through Charles Cooley and George-Herbert Mead's interactionist theories of embodiment and reflexivity. Crossley's main criticism of Foucault and Bourdieu is that they overemphasise the role of structures in the control over meaning and power, and underemphasise or erase the transformative potential of individual agency. Specifically, Crossley argues that they fail to see the role of

the individual in their own reflexivity. Foucauldian reflexivity, he writes, 'is achieved as a consequence of the operation of body power' (Crossley, 2006, p. 23). Conversely, Bourdieusian resistance is described as 'pre-reflective'; rooted in habitus that reflects and reproduces an individual's status in society (such as class, race and gender). Crossley's solution is to approach reflexive embodiment from an interactionist position, whereby 'the basic self-consciousness and bodily awareness that reflexive embodiment presupposes derives from our relations with others' (2006, p. 26). Here, Crossley's analysis highlights the subject's ability to be influenced by those around them, and the process of actively making a conscious decision based on those influences. He proposes that reflexive embodiment therefore occurs in 'worlds', or networks of people with various skills and backgrounds that contribute to an individual's actions. In terms of fitness, for example, a prospective gym member does not make the decision to join a gym alone: they are influenced by the salespeople, who are in turn influenced by their training at the gym and any vocational training; they may also be influenced by their social circle, who in turn are influenced by their own experiences, and so on. Networks like these offer the study of physical cultures (like fitness) an additional frame of reference that provides nuances to the concept of agency, embodiment and choice. This is significant for this thesis in that it demonstrates how fitness is not an individual process (although it is individualised) but is in fact a network of interactions that are constantly undergoing both contestation and reification over time.

This section has demonstrated how these theories interact to form a base of working knowledge from which the following sections will draw. The Foucauldian docile bodies theory, supported and enhanced by critiques from Crossley, Bordo and Atencio and Wright will be applied to understand how fit female bodies are positioned as subjects in a relational structure of power, and how these bodies are able to resist the prevailing discourses ascribed

to the positions they occupy. Butler's theory of bodies as matter, expanded by Colls, will provide a framework for conceptualising the body as the product of what it can do physically, separated from how particular bodies are associated with aspects of morality, gender, sexuality and race. This will provide an understanding of the body's productive potential *beyond* internalised narratives of body-as-signifier or hyper-conformity. I will approach the cardio bunny and the woman who lifts from the perspective of bodies as matter, to challenge some of the ideologies that these bodies have been inscribed with.

Run for a reason: Examining compliance and resistance in the cardio bunny

The word 'bunny' evokes various associations, most of which are related to some kind of pet: cuteness, playfulness, a carefree or light-hearted nature, and a sense of not being as 'serious' as a human person. These associations are also conventionally understood as stereotypical feminine traits, and this is reaffirmed by the main use of the term in popular culture. For example, the Playboy Bunnies, a term that refers to women associated with the Playboy magazine brand. Labelling a gym member who only utilises the cardio machines as a 'cardio bunny' or even 'cardio queen'[48] is therefore deployed as a derogatory, feminising term meant to emphasise the cardio bunny's lack of seriousness or commitment to working out and also their (apparently misplaced) devotion to a single form of exercise. I have gathered this through ethnography as well as through textually analysing fitness media, such as the articles mentioned in the Introduction. Criticism and discipline of the cardio bunny is underpinned by a masculine preference for weightlifting and male-coded knowledge and cultural capital of being a 'proper' gym user. The reason that being a cardio bunny is portrayed as an undesirable identity is partially because of the current trend in the health and fitness industry

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[48] Cardio queen also draws from the use of queen in gay men's subculture, both as a derogatory descriptor of effeminate gay men, and as a name that indicates a preoccupation or obsession.

to emphasise strength training, an umbrella term that accounts for weightlifting, combat training, body weight exercises and functional training[49]. Strength training and cardio-only approaches are highly gendered, with the maleness of strength training constructed as legitimate and authentic, and the perceived femininity of cardio-only exercise portrayed in mainstream fitness media as inauthentic, immature and misguided. In fitness media, the cardio bunny is constructed as a fit female subject that has failed to meet the criteria as an ideal member of fitness culture[50]. In short, analysis of the cardio bunny will indicate what types of feminine performance and embodiment are acceptable as part of a fitness discourse, and which are deemed unacceptable or insufficient. Through this, I suggest how the cardio bunny offers resistance to normative constructions of fit femininity. Engaging with theoretical concepts of intra-action and interactionism will assist in unpacking feminist materiality and exploring the nature of docile bodies that do not perform ideally.

Popular discourse surrounding the cardio bunny is generally couched in the idea that the subject is seeking to improve their fitness practice, exemplified by article titles such as 'Don't be a cardio bunny' (Tuma, 2015, from *Fitness Trainer* magazine), 'Cardio bunny? Stop it! Stop it now!' (Lee, 2012, from SoheeLeeFit, the blog of a female fitness coach) and 'How you can stop being a cardio bunny today' (This Fit Chick, 2014, the blog of a female health coach). The cultural figure of the cardio bunny is one of the mainstream representations of women in fitness. Cardio bunnies are often seen as inauthentic and naïve, who put in tokenistic effort in the gym (walking on a treadmill while watching television, an activity that is also conventionally misread as passive) to display their slim bodies. The cardio bunny is

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[49] Functional training refers to a style of training that is low-budget and draws from CrossFit practices, including carrying weighted sacks, swinging heavy ropes and pushing weighted sleighs.
[50] Although men can be cardio bunnies, this thesis is concerned with how women are read within a male dominated space and will therefore not examine the meaning of the role for men.

read through a series of visual codes and conventions: she is usually white, has long hair in a ponytail, brand name activewear and running shoes, is young (18–30) and slim but not muscular. These women are frequently seen by both men and women as posers – those who crave the cultural capital of gym membership and participation in fitness culture, but do not wholeheartedly subscribe to the practices involved in maintaining this identity.

Femininity and legitimate exercise

Cardio bunnies are constructed through broader cultural narratives that position women's exercise as inferior. Women-only gyms and exercises have historically taught passivity and repetition in exercise, and discouraged the 'masculine' practice of lifting weights. According to Leslea Haravon Collins in a study about feminism and aerobics, women have historically been encouraged to limit their involvement in fitness to aerobic classes, which are seen to 'maintain dominant ideologies of women's powerlessness and sexual commodification' (2002, p. 85). It is important to note that this study, as well as other studies of aerobics[51], have sought to identify the opportunities for empowerment in these classes through concepts of Foucauldian productive power. However, it cannot be ignored that designating gentle group exercises as 'feminine' works to reproduce certain gender stereotypes. Now that weight lifting has been constructed by mainstream media as 'acceptable' and indeed preferable for women as fit subjects to perform, those traditional ways of thinking are actively discouraged and rebuked through associating femininity with physical weakness, inauthenticity and other traits deemed undesirable from a fitness perspective.

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[51] See Markula (1995) 'Firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin: the post-modern aerobicizing female bodies'.

The design, procedures and practices of women's gyms may reaffirm essentialist understandings of how men and women perform fitness differently. Maxine Leeds Craig and Rita Liberti investigate how certain women-only gyms internalise gender differences in exercise rather than 'recognising and negotiating with the social and cultural inequalities between men and women in patriarchy' (2007, p. 676). Their research focuses on circuit gyms such as *Curves*, where workouts are pre-determined by a clockwise rotation through 'stations' of equipment, and members have a set time to work at each station before moving to the next. Through research with focus groups of gym members, Leeds Craig and Liberti argue that the gym and its exercises are organised by the principle that 'women's fitness needs were different than men's' (2007, p. 682); specifically, that women require a non-competitive environment and a fitness regime that can be performed automatically and repetitively, without the need to make choices about which machine to use. The gym members they interviewed conveyed that these gyms felt 'less like a real gym' (2007, p. 684) – an ambiguous assertion, given that 'a real gym' could here mean that the circuit gym is not intimidating and male-dominated, or that it is a derivative facsimile. Leeds Craig and Liberti also found that the space shared striking similarities with the organisation of a kindergarten, including craft-adorned walls, an emphasis on sharing and taking turns, and a shift towards sociability as the main function of the gym rather than the work (2007, p. 684). This reproduces an association between immaturity/infantilism and femininity that is visible across many representations of traditional female roles. Cardio bunny practices convey a similar underpinning ideology: cardio is repetitive, requires little strategising or adaptation, and the main activity is less about work and more about socialising, such as chatting with other nearby members, talking on the phone, or in the case of newer gyms with internet-compatible cardio machines, using social media. These traits suggest a naturalisation of normative gender

roles for women, which, in a double-bind, women are both expected to accept and criticised for enacting.

Although cardio bunnies are seen in the fitness community as embodying and performing an acceptance of conventional, normative feminine traits, it is important to draw a distinction between performing an action and complying with the meanings associated with an action. Roberta Sassatelli, in an ethnographic account of British and Italian gyms, argues that 'embodied action is not necessarily embodied practice' (2010, p. 19). The implication for this thesis is that practicing a cardio regime as a sole form of exercise does mean that the subject has accepted the cultural ideals prescribed to the action. In fact, many articles that detail a writer's experiences of moving beyond the cardio bunny identity indicate a multitude of reasons for solely using cardio machines at the gym. These include feelings of intimidation from trainers, staff or other gym goers, being inexperienced and unsure of which machines to use and how, and a fear of being seen as 'out of place'. Limiting oneself to a perceived 'safe' space demonstrates awareness of spaces or practices that are 'unsafe', even if the individual does not have a deeper understanding of what constructs those boundaries. Rather than embodying acceptance of one's allotted place without question, the category of the cardio bunny signifies awareness of social stratification, and performs work to fit into the scene. Here, the cardio bunny is 'succeeding' in complying with notions of passive and decorative femininity, but she 'fails' to fit in with the expectations of the fitness field. On the other hand, the woman who lifts (which will be focused on in more detail in the next section) is seen as transgressing gender boundaries, but is conferred power and status because she is complying with the masculinity of the gym.

The rift between performing ideal femininity while simultaneously enacting an imperfect, fit identity is effected through the relationship between how the body is used and how the body is read by an audience. Jacques Jackson and Antonia Lyons conducted a series of focus groups intending to study a group of men and women's responses to body and beauty ideals. Participants were shown photos of men and women that were the result of image searches featuring 'sexy', 'thin' or 'average' as keywords. They noted that the participants in the case study often made judgements of the images by linking physical attributes with non-physical attributes. That is, the participants were not only analysing the images from a perspective of physical attractiveness, but they were also making inferences about the subjects' personalities as a causal result of this attractiveness.

> Here, these 'sexy' women are constructed as empty and without purpose. They are
> derided for 'just' appealing to men's sexual drives and for not seeming 'nurturing'
> (an attribute associated with traditional femininity). In contrast, the male participants
> positioned the average sized women as decent and nice. (Jackson and Lyons, 2012,
> p. 26)

Here, Jackson and Lyons have observed their subjects conflating conventional physical 'sexiness' with the idea that 'sexy' women are unintelligent and devoid of personality, whereas women whose looks are read as 'average' are assumed to be nice or friendly. Applied to the cardio bunny, we must consider the relationship between the body and what it does, and how other gym goers 'read' it. The cardio bunny runs, cycles, or uses the elliptical machine – embodying and demonstrating awareness of assumptions of female passivity, and enacting implicitly how women have traditionally been positioned to exercise – non-competitively, gently, and in a manner that is conducive to socialising. This performance positions the uncritical viewer (those who view the body with a male gaze, including women who have been initiated into the fold of masculine gym practices) to read the body through

problematic assumptions about women. The cardio bunny is a cultural figure that is grounded in femininity and work, and is important for challenging the assumptions of gender roles and fitness culture.

Resisting narratives of exercising 'correctly'

Failure to comply with any role may work as an act of resistance, given that failure highlights the unspoken, internalised assumptions underpinning a subject's performance of identity. Jack Halberstam explores failure as a queer practice that passively subverts and questions dominant ideologies. Halberstam proposes a 'radical masochistic passivity' or 'passively political mode of unbecoming' as an alternative avenue of resistance that operates outside of the coloniser/colonised dichotomy (2011, pp. 131–133). Halberstam's application of this theory is specific to psychoanalytic accounts of historical retellings by or about women of colour, hence the use of the coloniser/colonised binary. Masochistic passivity refers to the psychoanalytic concept of masochism, 'a performed refusal of wholeness, and a demonstration of Deleuze's claim that the masochist's apparent obedience conceals a criticism and a provocation' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 139). Rather than finding resistance in spite of docility, as Foucault suggests, masochistic subjects instead complicate the very notion of obedience by finding resistance in and through apparent docility. Halberstam asks, 'what happens if a woman or feminine subject who occupies a privileged relation to dominant culture occupies her own undoing?' (2011, p. 133). I argue that the cardio bunny provides a response to this hypothetical question. The cardio bunny 'fails' by not conforming to dominant (masculine) practices of gym behaviour, and in doing so is exposing the codes and conventions of fitness culture participation that are largely taken for granted. However, when or if the cardio bunny becomes educated to 'proper' fitness practices and integrates strength training among their cardio work, this form of failure is constructed as temporary, and may

therefore be incorporated back into the governing form of 'common-sense' thinking about fitness culture.

Considering the cardio bunny as a resistive identity involves invoking and critiquing particular forms of embodiment, and integrating those forms to theorise fit femininity. Firstly, drawing from Foucault's docile bodies, the female cardio bunny can be read as a product of 'hyper-conformity', where the fit subject has so fully embraced the prescriptive traits of femininity that they are unable to read the codes of 'correct' gym practice because the codes are traditionally aligned with masculinity. The cardio bunny is mocked for their lack of adaptability to the fitness world, and their incorrect reading of the gym. This perspective, while acknowledging the fraught position women are in negotiating their status as members of fitness culture, does little to highlight the role of the body as a *material* entity, and represents the subject as unable to make choices beyond what the dominant structure has offered. This kind of resistance seems passive, because it is borne not out of agency or a desire to interrogate common-sense roles, but through a fundamental conflict between discourses that construct a fit subject and a female one. Coll's work with the theory of intra-action, conversely, can be applied to read resistance into the cardio bunny at a more individual level and focuses on the materiality of the practice rather than the passive role of hyper-conformity. Intra-action proposes a shift from the discursive approach to the cardio bunny, towards the material. Rather than focusing on how the cardio bunny is positioned as a subject and how their subjectivity influences the fitness and femininity discourse, I argue that the cardio bunny is a mode of embodiment that needs to be separated from the judgement values associated with it. That is, rather than what the cardio bunny *is*, what can she *do*? The cardio bunny is dedicated to and capable of activities such as running, cycling or walking for relatively long periods of time; she has mastered (or is learning to master) specialised

practices and behaviours associated with being a cardio bunny[52]. These modes of embodiment can be re-read outside of connotations with laziness and inauthenticity to fully recognise the material potential of the cardio bunny. This figure can be read as an identity embedded in and predicated upon its relation to a network of others in the fitness field. Behind every cardio bunny's choice to have a strictly cardio-only exercise regime is a dialogue between the subject and advice from fitness professionals, magazine articles, blog posts, conversations with friends and so on. Therefore, assigning fault and attributing moral lack to the cardio bunny's behaviour erases the network of social relationships that construct such a choice. Critique of the cardio bunny needs to take into account these networks, and interrogate the desire to 'blame' an individual for a particular practice.

'She lifts, bro': Female masculinity, masquerade and the 'woman who lifts'

On the other end of the spectrum of fit feminine subjects is the 'woman who lifts': a defiant, muscular, female body often found in the CrossFit community or in the spectacle of women's bodybuilding; or in the slightly less extreme world of fitness modelling. Instead of being seen as 'queens' or 'bunnies', these women are positioned as tomboy archetypes or 'one of the lads', eschewing conventional models of femininity and instead seeking acceptance in a male-dominated fitness subculture. Compared to the cardio bunny, the woman who lifts is only criticised for her practices if she cannot maintain a certain standard of performance, because this will be read as 'posing'. If the cardio bunny is regarded as a successful enactment of femininity, but a failed attempt at participation in the fitness community, the woman who lifts provides an inverse example of a subject who transgresses the boundaries of traditional gender roles, but who complies fervently with cultural expectations of legitimate

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[52] See GQ (2017) 'Why you need to do more cardio', which highlights the work being done by cardio bunnies as important aerobic exercise. Accessed from: https://www.gq.com/story/why-you-need-to-do-more-cardio

gym behaviour. As with the cardio bunny, then, the woman who lifts exemplifies the complex internalised processes of simultaneous resistance and conformity in the field of fitness. I argue that as a form of resistance, the woman who lifts embodies concepts of female masculinity and womanliness-as-masquerade, and physically occupies/re-writes masculine space and practices. However, the woman who lifts (hereby used interchangeably with WWL) also recuperates emphasised femininity to negate their masculine appearances, and the institutions that govern WWL practices (for example, CrossFit gyms, fitness modelling and bodybuilding competitions) discipline the expression of conventional femininity alongside displays of physical strength and extreme musculature. Although there is much scholarly work on female bodybuilding[53], there is a paucity of research that addresses the less extreme and more popular trend of fitness modelling. I will conclude this section with a critique of advertisements for CrossFit goods and services as a way of demonstrating the inner contradictions of WWL culture.

Women's bodybuilding, drag, and the 'dangerous' muscled woman

In order to locate the WWL as a cultural figure, it is necessary to trace its historical trajectory through varied modes of women's body-work culture – specifically, female bodybuilding. Bodybuilding is characterised not only by the practice of building extreme muscle volume and definition, but also through the spectacular display of these results in competitions and exhibitions. These events require participants to cycle through a series of conventional poses clad in fake tan (to highlight muscle definition) and costumes, often swimwear or other revealing clothing. Bodybuilding in Australia is judged in two rounds: the first round is

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[53] For resources on this subject see Shea (2001) 'The paradox of pumping iron: female bodybuilding as resistance and compliance', Richardson (2007) 'Flex-rated! Female bodybuilding: feminist resistance or erotic spectacle?' and McGrath (2009) '"Big freaky-looking women": normalizing gender transgression through bodybuilding'.

judged for 'symmetry', where contestants 'face the judging panel and perform four quarter turns' (iCompeteAustralia.com, n.d., n.p.). The second round is judged for 'muscularity', where contestants must cycle through seven compulsory poses to exhibit each muscle group. Contestants in the bodybuilding category are judged primarily for the size and symmetry of their muscles. Female bodybuilders problematise the assumed and shared cultural norms of male and female bodies because their bodies are encouraged to be entirely hard and large, instead of soft, slim or curvy. Although male bodybuilders are often considered to represent physical excess, they may also signify an exaggerated extension of the cultural expectations for male bodies to occupy more space, and to be hard and large.

Female bodybuilders and the criticism they attract highlight the inverted set of expectations for women's bodies: to occupy less space, and to be soft and small. St Martin and Gavey explore the concept of the female bodybuilder in terms of whether it interrogates and destabilises gender norms, or recuperates them. They argue that female bodybuilders do reaffirm traditional norms of the female body through an emphasised performance of femininity, but that these practices 'do not preclude feminist resistance' (St Martin and Gavey, 1996, p. 54). St Martin and Gavey propose that 'if we read bodybuilding and women's bodybuilding as cultural texts, then it is possible to interpret women's bodybuilding as a challenging and destabilizing social practice' (1996, p. 55). This is because their muscular bodies, and the femininity that is practiced to negate masculinity, are so exaggerated that they draw attention to the expectations that gender roles are 'natural'. St Martin and Gavey's essay intentionally avoids labelling female bodybuilding as either uncritically resistive or entirely problematic and compliant with dominant ideology. They do this to illustrate that physical culture always has the capacity for both resistance and conformity. I will be following their approach in this chapter in an effort to not define WWL

in rigid terms of cultural and social value. Rather, I will address the relationships between gender, the body and the physical work enacted in fitness spaces to demonstrate that WWL have capacities for both subversion and reification of norms, depending on the context.

Female bodybuilding is so overt and spectacular in its performance of gender that this construction of womanhood seems bizarre, displaced and exaggerated. Alan Mansfield and Barbara McGinn contend that 'the female muscled body is so dangerous that the proclamation of gender must be made very loudly indeed' (1993, p. 64). This suggests that when a woman participates in an activity that is traditionally designated as masculine, there is pressure for her to balance this out with excessive femininity – so much so that it may appear almost 'unnatural'. The concepts of masquerade and drag are useful to explore the cultural work of female bodybuilding and examine how displays of hyper-femininity can interrogate the tenets of traditional gender roles. Joan Riviere describes womanliness as masquerade; a performance that is undertaken to avoid punishment for transgression:

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it…my suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference [between masquerade and genuine womanliness]; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing. (1929/2005, p. 113)

Rivere proposes that women can take advantage of the constructedness of so-called feminine attributes and use them to their advantage. In terms of WWL and female bodybuilders, Riviere's argument suggests that female bodybuilders are an overstated version of how femininity is constantly performed in everyday life. Therefore, the excessive displays of femininity in women's bodybuilding may expose the artifice of gender and the actions a subject must perform to negotiate their agency among social structures. Female bodybuilders

are capable of using the artifice of gender to their advantage to transgress gender and body norms.

Drag is a form of masquerade that exposes the construction of gender and queers normative gender signifiers. What is conventionally known as drag is where a person of one gender (typically masculine) impersonates another (usually feminine). However, the goal here is not to 'pass' as a woman, but to embody garish, stereotypical and hyperbolic signifiers of womanhood including excessive make-up, costumes (such as an extravagant evening gown and high stilettos not often seen in public) and a tongue-in-cheek, often overtly sexual demeanour. Drag is often couched in a theatrical performance of some kind, such as singing or lip-syncing to songs by female musicians. Butler's definition of drag includes the subject performing their gender; that is, a woman can 'drag' as a woman because her hyper-feminine 'performance' contradicts her masculine or less feminine 'essence'. Conversely, a female bodybuilder's masculine performance is meant to contradict her feminine essence. Both contradictions dismantle the truth of a gender essence, 'and so displace the entire enactment of gender significations from the discourse of truth and falsity' (Butler, 1990, p. 210). This means that drag exposes the fact that gender should not be viewed in terms of its accuracy or authenticity; rather, it is fundamentally performative. Butler proposes that 'drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity' (1990, p. 210). Returning again to female bodybuilders, their performance of multiple 'gender' identities reveals the process by which both are constructed and reiterated. This in turn dismantles the notion of a singular, whole 'feminine' or 'masculine' identity.

Fitness modelling and corrective femininity

The more contemporary iteration of female bodybuilding is the world of female fitness

modelling, which includes categories such as 'figure' and 'bikini'. Generally, fitness models

do not possess as much muscle mass as bodybuilders, and are seen as more desirable when

toned rather than big (see fig. 7). While the invocation of the word 'fitness' seems to reflect a

stronger emphasis on health and the performance of being fit, the categories for these

competitions extend their scoring criteria beyond muscle quality/size and include face shape

and expression of femininity or beauty. While observing a fitness modelling competition at

the 2016 Australian Health and Fitness Expo as part of my ethnographic research, I noted the

appearances of high-scoring men and women. One of the differences I observed was that the

high-scoring women had little to no definition of the muscles in the buttocks (resulting in

smooth, firm, round and lifted buttocks), whereas the high-scoring men displayed hard,

muscled buttocks with each muscle group clearly contrasted. This example illustrates the

barriers of gender difference in fitness modelling or body-work competitions, because

compliance with gender roles is an implicit category of scoring criteria. Both male and

female competitors are expected to be muscular, but it is *how* and *where* they are muscular

that is determined by assumptions of what gendered bodies look like.

Fig. 7 – 'Am I a female bikini or fitness model?' from iCompeteAustralia.com (n.d.).

Left: Bikini model, toned. Right: Fitness model, sharp.

In women's fitness modelling and in female bodybuilding, the performance of femininity is exaggerated to compensate for perceived maleness. However, the performance of femininity is less like drag in fitness modelling than it is in female bodybuilding. While the extreme appearance of a female bodybuilder draws the feminine aspects of her appearance (for example, make-up, colour of bikini and painted nails) into sharp relief, feminine traits in the fitness modelling field are more understated. Traits that score highly include smaller muscle mass; toned muscles rather than large or defined ones; softer-looking buttocks and breasts; and facial attractiveness. This could suggest that the resistive aspects of female bodybuilding are incorporated back into naturalised ideologies of what mundane, everyday expressions of femininity should look and act like, meaning that female fitness competitions may not perform the same kind of 'drag' critique of gender as bodybuilding competitions.

Resistance training?: A CrossFit case study

If female bodybuilding and fitness modelling are public spectacles performed at special times and places, then women's CrossFit is the private, everyday, 'backstage' work of the WWL. CrossFit is a high-intensity workout program that draws from exercises designed for elite athletes, military personnel, police training and martial artists (Hentges, 2014, p. 34). CrossFit spaces (referred to as 'boxes' by CrossFit practitioners[54]) are often minimalist, evoking an aesthetic of garages, warehouses and unembellished industrial areas fitted with basic workout equipment. The actual workout emphasises variety, and encourages a new workout every day, called 'workout of the day' or 'WOD'. Common exercises include variations of weightlifting such as deadlifts, 'clean and jerk', bench-presses and squats, as well as bodyweight exercises like burpees or jumping rope. This exercise regime has carved out a new subculture in the fitness community, with practitioners forming tight-knit groups, developing their own vernacular and producing CrossFit-specific apparel and equipment lines. There are also CrossFit competitions, often appearing as part of health and fitness exhibitions such as the Australian Fitness Expo, where practitioners, usually in teams representing their 'boxes', are divided into men's and women's groups to perform a WOD, and are graded solely on technique. Significantly, appearance is not a criterion. From my own observation of a CrossFit exhibition contest at the 2016 Australian Fitness Expo, the glamour and 'drag' elements of the fitness modelling were notably absent. Female participants here wore sports tape on vulnerable shoulders and knees, had chalk on their hands, wore their hair in neat ponytails or buns and had no visible make-up, grunted and shouted in exertion, and wore simple fitness apparel stained with sweat. For example, contestants may wear a plain t-shirt with the sleeves cut off and black leggings. Absent were the fashion-forward stylings of

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[54] For a comprehensive list of CrossFit terminology, see blogger Tim Huntley's (2012) 'CrossFit terms, acronyms and jargon'. Accessed from: http://myathleticlife.com/2012/01/crossfit-terms-love/

Lorna Jane, Running Bare or Lululemon. Additionally, many participants wore plain-coloured team tops, with the name of their box printed on the back. It is conceivable that contestants in the fitness, figure or bikini modelling competitions take on a similar appearance when training and preparing to compete. However, the important distinction is that they undergo a transition from training to exhibition, don ceremonial costume and exhibit their physique rather than their technique.

CrossFit training is revealing in terms of how prescriptive gender roles may be problematised through fitness. Outwardly, it appears that CrossFit and WWL do important cultural work to reverse and subvert stereotypes of women's practices at the gym. However, this subversion is embedded in internalised notions of women's essential weaknesses and inferiority. Typical signifiers of femininity are traded for signifiers of masculinity, and 'undesirable' traits of femininity (such as slimness, softness, dieting and make-up) are considered to be negative. Furthermore, femininity is asserted in ways that blend 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits together, for example, pink boxing gloves. The presentation of an empowered, feminist femininity as a masculine one may seem problematic, because it asserts that women should adopt masculinity in order to be seen as equal, implying that femininity is always-already in a position of inequality. Female masculinity as a theoretical concept was articulated in detail by Halberstam. Halberstam seeks to define masculinity 'without men' and proposes that 'masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects' (1998, p. 1). This displaces the privileged characteristics of masculinity away from biological determinism and works to make visible the 'common-sense' processes of gender roles.

Here, the expression of masculinity in women's CrossFit and WWL does not imitate maleness, but works to explain how masculinity is constructed. In other words, female masculinity facilitates a divorcing of masculinity from maleness, and allows for the negotiation of gender roles. 'Thick to Thin' is a crowdfunded apparel company and self-styled community for female CrossFitters that presents a clear adherence to female masculinity. The clothing is women's size and fit, but the slogans resemble those of male-driven CrossFit companies and institutions. The mindfulness-centred positive-attitude of Lorna Jane apparel is replaced with aggressive but exuberant language typical of CrossFit media. Slogans include 'Mom in BEAST mode!', 'I lift like a girl'[55] and 'Help me, I'm sore'[56] (Kickstarter, 2017). Although some of the other slogans from this collection evoke a disciplinarian, 'authentic' attitude towards the body[57] found in more 'feminine' fitspiration media, this company mostly interpellates a subject who is female, but who values and strives for toughness, bravery and an outgoing and carefree persona characteristic of the tomboy. Womanhood and femininity is invoked strongly through terms like 'girl' and 'mom', so that the viewer is interpellated to read these slogans and associated practices as not a mimicry of maleness, but as a re-reading of masculinity by and for women.

The body is a significant site for the transmission and reception of fitness ideology. The body performs the physical work and bears the visible outcomes of fitness. Of the practices we undertake, our bodies are ascribed with both the cause and effect – the body is simultaneously part of the process and the product. The types of bodies this chapter has discussed represent two archetypal extremes of postfeminist feminine materiality and subjectivity in the women's

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[55] 'Girl' is presented in flowing script, contrasted to the bold sans-serif type of the rest of the copy.
[56] This slogan makes reference to the quote 'Help me, I'm poor' made by Kristen Wiig from the 2010 film *Bridesmaids*, a text strongly aligned with tomboyishness and female masculinity.
[57] For example, 'excuses don't burn calories', 'Real perfect' (perfect is crossed out), or 'sweat now, wine later' (Kickstarter, 2017).

fitness scene. Both work to balance, integrate and negotiate various combinations of masculinity and femininity, appearance and function, passivity and activity. The ideologies being worked through in these bodies are beginning to emerge as conscious processes, often in relation to the other; for example, statements by fitness bloggers reflecting on their pasts as cardio bunnies who were ignorant of the more authentic and well-regarded practices of the fitness community, but who then reformed: 'I *used to be* a cardio bunny' or 'I don't *want* to look bulky'. These statements are indicative of how 'correct' behaviour (both as a fit subject and also a female one) is internalised and enacted. This chapter has aimed to explain how the cardio bunny and the woman who lifts engage with gender difference, feminist practice, resistance and conformity. Neither figure is more or less legitimate than the other. Each has its own strategies of negotiating resistance to normative representations of gender, and each also has its own way of performing compliance with such representations.

The cardio bunny is often an object of derision in the mainstream gym community for her single-minded preoccupation with a mode of exercise now considered outdated. This derision stems from the association of using cardio machines (and the kind of bodily appearance this produces) with passivity and the perceived feminine practice of deceiving men about their own interests to attract attention. While the cardio bunny could be read as a type of docile body, who resists typical fitness practices to adhere to prescriptive notions of traditional gender roles, I have chosen to reconceptualise the cardio bunny as a subject of artful failure. The cardio bunny resists dominant ideology through 'political unbecoming' or a masochistic passivity that challenges the idea of obedience by operating beyond the dichotomy of oppressor/oppressed. By doing this, the cardio bunny is able to expose the expectations and naturalised assumptions that underpin participation in the fitness cultural community. However, this chapter is not an uncritical valorisation of the cardio bunny; female cardio

bunny subjects contribute to the gender segregation of gym space (and are also imposed upon by it), and perpetuate ideals of a fit feminine subject by policing themselves and others.

On the other side of the fit body spectrum is the woman who lifts. This figure may initially appear agentic in challenging the gender binary and feminine essentialism. Her physicality puts her corporeally on par with men, and her body demonstrates a disciplined drive to construct herself as she wants. Compared to the cardio bunny, the WWL appears to enact a failure to conform to gender expectations within mainstream culture, but succeeds at performing legitimate fitness behaviours and is therefore conferred power and status within the fitness community. Additionally, her 'failure' at femininity results in the adaptation of masculinity, which is seen as more favourable than the inverse failure at masculinity through the adaptation of femininity. However, this must not be read simply as an assimilation of female resistance by patriarchy. Instead it may rework mainstream conceptualisations of masculinity as male, and indeed femininity as female. Therefore, the WWL may work to problematise assumptions of how men and women behave, and how they use their bodies to engage with these assumptions.

Chapter Five

Que(e)rying the Fit Subject: Queer Women and Fitness Culture

When I joined a gym in 2014, I felt hyper-visible as a queer[58] Other. I wore men's singlets and cut-off track-pants; I had piercings, tattoos, asymmetrically cropped hair; and, perhaps most noticeable and coded, visible body hair. One day at the gym, I noticed 'Tegan and Sara' – an indie music group comprising Canadian twin sisters, Tegan and Sara Quin, who both publicly identify as lesbians – in a music video on one of the three central televisions. The music video for 'Body Work' by Morgan Page with Tegan and Sara, featured the sisters as workers in a gym, dressed in long denim men's shirts with the sleeves cut off or rolled up, listlessly standing and performing menial jobs. While this is occurring, the gym members in the background – all of whom are muscled, tanned, tall and clad in revealing fitness apparel – perform their own fitness routines, occasionally with a coordinated dance break at the song's chorus. At one point, one of the male members lifts the sisters – one on each shoulder – and starts to perform squats. Seeing this video at that particular time and place cemented for me what it felt like to be queer in a gym space that feels overwhelmingly heteronormative. In the video, the Quins were invisible to the other gym members (in part because of their status as workers) and hyper-visible (to be used as decoration or even tools), gesturing to the wider culture's approaches to sexual diversity and queerness.

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[58]The term 'queer' has multiple meanings in this thesis. In the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) community, queer is an umbrella term for individuals whose sexuality and/or gender is non-normative. In the academic sense, queer refers to a way of thinking critically beyond the norm in terms of sexuality, race and gender, which I will define in depth later in this chapter. Although I choose here to self-identify as queer, signifying both my sexuality and cultural understanding of the diversity of gender and sexuality, for the sake of avoiding confusion I will henceforth use LGBT to refer to the sexual orientation, and queer in the academic context.

In this chapter I will argue that in the context of women's fitness culture, LGBT women experience a duality of being invisible (where their sexuality is silenced to maintain the ruling status of heteronormativity) and hyper-visible (where their orientation becomes the defining feature of their identity). This limits the potential of the queer community to represent themselves in the context of fitness culture, and may also reinforce these limitations through either preventing queer women from participating or only allowing participation in prescribed ways. This occurs through representations of LGBT women/queerness in fitness media, the physical space of the gym itself, and in various fitness practices. LGBT women are able to negotiate the discomfort of being marginalised or Othered in this culture by blurring the boundaries of public/private or by 'passing' as straight. However, these strategies often function to incorporate LGBT people into the fitness field, under the condition that their queerness remains irrelevant to their participation in fitness, rather than questioning or resisting the exclusive tendencies of the field itself.

I will use Jillian Michaels – a prominent fitness celebrity who identifies as a gay woman – as the main case study in this chapter to examine how LGBT women are positioned and represented in fitness culture. Celebrities are sites of 'media attention and personal aspiration, as well as one of the key places where cultural meanings are negotiated and organised' (Turner, 2004/2014, p. 4). Thus, the way Michaels is represented is part of a wider framework of modes of address for queer women. Analysis of Michaels allows us to unpack cultural understandings of the intersections of queerness, femininity, postfeminism and fitness culture. It is my argument that Michaels – and queer women in fitness more broadly – are included or incorporated into fitness culture conditionally, where their queer bodies and practices are reinscribed to conform to the postfeminist sensibilities of femininity that fitness culture enables.

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The first section of this chapter is concerned with how the queer fit body is constructed for a mainstream, heteronormative audience. I propose that Michaels is represented as a woman first, and as gay second, to appeal to a heterosexual audience and undermine the importance of queer identity politics. I will unpack the relationship between feminine presentation and LGBT identity in connection with how femininity is deployed to temper the masculine characteristics of athletic prowess and a muscular body, and in doing so will critique how Michaels is conveyed as a queer subject given her public identity as a fit feminine subject. The second section investigates the boundaries of public/private in the lives of celebrities and the politics of 'coming out' in a fitness media context, using Michaels' coming out as an example. Queer theory is significant to this chapter because it offers ways of reading fitness culture beyond its ideal heteronormative reading, which in turn provides opportunity for participation and contestation by marginalised groups. I demonstrate that while LGBT women like Michaels have access to strategies that negotiate the problematic aspects of fitness culture so that they may participate, the more pertinent question is whether it is possible to que(e)ry the culture of fitness itself, as an institution that claims to offer conditional empowerment and growth for only those who conform to prescriptive body and gender ideals.

Fit but femme: Femininity, fitness and the queer body

Jillian Michaels is an American celebrity trainer who rose to popularity in her role as a trainer in reality TV show *The Biggest Loser*[59] between 2004 and 2013. She has since produced

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[59]*The Biggest Loser* is a reality TV show in which overweight contestants compete for a cash prize by losing the most weight relative to their starting weight. The contestants are divided into two teams, and each team is assigned a trainer.

several television programs[60], workout videos and weight loss programs[61], and is a public motivational speaker in the health and fitness industry. Michaels is white, slim but lightly-muscled, and presents as feminine with key 'feminine' signifiers such as long hair, make-up and jewellery, and is often seen on the show wearing form-fitting clothing like sports bras and leggings or shorts. Her femininity is not only alluded to by her appearance; she is also a wife and mother. Michaels identifies as 'gay', and has been in a relationship with a woman, with whom she has two children, since 2009[62]. There are two crucial aspects to Michaels' identity that I want to explore in this chapter to analyse how queerness is included (or excluded) fitness culture. Firstly, Michaels is constructed and viewed as feminine in her appearance. This may be done to resolve the more masculine aspects of her identity (including her being gay, athletic and commanding or forceful as a trainer on the show) so that her persona is appealing and aspirational to a heterosexual audience – women can aspire to be her, men can desire her. Secondly, Michaels is private about her sexuality and her personal life. Any discussion of her orientation or her partner is reserved for interviews in magazines or on talk shows, and is never mentioned on *The Biggest Loser* or her other programs. Michaels performs her sexuality in a way that is consistent with heteronormative expectations of queerness, that is, her sexuality is seen as apolitical, private and desexualised with the effect that it does not disrupt the dominant ideology of heterosexuality. Where Michaels has the potential to represent herself or be represented as a queer subject given her sexual orientation, she is instead represented as a gay woman within the confines of compulsory heterosexuality and normative gender roles. These aspects of Michaels' public persona reveal how queer identity politics are concealed in women's fitness culture.

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[60]This includes a weight-loss reality show similar to *The Biggest Loser* called *Losing it with Jillian* (2010), as well as a reality show about her own life called *Just Jillian* (2016).
[61]See https://www.jillianmichaels.com/ for programs and video titles.
[62]Michaels and her partner announced their separation in June, 2018, several months after this chapter had been written.

Who or what is a queer subject?

Before exploring Michaels' representational capacity as a gay woman to que(e)ry the institution of fitness, it is helpful to identify what queer subjectivity is, and what queer can mean as an action. Queer reading practices seek to negotiate heterosexist or normative ideology in media and make space for queer possibilities. Alexander Doty defines 'queer' as 'an attitude, a way of responding, that begins in a place not concerned with, or limited by, notions of binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm' (1993, p. xv). Doty contends that a queer reading position can be adopted regardless of the reader's sexual orientation or gender identity, due to a text's influences and cultural contexts (1993, p. i). This represents queerness as an 'open and flexible space' (Doty, 1993, p. xv) where boundaries and identities may be negotiated. Doty's theory seeks to dissociate gay/lesbian sexual orientations from signifiers associated with queerness, including style, politics and sexual proclivities so that queerness is read less as a collection of behaviours and practices and more as a way of thinking; this allows queerness to transform any/all heterosexual practices, texts and attitudes. Doty conceptualises this as a 'mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistencies and intensity', or a 'consciously chosen site of resistance and a location of radical openness and possibility' (Doty, 1993, pp. 2–3). This allows for the reading and re-reading of queerness, with its resistance, questioning and transformative potential, in texts and cultural practices that are perceived as heteronormative or prescriptive of dominant gender roles.

Michaels' celebrity status in fitness culture may be read as a queering of fitness, but as she is represented as heteronormative, this makes queer readings less accessible. In order to identify how Michaels is identified as normatively feminine to offset her masculine traits, it is necessary to first examine why lesbian desire is commonly perceived as masculine. Notable

theorists who have attempted to disentangle the naturalised connection between sex, gender and sexual desire include Judith Butler, who proposes that gender is performative; that it is 'constituting the identity it is purported to be…gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' (1990, p. 34). This suggests that the doing of gender (that is, sexual desire) is what constructs the subject as a particular gender in the first place; 'the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed' (Butler, 1990, p. 195). Therefore, through the lens of heteronormativity, when a person has sexual desire for women they are constructed as masculine; and when that desire is for men, they are feminine. When these boundaries are transgressed, the ideology underpinning the gender/sexuality link is made visible and may be challenged. This is evident in queer sexualities where individuals who are read as female, for example, perform maleness through sexual interest with other women.

The perceived link between lesbian desire and masculinity has also been critiqued by Teresa De Lauretis. De Lauretis interrogates the implicit sexism of the phrase 'sexual difference' as a means of reproducing lesbian invisibility. She claims that while 'sexual difference' is helpful for creating 'a critical space…in which women could address themselves to women', the emphasis on sexual difference 'obscures the effects of other differences in women's psychological oppression' (De Lauretis, 1988/1993, p. 141), that is, other intersecting aspects of identity. De Lauretis proposes instead that sexual difference be read as sexual 'indifference'; where queer women are seen to have the same desires as heterosexual men, and are viewed as masculine. Here, De Lauretis draws from Monique Wittig's proposition that 'lesbians are not women' (1981/1993, p. 105), an assertion which attempts to sidestep the restrictive heteronormative understandings of bodies and gender.

Women are culturally imagined and not born, and, in turn, that lesbians, because of heterosexuality's rigid two-gender system, are not women…a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society. (Wittig, 1981, p. 105)

Wittig advocates for the representation of lesbians as a category separate from women because of the underlying enforced heterosexuality that accompanies 'woman'. Here, the category of lesbian is represented as almost a separate gender in itself. This perspective seeks to redefine the relationship between gender and sexuality, and proposes that gender is enacted by sexuality. If women are constructed on the basis of their heterosexuality, then lesbians are not constructed as women. Wittig's argument is important as it establishes the foundation for the representation of queer women beyond the normative binary system of gender and sexuality.

The aforementioned perspectives introduce the possibility of various permutations of sexuality, sex and gender and effectively challenge how gender is constructed. One of the methods by which this is embodied is through butch-femme relationships – lesbian relationships where one person performs femininity and the other performs masculinity through appearance, occupation and interests, sexual activity and division of domestic labour. Sue Ellen Case regards this pairing as the ideal feminist subject, proposing that feminism must avoid the construction of a 'female' subject, 'who is always-already locked in a heterosexual ideology' (1988/1993, p. 294). A feminist subject is 'conscious of herself both inside and outside that ideology, is capable of changing the conditions of her existence' (Case, 1988/1993, p. 294). This position draws from De Lauretis' work on the feminist subject who is 'at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of

being so' (De Lauretis, 1988, p. 110). Case extends this statement to the performance of butch-femme couples:

> These roles qua roles [butch-femme couples] lend agency and self-determination to the historically passive subject, providing her with at least two options for gender identification and with the aid of camp, an irony that allows her perception to be constructed from outside ideology, with a gender role that makes her appear as if she is inside of it. (1988/1993, p. 301)

While Case is not suggesting that all feminists become lesbians, or that all lesbians adopt a butch-femme aesthetic, she does encourage camp and playfulness in the construction of a feminist identity to resist being 'trapped' in patriarchal ideology. At the core of this ability to play with the construction of gender/sex roles (rather than into them) is the concept of masquerade. Masquerade is invoked often in feminist theory to describe a process of self-consciously donning a particular role to subvert the idea that such a role is ever 'natural' (Riviere, 1929/2005, p. 113). Mary Ann Doane further developed this concept in the 1980s through feminist film theory, proposing that women who emphasise their femininity to excess (particularly in terms of costuming in cinema) are 'flaunting femininity… hold[ing] it at a distance' (1982, p. 81). In a butch-femme couple, the butch woman masquerades as masculine and 'proudly displays the possession of the penis' (Case, 1988/1993, p. 300). The femme performs womanliness as masquerade 'to hide her desire for masculinity' (Case, 1988/1993, p. 300). The construction of butch-femme identities are presented explicitly as roles rather than essentialist 'birth-rights' (Case, 1988/1993, p. 300), and therefore expose the construction of gender roles taken for granted as well as offering an alternative. This is relevant for examining how De Lauretis' theory of sexual indifference and its impact on gender can be embodied, and how these performances can effect change in gender representation.

The consumable lesbian body

In mainstream media, lesbians are often represented as feminine despite their sexual
'indifference' which arguably assimilates lesbians into the category of women so that gender
norms can be upheld. Queer studies scholars have theorised the construction of a queer or
lesbian body as subject to the desires of a heterosexual audience, and advocate for a body
politics that playfully reveals the artifice of the 'natural' signifiers of being female and/or
LGBT. Ann Ciasullo contends that mainstream media 'produce and reproduce particular
lesbian bodies while effacing other, equally legitimate – and perhaps even more
conventionally "lesbian" bodies' (2001, p. 578). In particular, she posits that femme lesbians
are constructed as the archetype of lesbian bodies, despite butchness being seen as the more
prominent lesbian archetype within the lesbian community. Ciasullo suggests that while the
butch 'is more able to challenge mainstream cultural fantasies about lesbianism' (2001, p.
578), the femme lesbian is more marketable to both heterosexual and homosexual audiences
because it is more closely aligned with existing normative ideals of femininity, beauty and
sexual desire. The intention for mass appeal necessitates that the femme lesbian body is 'both
sexualised and de-sexualised', constructed 'just like conventionally attractive straight
women' (Ciasullo, 2001, p. 578.), but her desire for other women is simultaneously
suppressed in these representations.

Farr and Degroult expand on Ciasullo's interpretation of the femme lesbian through their
analysis of *The L Word* (2004–2009), a popular Showtime television series depicting a
friendship group of lesbian women in Los Angeles. While the show is often seen as pivotal
for its depiction of lesbian sex and relationships, Farr and Degroult identify the inadequacies
of its representation of lesbian women beyond those who are stereotypically feminine, white
and middle class. Among the six main characters (Shane, Alice, Bette, Tina, Jenny and

Dana), five present as stereotypically feminine – they are all slim[63], four of the five are white, they wear jewellery and feminine clothing, and the women with whom they have sexual or romantic relationships possess the same feminine characteristics, conveying the idea that feminine lesbian desire and presentation is the main form of lesbian desire and presentation. Farr and Degroult state that a consumable butch body is constructed in *The L Word*; it acknowledges butch identities in lesbian communities, but feminises them for the palate of the heterosexual audience (2008, p. 432). In the series, this role is played by the character Shane – a white, promiscuous, androgynous woman who has working class origins. Shane is constructed as the most masculine character of the core group, but still embodies hegemonic 'feminine' traits such as being a hairdresser, being slim and wearing make-up. Farr and Degroult see this as demonstrative of how lesbians in *The L Word* 'are created in a manner that allows the mainstream heterosexual audience to regard them firstly as women, and secondly as lesbian' (2008, p. 425). The need to reclaim femininity 'from' lesbianism, and the construction of femininity as a balm for the threat of homosexuality raises questions about how women's sexual desire is perceived.

The commercialised representation of lesbian women for a mainstream audience can be examined through the concept of 'commodity lesbianism'. Danae Clark writes about 'commodity lesbianism' as a form of 'gay window advertising' (1991/1993, p. 187), where queer people are addressed through codes which are subtle enough to appeal to both queer and straight audiences and as such produce varying readings from specific audiences. Commodity lesbianism refers to the commodification of queer iconography or cultural capital

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[63]It is worth noting that despite the main characters' slim bodies, there are few episodes featuring scenes in which the characters go to the gym or do any kind of exercise (apart from Dana Fairbanks, the celebrity tennis player character). The characters are often seen eating salads and drinking Diet Coke, however. This suggests that their figures are constructed more as slim than fit or toned, and the work to maintain these bodies is done more through food than exercise. This naturalises the concept of slimness as associated with femininity.

to interpellate queer women as consumers loyal to a brand that espouses heteronormative ideology, and to transform the terms associated with their products into ones that fit back into those ideologies. Clark argues that gay window advertising and commodity lesbianism 'allows a space for lesbian identification, but must necessarily deny the representation of lesbian identity politics…the result of this tension is that capitalists welcome homosexuals as consuming subjects but not as social subjects' (1991/1993, p. 195). Other examples of commodity lesbianism include using androgynous fashion models or actors as tokens (but not a queer couple), designed to quell fears of a corporation's homophobia or exclusion, but which constructs these actors as objects or tools, similar to Tegan and Sara being used as weights to be lifted or drones to carry out intentionally repetitive work. Suzanna Walters problematises the labelling of products/symbols[64] as 'queer' because:

> These shifting signifiers of 'queer' are never simply our [queer people's] own products, located solely in some subcultural netherworld, but instead they move uneasily in and out of the 'mainstream' as it recodes and cannibalises these new images, icons, activisms. (2005, p. 7)

Walters calls for awareness of the commercialising and apparent mainstream acceptance of 'queer' signifiers, because they are always-already embedded in the rhetoric of capitalism, and may easily be re-integrated to serve the interests of selling products, rather than the interests of queer representation and identity politics. This notion is similar to that of commodity feminism, where the rhetoric of feminism is 'rerouted through the logic of commodities' (Goldman, Heath and Smith, 1991, p. 8) so that companies may court a certain audience while reincorporating feminist language to become aligned with consumer goods.

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[64]Some of the signifiers Walters lists include 'tattoos', 'dildos', 'Michelangelo', 'go-go girls' and 'Foucault' (2005, p. 7).

The aims of queer theory, to some extent, represent an antithesis of postfeminism, where the recuperation of gender roles that characterise postfeminism is disregarded in favour of a more radical politics of approaching gender and sexuality. This becomes problematic when, through increasing visibility in the public and mainstream sphere, queerness becomes associated with consumer products and practices, and invariably embraces some of the identity-construction practices around empowerment and individual style as encouraged by postfeminism. When concepts of queerness converge with how femininity is perceived and (re)produced, the resulting queer, female bodies are objects of the male gaze and the heterosexual gaze. When queerness is recognised in mainstream fitness media, it is often in a commodified, ambiguous form. The Lorna Jane clothing line has recently started branding some of their apparel items with the word 'tomboy', a term employed often to describe queer women[65], especially in the commercial sense to appeal to the queer women market. This can be interpreted as a fitness example of commodity lesbianism/gay window dressing (Clark, 1983/1993, p. 186). The term tomboy, from the subculture of queer women, could be code for acknowledging lesbian identity. According to a mainstream reading, however, it could be read by heterosexual women as a playful, childlike marker of female masculinity, yet still within the safe boundaries of a heterosexual orientation. This is similar to gay window dressing because while it may allude to acceptance of queer identity, this acceptance is expressed from within the constraints of a capitalist framework, and is problematically marketed towards a majority audience of heterosexual women.

The construction of the queer female body becomes more complicated when located within the context of sport and in relation to athletic ability/physicality. Representation of queer

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[65]Examples of the use of 'tomboy' to specifically address and represent queer women in advertising include the underwear brands TomboyX and Tom-Boi.

women in sport had its origins as a pejorative for female athletes, regardless of their sexual identity. That is, before queer women were acknowledged as athletes, female athletes were labelled 'lesbians' (even if they were heterosexual). The identity politics behind this label and the backlash against it form a complex system of representation for female athletes, where perceived masculinity of an athlete may be embraced as a transgression from traditional gender roles, or fought against to recuperate femininity. Susan Cahn writes about the 'mannish lesbian athlete' as a 'bogey-woman' of sport that is a foil for 'more positive, corrective images that attempt to rehabilitate the image of women athletes and resolve the cultural contradiction between athletic prowess and femininity' (1993, p. 343). Because participation in sport[66] was initially reserved for men only, women's entry into sport was deemed masculine, and so 'by the 1930s…female athletic mannishness began to connote heterosexual failure…in the years following World War II, the stereotype of the lesbian athlete emerged full blown' (Cahn, 1993, p. 344). However, the image of the mannish lesbian athlete or 'muscle moll' also created space for lesbians to form a collective culture in sport, especially those that assumed more masculine, butch identities. Femininity in sport is associated with a backlash to the perceived mannishness of female athletes, and is thus constructed as an antidote to homosexuality as well as the imposed masculinity of sport as an institution. Feminine signifiers like pink boxing gloves, or the logo used to promote the 1999 soccer World Cup in the USA (a silhouette of a player with a ponytail) can 'distance women's bodies from signs of maleness, masculinity and therefore the butch stereotype' (Caudwell, 2007, p. 184). Markers of hegemonic, commodity-based femininity are applied as a counterbalance to butch stereotypes of queer women in sport, and also to perceived

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[66]Cahn uses examples of tennis, track and basketball, but implies that this stereotype has pervaded throughout all publicised sport.

queerness by association with masculine practices that deviate from prescriptions of
femininity.

<u>Making Michaels marketable</u>

Just as women's sporting bodies have been tempered by signifiers of femininity, Michaels' fit
body is styled as heterosexy to appeal to a heteronormative audience. Her style and image are
relatively consistent throughout her work in *The Biggest Loser*, her own series *Losing it with
Jillian*, her various fitness video products as well as appearances in fitness magazines.
Figures 8, 9 and 10 are photographs of Michaels as depicted on the cover of her workout
video *6 Week Six-Pack*, and two are cover shots from fitness magazines *Shape* and *Women's
Health*. In all three, Michaels is smiling, her hair is long and flowing around her shoulders,
and she is wearing a crop top that exposes her stomach and cleavage, and her hips are tilted in
a 'provocative pose designed to please and entice the reader (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009, p.
42). All three present Michaels as an aspirational image for consumers of her products,
tailored to the kind of product being advertised. Michaels is constructed as a sex symbol on
the magazine covers – her 'masculine' musculature is concealed, she wears jewellery and
make-up that negate the suggestion of physical exertion or exercise, her breasts are rounded
and pushed up to draw the gaze, and her hair is tousled and messy. Additionally, the word
'sex' features on both magazine cover pages, positioning the reader to make a connection
between the image and the word. Despite identifying as gay, Michaels is constructed here as
a heterosexual sex symbol – the ideal subject of these magazines is a heterosexual woman,
and Michaels is portrayed as that which the reader should aspire to. Her appearance connotes
sexual attractiveness, but not to the women reading the magazine. Instead, the readers are
interpellated to understand that Michaels is attractive to heterosexual men, and that for the

reader to become attractive to heterosexual men, they must model their appearance after Michaels'.

Fig. 8 – Cover image for *6 Week Six-Pack* DVD (2012).

Fig. 9 – Cover image for *Shape* magazine, July/August 2015 (Shape, 2015).

Fig. 10 – Cover image for *Women's Health Magazine*, January 2016 (E Online, n. d.).

It is worth noting that these images contain some features that are more consistent with how men are positioned in men's magazines than in women's. Dworkin and Wachs, in their comparison of how models are posed in women's and men's fitness magazines, found that women were often posed with their heads tilted, looking up at the camera with slightly parted lips, giving the viewer a 'come hither gaze' (2009, p. 42). The women were also often posed with their hands on their body, with a hip thrust, smiling fully and with their abdominals exposed. On the other hand, the men were often found to be shot head on, body facing fully toward the camera, hands on a prop, smiling fully with abdominals exposed. Michaels' poses in these three images reflect both the men's and the women's posturing techniques, suggesting a possible integration of archetypal masculine and feminine positioning[67].

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[67] In further research, it may be useful to compare images of Michaels with other queer identifying fitness celebrities, or other female fitness celebrities whose brands are based on the kind of aggressiveness Michaels represents in *The Biggest Loser*. The blending of masculine and feminine representation of Michaels may contribute to expanding the possibilities of gender roles (that is, women can be masculine *and* feminine), but this is not queer because it still affirms the importance of gender signifiers.

If a fitness celebrity does not fit into a set of normative characteristics in terms of identity and appearance, this aspect of their identity may be hidden or avoided to maintain a preferred image. In contrast to the feminine construction of Michaels' image, consider the representation of an earlier LGBT fitness celebrity, Susan Powter. Powter identified herself as a 'radical, feminist, lesbian woman' in a 2004 interview for lesbian magazine *Curve* (Hentges, 2014, p. 152). Powter became popular in the early 1990s in the infomercial for *Stop the Insanity*, Powter's guide to weight loss which condemned dieting ('diets don't work!'). In the infomercial, Powter has a bleach-blonde buzzcut and is 'outspoken and opinionated and raw' (Hentges, 2014, p. 152). Despite the conventionally masculine haircut and loud, aggressive voice, she also appears in the infomercial with heavy eye and lip make-up, refers to herself as 'a housewife who figured it out' and makes reference to her ex-husband, positioning her audience to believe she is heterosexual. Her public self-identification as a lesbian only began in 2004, but unlike Michaels, Powter is insistent and vocal about her status as a lesbian. Significantly, this figure was not 'out' at the time of her popularity (as was Michaels), and openly made reference to her relationships with men as well as occupying domestic feminine roles. Her appearance was allowed to be more masculine – and at the time more transgressive of the rules for a feminine appearance – perhaps *because* she was represented as heterosexual. If Powter was out during her fame, it is likely that either her sexuality would have been suppressed, or it would have been compensated with the judicious amplification of more conventionally feminine characteristics. The representation of Powter, contrasted to Michaels, is telling for the development of a fit femininity. In particular, it suggests that queer sexuality in women's fitness culture must be shaped in such a manner to foreground femininity to qualify traits that do not conform to prevailing understandings of what it means to be feminine. Or, that floating queer signifiers (such as Powter's buzzcut) in the context of fitness culture may be incorporated into the context of heteronormativity.

Michaels' feminine body can be understood as a means of 'rehabilitating' both her sexuality and her participation in a masculine public sphere (that is, personal training as well as other fitness activities such as boxing and weight lifting). Sarah Hentges notes that 'sexiness can be negotiated and flaunted, but sexuality is less visible or assumed to be irrelevant to the work(out)' (2014, p. 150). As mentioned earlier, Michaels' body is constructed as aspirational for women and desirable to men, which supports and encourages a heteronormative gaze. Drawing from what Ciasullo writes about the feminine lesbian body, Michaels is positioned as a woman first, using feminine signifiers that in turn imply heterosexuality, so that she can reach the mainstream market. Her queerness is secondary at best, and in most cases is invisible. Ciasullo writes:

> The mainstream lesbian body is at once sexualized and desexualized: on the one hand, she is made into an object of desire for straight audiences through her heterosexualization, a process achieved by representing the lesbian as embodying a hegemonic femininity and thus, for mainstream audiences, as looking 'just like' conventionally attractive straight women; on the other hand, because the representation of desire between two women is usually suppressed in these images, she is de-homosexualized. (Ciasullo, 2001, p. 578)

Following this logic, Michaels is simultaneously rendered (hetero)sexualised through her representation as conventionally feminine, as well as de-(homo)sexualised by keeping her partner (and subsequently the desire between the two women) separate from her public images. Where Michaels may have had the potential to disrupt normative assumptions of sexuality in a fitness context, she has been incorporated into the context of hegemonic representations of femininity and reaffirms normative expectations of fitness through her role as a trainer.

Beyond her physical appearance, Michaels reaffirms the importance of the gender binary by aligning herself with women's fitness culture. This is achieved through her partnership with women's only gym Curves, the design of her app that contains obvious feminine signifiers (pink colour scheme, photographs of women only), and her 9:1 ratio of women's and men's apparel available on her online store. Additionally, D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein suggests that Michaels has an aversion to becoming pregnant, saying that she 'couldn't do that to my body' (2011, p. 10). Indeed, one of Michaels' two children was adopted, and the other was carried by Michaels' partner. O'Brien Hallstein posits that this view of pregnancy as something that deforms the female body reveals how 'contemporary women's bodies have been redefined…from the traditional religious view of women's bodies as birthing centres to women's bodies as first and foremost sex objects' (2011, p. 10). Michaels' comments reflect an internalised attitude towards women's bodies, and thus her own, that the ideal feminine form must be slim. She embodies this attitude by maintaining her own physique according to these ideals, and by encouraging women to conduct this same maintenance through her work on *The Biggest Loser, Losing it with Jillian,* and through her other workout videos and products. This is important in that it pairs how Michael is visually coded as feminine and heterosexual with her public actions and comments that enforce the meaning of these codes.

Coming out quietly: Queer celebrity

This section focuses on the politics of coming out as queer in a way that constructs queer sexualities as normative, and immaterial to being a prominent fitness celebrity. Michaels' outwardly conventional femininity is only one method of presenting her as an aspirational figure for a heterosexual audience. Michaels' sexuality became a matter of public knowledge six years after gaining popularity in *The Biggest Loser*, and remains an under-represented

aspect of her identity in fitness texts. I contend that her sexuality is presented largely as private, and is normalised or made extraneous by invoking fitness/wellness, motherhood and heterosexuality as the logical framework in which she lives. This is done to reorient her sexuality in a way that does not threaten dominant structures on which her brand depends – specifically, gender roles and class stratification. For celebrities, there exists a paradox of visibility. As Erin Meyers argues, 'although many celebrities bemoan the fact that their private lives are offered up for public consumption by celebrity media…the blurring of the private/public distinction that occurs in celebrity media is essential for the maintenance of their star power' (2009, p. 891). This paradox becomes more complicated when the celebrity is queer. In Michaels' case, for example, although it may seem reasonable to an audience for her to keep her sexuality private, her silence on the matter may also be perceived as being inauthentic or deceptive for the sake of her brand. This pressure is exacerbated by the imperative of having a social media presence, as well as being publicly involved in a specific cultural field that explicitly values authenticity and valorises the concept of a true self that must be revealed. To appreciate the complexities of queer representation and alternative readings of queer bodies, for instance in popular heteronormative media, this section will draw from popular media discourse, including from queer-specific media such as Autostraddle, as well as academic theory.

Celebrity, authenticity and the boundaries between public/private

The construction of a celebrity's persona and what aspects are made public are choices loaded with political meaning. Celebrity culture has undergone a shift in the last two decades where the boundaries between public and private have become less discernible. During the 1950s to the 1990s, celebrity culture manifested as idol worship, where the public's focus was on the celebrity's achievements and how such achievements set the celebrity apart from

'ordinary' people (Cashmore, 2006, p. 3). As tabloid magazines, websites and blogs began producing high volumes of curated photographs and descriptions of celebrities performing daily tasks, a fascination developed surrounding how the celebrity, who is idolised for their public lives, can seem 'like us' in their private lives. In other words, 'genuine ordinariness became just as gaze-worthy as bona fide celebrities' (Cashmore, 2006, p. 194). Graeme Turner states that 'the celebrity develops their capacity for fame, not by achieving great things, but by differentiating their own personality from those of their competitors in the public arena' (2004/2014, p. 5). This suggests that a celebrity's personality must become equally, if not more, important as their public performances.

Social media is important for the construction and maintenance of an 'authentic' celebrity persona that crosses the boundaries between public and private. The production of the celebrity subject is interlocked with the media texts that represent this individual to the public (Marshall, 2006, p. 647). The celebrity therefore, according to David Marshall, becomes caught between how their publicity team manages their representation, and what is produced and distributed by fans or paparazzi without authorisation (2006, p. 648). Between these two spaces, social media is a means of navigating that which is externally controlled by providing a direct avenue through which to address any conflicts between these two types of representation. Kelli Burns and Ellie Galerman address the phenomenon of celebrities using blogs to represent themselves to their fans, suggesting that this medium offers fans new techniques of connecting with their favourite celebrities, 'and not the identity constructed by tabloids, entertainment programs or celebrity handlers' (2009, p. 49). This kind of visibility connects the fans to a celebrity with the illusion of intimacy, but in a manner that maintains existing hierarchy. The impression of authenticity and intimacy constructed by celebrities on social media is paramount to the creation of their self-branding and the maintenance of their

fanbase. Alice Marwick and danah boyd write that celebrities on Twitter actively perform intimacy and authenticity through the construction of a 'backstage access' narrative by posting seemingly uncensored, candid thoughts, feelings and stories (2011, p. 140). This type of celebrity practice, however, enforces unequal power relations through the construction of followers as fans (rather than friends or family), placing distance between the celebrity and their followers. Although fans are allowed to see 'backstage' through tweets, the 'real' backstage is still hidden from view, or, as Marwick and boyd put it, while Twitter may bring celebrities and their fans 'closer together…it does not equalise their status' (2011, p. 155).

As a reality TV host, Michaels performs authenticity onscreen in a way that constructs the contestants' stories/journeys as 'truth', which in turn reproduces myths about body image and health. *The Biggest Loser* depicts overweight volunteer participants living, working out and eating together in one house as they strive to lose weight. Reality television programs like *The Biggest Loser* constitute a part of what Foucault refers to as a 'regime of truth':

> the types of discourse which [each society] accepts and makes function as true; the
> mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true or false statements,
> the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded
> value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying
> what counts as true. (1985, p. 73)

Implicit in this definition is the notion that 'truth' is not singular or fixed, but that our perception of truth is constructed by a network of interconnected power relations that disseminate representations of what is 'true' through many mediums. That which is presented as truth is dependent on the interests of the dominant culture, and is then made to appear natural so that it is not questioned. The presentation of certain things as 'real', therefore, naturalise what 'reality' is supposed to be. In *The Biggest Loser*, the truths being naturalised

are that being overweight is something that needs to be corrected; that 'health' is conflated with a certain weight; that it is the responsibility of the individual to ensure they are 'healthy', and that a monetary reward is valuable motivation to change pre-existing 'unhealthy' behaviours and attitudes. Michaels' role in *The Biggest Loser* is as a coach, training the contestants physically and emotionally. She is positioned as an arbiter of authenticity, having completed her own transformation from an obese, insecure teenager to a fit, conventionally attractive woman. This journey confers legitimacy to her role as trainer, having been on the 'other' side of fitness. Although Michaels only mentions her family and sexuality outside of her professional work, her personal story about being bullied as an obese child and her journey to weight loss is often referred to on *The Biggest Loser*. This indicates that the kind of authenticity Michaels is required to perform is specific to the themes of the show, which reinforces the truth claims being constructed by the program. Her coming out and subsequent mention of her sexuality is permissible only in a particular context, demonstrating the restrictions placed on queer celebrities.

Coming out in celebrity culture

Coming out as queer, even for non-celebrities, is a process that is embedded in the relationship between public and private life. In the wake of the gay rights movement sparked by the Stonewall Riots in 1969[68], queer theorists sought to critique how queer people were represented by and for a heterosexual gaze. One of the central modes of representing queer people was the dichotomy of private and public, encapsulated by the concept of the closet and coming out. The concept of the closet is widely used to describe the hidden, non-public space where one is queer without the public (their family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances and

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[68] The Stonewall Riots refer to a series of violent protests against police raids of the Stonewall Inn (a gay bar) in Manhattan, New York in 1969. These events are widely perceived as monumental for the LGBT rights movement.

any other groups or individuals in the queer person's social sphere) being aware. One comes out of the closet when they reveal their homosexuality to the people within this social sphere. After the Stonewall Riots, coming out of the closet was represented as an event that occurs once, neatly transforming a private/closeted queer into an out/public queer. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick contends that coming out is not done once, but performed consistently through an individual's life, yet the focus of the concept of coming out is represented as the first, singular event where an individual informs their immediate family and friends of their sexuality (1990/1993, p. 46). According to Sedgwick, the concept of the closet as a fixed moment works to 'define the homosexual person as an identity, not a series of acts' (1990/1993, p. 55), erasing the performative nature of identity and reaffirming the concept of identity as a whole, attainable thing. Queer subjects must constantly come out in order to 'combat the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption' (Sedgwick, 1990/1993, p. 55), meaning that queer people are constantly performing and exercising their right to be recognised as queer in the public sphere. Butler takes this position in her work on gender performativity and further interrogates the perceived liberation queer individuals experience when 'coming out':

> Is the 'subject' who is 'out' free of its subjection and finally in the clear? Or could it be that the subjection that subjectivates the gay and lesbian subject in some ways continues to oppress, or oppresses most insidiously, once 'outness' is claimed? (1991, p. 15)

Butler proposes that coming out does not necessarily demarcate freedom from oppression for a queer person, or even a real departure from the closet (that is, invisibility as a queer person), but rather implies further control of a subject once that subject has made their identity public. Once one has made a conscious choice to take up any subjectivity, even if this identity is

potentially subversive to a norm, they are subject to oppression from the same regimes and structures that create the conditions one must 'come out' against.

Coming out is underpinned by narratives of compulsory heterosexuality – that one is assumed to be heterosexual until proven otherwise – and that this must be proved and performed constantly. Adrienne Rich conceptualises compulsory heterosexuality as the assumption that women are innately attracted to men, and that the desire for other women is therefore only present as a conscious choice made to avoid men (1980/1993, p. 229). This concept works to invalidate women's sexual or romantic desire for other women and reorient queerness into heteronormativity. Given the cultural norm of compulsory heterosexuality, Michaels' silence about her sexuality during the height of her popularity suggests an implicit exclusion of non-heterosexual identities in mainstream fitness media. The suppression of queer voices or the concealment of queer identities in fitness culture is justified by the attitude that sexuality is unrelated to the workout. Hentges suggests that 'as fitness reinforces the perfect body and narrow ideas of femininity, it also reinforces compulsory heterosexuality' (2014, p. 151). Where queer women like Michaels withhold information about their sexuality, and are therefore assumed to be straight, heterosexual female trainers or fitness celebrities can be forthcoming about their partnerships with men. For example, Kayla Itsines' Instagram often features her fiancé (and business partner) Tobi Pearce, including declarations of love and details of their private life together, images of them kissing or embracing, integrated into her professional fitness persona.

Celebrities are pressured to convey an authentic image that follows certain prescriptive guidelines, and queer celebrities are subject to additional pressure to confess their sexual orientation for the sake of this authenticity. The coming out of Ellen DeGeneres, a popular

comedian and daytime talk show host, illustrates the complex politics of constructing a consumable, mainstream queer celebrity which, in DeGeneres' case, is represented through tokenism. While Michaels and DeGeneres have differing experiences of coming out as gay, it is prudent to compare these situations to determine common modes of how they are constructed and understood. While separate from the sphere of fitness culture, I cite DeGeneres' coming out because it was a pivotal moment for mainstream representation of queer people and for televised coming out confessions, and thus has influenced how lesbian celebrities have been constructed and perceived since. DeGeneres first emerged on television as the star of a sit-com, *Ellen* (1994–98). In 1997, DeGeneres' character came out as lesbian during the end of the show's fourth season, shortly after DeGeneres came out on *The Oprah Winfrey Show.* Her changing attitude in response to her choice to make her sexuality public is revealing. In 1997, directly after coming out, she stated that 'the main reason I never wanted to do this [come out] was because I don't want to become political and I don't want to become some gay activist' (DeGeneres quoted in Skerski, 2007, p. 363). Jamie Skerski, in an analysis of 'the rise and fall of Ellen DeGeneres', reads this quote as indicative of an 'apolitical (and perhaps naïve) stance' (2007, p. 364). In the fifth and final season of *Ellen,* the show became more concerned with queer issues, which DeGeneres defended by stating that 'I changed. I grew up. I didn't even realise the internal homophobia and the shame that I was still dealing with. I thought, if I just say the words "I'm gay"…that's going to be enough' (DeGeneres quoted in Skerski, 2007, p. 363). Shortly after this, *Ellen* was cancelled due to low ratings. DeGeneres began her talk show, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, in 2003. In 2006, DeGeneres stated again that she is 'just not a political person' (DeGeneres quoted in Skerski, 2007, p. 363) in what Skerski terms 'a tamed re-invention' (2007, p. 364) of herself as a 'domesticated day-time talk show host who just wants to make people laugh' (2007, p. 378). Skerski contends that 'changes in her public performances (and network responses to those

changes) illuminate an exceedingly complex version of cultural tokenism' (2007, p. 364).

While DeGeneres is possibly the most visible lesbian celebrity, she is celebrated for 'her very

lack of lesbian performance' (Skerski, 2007, p. 377). Michaels, too, seems to be celebrated as

a lesbian celebrity only because she does not highlight her orientation as a dominant or

political part of her identity.

'Yes, Jillian Michaels is gay'

Michaels' own coming out narrative is couched in a heteronormative rhetoric of shame and

confession that works to reinforce heterosexuality as the norm. Articles about her sexuality

are titled 'Yes, Jillian Michaels is gay: the quiet coming out' (McGinnis, 2012, n.p.), '"I wish

I was straight": Jillian Michaels admits she's still not comfortable with being gay in new

interview' (Dodge, 2014, n.p.), 'Jillian Michaels opens up about her sexuality' (Nichols,

2014, n.p.) and 'How Jillian Michaels really feels about being gay' (Narins, 2016, n.p.).

Collectively, these headlines suggest not only that Michaels is under pressure to be

forthcoming about her sexuality to the media, but also that there is the insinuation of

Michaels wanting to be 'normal', and therefore to not have anything to 'come out' about. The

idea of Michaels' 'quiet coming out' is multifaceted in terms of its representation of

queerness and identity politics. Firstly, coming out 'quietly' suggests a lack of spectacle that

has accompanied earlier celebrity coming out stories (as in the case of DeGeneres). Butler

states about coming out, especially to make a claim of authority when discussing queer

issues, that 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes' (1991, p. 13).

Thus, Michaels' quiet coming out may be less subversive of the notion of binary identities

than other celebrity coming out narratives. In contrast to Butler's position, Mark Blasius

'believes coming out to be the necessary precondition for the emergence of a lesbian and gay

ethos that can overturn compulsory heterosexuality' (quoted in Herman, 2005, p. 8). By not

making an overt statement about her sexuality until further into her career, Michaels has

allowed herself to be constructed as heteronormative in a climate of compulsory

heterosexuality. It is important to interrogate these representations as they develop, because

'the increase in representations leads to a myth of progressive politics – merely the illusion of

societal acceptance' (Skerski, 2007, p. 366). The language Michaels used to officially come

out and address her coming out narrative reflects the scholarly discourse of 'progressive'

coming out stories against ones that normalise heterosexuality and Other queerness.

Michaels' coming out in the magazine *Ladies Home Journal* – the title itself invoking the

domesticity associated with traditional feminine roles – was linked with her maintenance of

an 'authentic' brand in the health and fitness industry. Coming out is not a uniform process

and is dependent upon audience reception, cultural context and the varied methods of coming

out. Didi Herman proposes that 'different ways of coming out have different meanings and

effects' (2005, p. 11). In a comparative analysis of two texts in which a main character comes

out as lesbian, Herman posits that the narratives of coming out that are grounded in 'I am'

statements are a 'dead-end' compared to narratives centred on desire (Herman, 2005, p. 11).

This suggests that Michaels' coming out, which is centred on desire rather than identity, may

be seen as more progressive by public heteronormative audiences. However, her language is

notably intertwined with the discourse of health and fitness which she represents

professionally, as well as the dominance of heteronormativity:

> 'Let's just say I believe in healthy love. If I fall in love with a woman, that's
>
> awesome. If I fall in love with a man, that's awesome…it's like organic food. I only

eat healthy food, and I only want healthy love!' (Michaels quoted in Bernard[69],

2010, n.p.).

Here, Michaels uses the fitness rhetoric with which she is associated to justify or soften the revelation of her sexuality. Although it appears to present a logical stance to her (heterosexual, health-conscious) audience, the concept of 'healthy love' is problematic on a number of levels. Equating sexual orientation with a preference for organic food represents sexuality as something that is consciously chosen and performed. While the converse rhetoric that naturalises sexuality as something one is born with is equally problematic, portraying her queerness in this manner places the onus of defending an LGBT identity on the individual, rather than challenging heterosexist ideologies. In this quotation, Michaels also suggests the possibility of being with a man, which not only reaffirms the gender binary ('I could fall in love with a man OR a woman') but situates the 'safe' identity of heterosexuality within her identity as 'gay'.

Michaels' identity as a gay woman and as a fitness professional are stratified and separated so that she brands herself first as a fitness professional and as a woman, and secondarily as a gay person. Representations of her relationship with her fiancée are designated to non-fitness texts, for example, in magazine/blog interviews, chat shows and other media separate from her more career-focused texts such as *The Biggest Loser* and her instructional exercise videos, website and app. Bob Harper (Michaels' co-trainer on *The Biggest Loser*) came out publicly as gay on the show, in a 2013 episode where he was talking to a contestant who was having difficulty coming out to his own parents. While Harper is constructed as emotionally intelligent, he embodies conventional masculinity through his muscular body, and his

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[69] The title of this article is 'Jillian Michaels: first lady to ever come out (bisexual) in 'Ladies Home Journal', suggesting to the reader that Michaels identifies as bisexual. This is contrary to later articles in which she identifies as 'gay'.

aggressive enthusiasm as a personal trainer. This is contrasted to Michaels' coming out because while she came out in a women's magazine, Harper's coming out is associated with the show. Michaels' sexuality and its relative acceptance in the fitness community may appear as signs of a progressive culture. However, her practices of keeping her family life private, and maintaining a feminine, 'neutral'/heteronormative public appearance suggest that mainstream fitness culture prefers heteronormativity and dominant gender roles, especially for women. Additionally, she also embraces other normative social roles and ideologies, including capitalism and class division, by virtue of her involvement in the production and marketing of commodities. Fitness culture justifies its erasure of non-normative gender roles through asserting that conspicuous sexuality does not belong in the realm of fitness texts, while simultaneously naturalising heteronormative roles and practices.

In this chapter, I have examined how LGBT women are constructed and addressed in women's fitness culture through analysing the representation of a gay fitness celebrity. I have claimed that, although popular representation of LGBT people is important, being LGBT is not the same as being queer. The construction of Michaels' body in fitness magazines and texts is softened with signifiers of 'heterosexiness', which coupled with her relative silence about her sexual orientation in her professional life, reaffirms the naturalised position of compulsory heterosexuality to her audience. Her physical appearance is constructed as a consumable lesbian body in which she appears as a woman first, and a gay woman second (if at all). This can reaffirm both the dominance of a fixed gender binary system and heteronormativity. Furthermore, she herself has made comments that signify acceptance and conformity to gender essentialism and to oppressive rules about women's appearances. This suggests that the interests of Michaels and her brand are to reinforce normative paradigms

rather than to challenge them, and that being LGBT does not equate with a radical queer or feminist politics.

Jillian Michaels represents part of a larger issue concerned with how fitness perpetuates dominant ideologies of a specific kind of femininity and the policing of body types. Michaels' visibility as an LGBT celebrity in the field of women's fitness facilitates a debate about how progressive queer representation should be deployed. This debate is divisive between the queer community, the general (heterosexual) media and the academy. While I make no attempt to adopt a definitive position or recommend a specific strategy for doing this (to do so would be reductive), I maintain that the effective queering of the fitness cultural field requires more work to challenge the structures of gender and the perceived 'irrelevance' of sexuality in fitness practices or media texts. This is inherently difficult in the field of fitness because of how fitness operates according to the logic of commodities, and as such is subject to the marketing conditions that support gender stereotypes and class stratification.

Conclusion

Fitness Futures

In a gender studies class in my final year of undergraduate studies, students were tasked with choosing a text to analyse using one of the theoretical frameworks we had learned over the course of the unit. I chose to study Lorna Jane inspirational tank tops as an example of how a postfeminist sensibility may be conveyed. My argument was that the tank tops – specifically, the mottos written on them[70] – represented an insidious mode of ideological hijacking, where the potential for feminism to challenge patriarchal oppression was extinguished through the process of commodifying its symbols. My understandings of both postfeminism and fitness culture were underdeveloped at the time, as well as comparatively closed and cynical. As I see it now, my thinking was limited by over-relying on textual analysis alone and failing to recognise the complex, contextualised network of structures, agents, ideologies and practices that constitute women's fitness culture.

That gender studies assignment, completed back in 2013, was foundational in my thinking critically about women's fitness culture. It was the kernel from which this doctoral dissertation grew, and has functioned as a reference point that has enabled me to measure the evolution of my critical understanding of the subject over the course of this thesis. The research problem that this thesis addresses is: what is the cultural context for women's fitness culture, and what are its implications for the construction and representation of women's bodies in a postfeminist discourse? Initially, this was to be answered using a three-pronged approach: firstly, by critiquing discourses related to fitness culture and its empowering

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[70]Examples include 'Amazing takes work', 'never give up', 'dare to be amazing' and 'determined to: be active, be healthy, be happy, be me' (Lorna Jane, 2013).

potential in terms of identity construction, self-work and body awareness. Secondly, I aimed to investigate how women's fitness culture is a highly commodified, gendered, postfeminist movement that impacts on the fitness rhetoric of self-agency and empowerment. Lastly, I intended to determine how the involvement of digital media enacts this process of commodification. Since then, my aims have developed more broadly to investigate how women's fitness culture conveys and is constituted by a postfeminist sensibility, and to examine how dominant ideologies of women's fitness culture may be contested.

The difference between these two sets of objectives is that in the first instance, my focus was on whether fitness culture is or is not empowering (admittedly, a polarising binary), and that my subsequent aims were centred on the hypothesis that it is not empowering. This premise was inadvertently couched in terms of moral judgement of fitness culture and postfeminism, and contributes to a stance that precludes the possibility of resistance, creativity and negotiation. My intention at the time was to prove how the commodification and gendering of fitness was linked to undoing the project of feminism in women's physical cultures. The revised set of objectives is concerned with how postfeminism is expressed in women's fitness culture, while acknowledging how this may be more complex or multifaceted than originally envisaged. In this thesis, I have also endeavoured to inquire into how women's fitness culture offers to its participants opportunities for subversion and contestation. The transformation of my research aims throughout this thesis represents a nuancing of my theoretical framework; exploring why some aspects of fitness culture might be appealing in postfeminist times, and what positive cultural work it performs.

Primarily, the texturing of my approach to women's fitness culture began with applying Gill's theoretical framework of a postfeminist sensibility to what I perceived as the key

themes of postfeminist fit femininity. This involved examining how women's fitness culture conveys and engages with the themes Gill identifies as indicative of postfeminism. As outlined in Chapter One, these themes include the idea that sex and gender are essential, and therefore 'natural' differences must exist between men and women; an alignment of interests with surveillance culture, where individuals are encouraged to collaborate in their own subjectification as well as self-surveillance; an emphasis on personal choice and the concept of empowerment; and an imperative to transform and improve the self (2007b, p. 169). However, I have not sought to apply an established framework neatly against a new cultural background. Rather, as I have maintained, my intention has always been to address the *intersections* of postfeminism, physical cultures, digital cultures and the notion of authenticity that is embedded in these areas. To this effect, my analysis of fitness culture has been grouped into themes that present opportunities for critique of this discursive nexus between fitness, women, technology and culture.

In Chapter Two, I established the gym selfie as an important signifier of women's fitness culture that illustrates the intersections of postfeminism, physical and digital cultures, and perceived authenticity mentioned above. Selfies in general are texts that blur the boundaries between the consumer and producer; subject and object; the body and the self. These texts, like all texts, cannot be classed as either entirely disempowering or entirely empowering. Instead, the malleable meaning of any selfie lends itself to being constantly re-read and reproduced according to the various sets of expectations and rules that surround it. As an image, the gym selfie represents a still body as a paradoxical representation of the 'progress' of fitness. The codes and conventions of the gym selfie facilitate the construction of an ideal fit self through 'prismatic' engagement with the body in a game of concealing and revealing various body parts. This becomes a way of indirectly engaging with images of fit bodies in

fitness media. The transformation imperative of gym selfies, especially those from my analysis of Kayla Itsines' Instagram, exemplifies 'the dominance of a makeover paradigm', as well as several other themes Gill refers to (2007b, p. 169). In addition to this approach, however, the gym selfie can be conceived of as a negotiative strategy of identity construction. Here, Lacan's Ideal I merges with Sassatelli's mirror work resulting in the theorisation of 'gym selfie-work' as enacting a postfeminist fit femininity that exemplifies values of self-surveillance, individual empowerment and the reification of normative characteristics of feminine physical appearance. #melvfitness' deconstruction of the gym selfie conventions that are often taken for granted as textual elements demonstrates that there are resistive strategies available here to mobilise the gym selfie to challenge the ideologies of fitness culture. What is perhaps the most provocative lesson we can learn from the gym selfie is that even within the delicate intersection of commodification, femininities, and the processes of discipline in digital spaces, individuals are able to critically interrogate at least some of their own participation in this text.

The study of fitness apparel in Chapter Three prompts some of the same questions that emerged from analysis of the gym selfie, in regards to how commodification impacts upon an individual's experience of empowerment. Fitness apparel additionally addresses similar concerns of blurred boundaries; in this case, those between interior and exterior, fitness space and non-fitness space, and self and other. These boundaries become even more questionable given the complexity of the network of relations that underpin the apparel itself. Even though mottos – printed on colourful gym tops – are often the first signifiers we encounter, fitness clothing is meaningful in ways beyond what it looks like. From the internal and often contradictory politics between a company's 'philosophy' and its practice, to the experience of shopping in digital and physical spaces, the structures of fitness apparel are far-reaching and

impactful to the way fit feminine identity is constructed. Fitness apparel establishments interpellate an ideal consumer who embodies a fit postfeminist subjectivity through constructing an elusive habitus that is characterised as slim, white, young, middle class, heterosexual and able-bodied. This is done through over-representing these kinds of bodies in marketing material, as well as drawing from signifiers of domestic femininity in the design of the physical retail outlets, and even the size range of the products. My analysis of the clothing itself is significant for the theorisation of a politics of comfortable clothing, whereby the boundaries of internal/external become obscured as inspirational or aspirational mottos, written on a second skin, occupy space both on the body and the clothing. Consequently, they can be read as an address *to* the wearer and *from* the wearer. These discussions begin to direct focus back on to the body as a central site for fitness.

Chapter Four saw the resemblances and contrasts between two types of fit body, which presented multiple permutations of gender and fitness roles. At first glance, the cardio bunny is arguably an embodiment of postfeminist femininity in that she complies with the rules and restrictions placed upon her by more 'traditional' understandings of women's movement and participation in fitness space. In terms of space, she occupies the sections of the gym deemed more feminine – the places where the kinds of exercise facilitated there are deemed as passive, repetitive and often linked to socialising or non-exercise activities (such as watching television). The cardio bunny could be read as a docile body, affected by external influences and fulfilling her role as a self-policing subject in terms of feminine exercise. However, there are aspects of the cardio bunny this theory cannot account for. While she may embody aspects of conservative femininity, she also flouts the unspoken boundaries of 'legitimate' exercise that stems from the construction of fitness space as masculine. Through these modes of transgression, or 'failure', as I have suggested via Halberstam, the cardio bunny may be

subversive in that she makes visible the invisible rules of what fitness should be. Her identity as a fit subject is often perceived as performative, misguided or 'posing'. Thus, her failure at accepting the ideal activities of fitness position her as a threat to the authority of masculine fitness practice.

Conversely, the woman who lifts (WWL) is constructed initially as a more 'authentic' participant of fitness precisely because her chosen activities are aligned with masculinity. Instead of being mocked, she is regarded as capable, strong and engaged with exercise rather than passive and uninformed. WWL bodies are read as masculine because they possess muscularity that women are traditionally discouraged from desiring or having. The WWL has transgressed gender roles here in a manner that seems progressive. However, further analysis suggests this figure is more complex; the WWL embodies multiple competing ideologies about body-work and gender that cannot be classified as either exclusively resistive or conforming. WWL practices, and the degree to which they transgress gender or fitness roles, become more nuanced in the categories of private and public performance. Through the hyper-feminine masquerade of spectacular competitions such as fitness or bikini modelling, femininity is recuperated in these masculine bodies. In the more mundane realm of everyday fitness such as CrossFit spaces, the masculinity of WWL practices may be rewritten as female masculinity – masculinity without men. Ultimately, what the exploration of these figures contributes to the field of both fitness and postfeminist scholarship is the imperative to read fit bodies in relation to the vast networks of institutions, ideologies, social ties and spaces that construct them, which adds nuance to the ostensibly obvious initial impressions these figures attract.

My detailed study of Jillian Michaels was revealing of how queer women are represented in fitness culture. In this fifth and final chapter, I aimed to not only distil and integrate earlier discourses of the body, visual representation, femininity and commodification, but to further consider aspects of fitness beyond the dominant representations. In many respects, Michaels embodies typical fit femininity. She is represented with postfeminist feminine signifiers – she is slim, outgoing, confident, white, conventionally feminine in appearance (long hair, make-up, form-fitting activewear, cleavage and so on) and active in disciplining not only her own body, but those of others. Her queerness is often suppressed in the fitness media in which she is featured, but its visibility in other media seems important for investigating the relationship between fitness culture and queer subjectivity. In the case of Michaels, her representation in media, as well as how she discusses her own experiences of queerness and femininity, indicate that a queer subject in fitness – that is, one who subverts the heteronormativity of postfeminist fitness culture – is difficult to qualify. Beyond the celebrity case study specifically addressed in this chapter, I believe that analysis of the everyday queer experience of fitness will be instrumental in understanding how non-normative subjectivities negotiate their role in women's fitness culture.

The kinds of inquiries I have made in this thesis could be applied to other practices and subjects of fitness culture. In further research on this topic, I wish to address how older women are represented as fit subjects: does this cohort share the same politics or experiences as its younger counterparts? Are older women interpellated through the same postfeminist themes such as bodily autonomy, (hetero)sexual liberation, and consumption as empowerment? Samantha Brennan and Tracey Isaacs' *Fit at Mid-Life: A Feminist Fitness Journey* (2018) may inform this future research. This book claims to offer 'A uniquely feminist approach to how women can break free from what society thinks and get active in

their forties, fifties, and beyond' (Brennan and Isaacs, 2018, n.p.). While the authors are feminist academics, the book, similar to Hentges' *Women and Fitness in American Culture* (2014), approaches fitness not only academically but also with creative and reflective critique, which could provide an interesting basis for discussion of these issues.

It was inevitable that, in a project like this, technologies of fitness measurement and surveillance would develop at such a pace as to defy the time limitations of a PhD. While the concepts of surveillance and measurement are at the centre of this PhD, work remains to be done on the role of wearable activity trackers in the context of creating self-policing subjects and quantifiable selves. Digital media experiences of fitness culture present an individualised but atomised mode of surveillance: individualised in the sense that they are experienced personally and privately, and atomised in that there is no central authority doing the surveilling. In the case of the gym selfie, discussed in Chapter Two, subjects are encouraged to offer up images of themselves for critique, an act which is embedded in wide-reaching cultural paradigms about what the body should look like. Furthermore, the images themselves are disseminated throughout digital space, available to be appropriated into new (and often commercialised) contexts. Wearable fitness trackers exacerbate this degree of surveillance by capturing the quantifiable activities the body performs. These devices can monitor the amount of steps one takes per day, changes in heart rate, sleep patterns, and various other signifiers of the body. This information is generated as data that may be used for commercial purposes.

Since commencing this thesis in 2015, fitness culture has experienced notable shifts and developments. Much of the feminist rhetoric of mainstream women's fitness culture, as I have discussed, does not overtly identify itself as feminist. That is, there are few (if any) open

proclamations that fitness is feminist. Instead, the language is that fitness is empowering and liberating, or that fit girls are strong and powerful. I have been following an online magazine called *Ms. Fit Magazine*[71] (founded in 2013) that presents itself as an explicitly feminist response to mainstream fitness culture for women. Its manifesto declares that 'we, the Ms. Fits, believe that living consciously includes being conscious of the world outside of the yoga or Pilates studio and that our wellness also depends on the wellness of the earth and everyone on the earth' (*Ms. Fit Magazine* 2013, n.p.). This sentiment expresses a desire to move away from the individualised experience of fitness, and towards a concept of wellness that includes issues – such as reproductive rights, health care, addictions and trauma – that are specific to 'women and queer folks' (*Ms. Fit*, 2013, n.p.). With articles such as 'Your workout is not a war zone: rethinking the language of fitness' (Richards, 2015), 'We did it so you don't have to: three day cleanse' (Bergquist, 2016) and 'Jiggle is hot: exploring sex in a fat body' (Chastain, n.d.), *Ms. Fit Magazine*'s perspective on fitness extends past the commodities and mechanics of fitness, and questions how fitness affects different subjectivities.

This magazine is framed as 'alternative', however mainstream fitness itself has undergone a degree of change over the last decade that acknowledges the importance to consumers, and therefore the profit line, of fitness that is more inclusive and holistic in approach. The Lorna Jane website, for example, now offers a place where consumers can register interest in an expanded size range. This is contextualised by a message from company's founder, Lorna Jane Clarkson, stating that although she believes the current size range is justified because it is in line with industry standard:

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[71] While the title, *Ms. Fit*, may invite comparisons with Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pitman Hughes' iconic *Ms.* magazine of the feminist second wave, the publications are unrelated.

I am constantly searching for ways I can do better and feel it's my responsibility to ensure Lorna Jane lives up to your expectations. We would love nothing more than for Lorna Jane to lead the industry in sizes outside of common fashion industry standards and we need your help and support to get there. (Lorna Jane, 2018)

This excerpt, along with the rest of the statement, suggests that there are increasingly diverse voices among members of fitness culture, and that these voices effect some kind of change, or at least recognition, by fitness institutions. It is unclear at this stage whether or not this development will challenge the broader problematic structures of fitness cultures, or whether this shift is merely about making the culture more widespread. Notably, Lorna Jane's call for diversity forces the onus onto the consumers, rather than making the executive (and potentially costly) decision to expand the size range without quantitative input from existing customers, many of whom are already likely to fit into the sizes offered by the company. This suggests that while some of the ideologies of fitness culture have and will continue to evolve over time, some of them – such as the logic of commodities – will remain stable. What can be inferred from these new developments is that the debate about the cultural work of women's fitness culture is continually reshaped and reworked from multiple angles and voices. While the discourses of fitness, femininity and consumerism are constantly morphing and adapting, so too do informed and empowered responses and resistances to the more damaging aspects of culture and consumption.

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