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#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' and Mother's Narratives on the Impact of Fitspiration via
Social Media

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Approval of Thesis

The undersigned certify that they have read the thesis entitled

#FITSPO: ADOLESCENT GIRLS' AND MOTHER'S NARRATIVES ON THE
IMPACT OF FITSPIRATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to each and every person that identifies as a girl or woman who has ever been minimized, derailed, or imprisoned by ‘feeling fat’.

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First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Gina Wong for being an unwaveringly enthusiastic supporter of this research from its inception to its final form. Your guidance and mentorship helped to capture my many swirling, floating ideas and give them form and focus. Gina, your cultivation of my research skills and encouragement of my development and growth as a writer are invaluable to me. This formative experience would not have been possible without you. I will carry the learning I gleaned from you with me always in my career as a researcher and clinician.

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Abstract

This research explores adolescent girls' (age 16 to 17) and mothers of adolescent girls' (age 15 to 17) storied experiences of viewing, guiding, and communicating about fitspiration on visual-based social media networks. The feminist-narrative research puzzle is, "*What are the storied experiences of adolescent girls (age 15 to 17) and mothers of adolescent girls (age 15 to 17) of viewing, guiding, and communicating about fitspiration on visual-based social media?*" Five common threads in the four narratives emerged as (1) culture of valuation contingent on appearance; (2) viewing fitspiration resulted in body dissatisfaction; (3) possessing coping resources does not guarantee immunity to body dissatisfaction; (4) mothers recognize impact of fitspiration on daughters; (5) mothers guide through various methods but remain uncertain; (6) alternative body messaging aids in resistance to body ideal influence. A differing thread emerged as (1) mothers differ in fitspo knowledge; (2) mothers differ in communication and regulation intrusiveness.

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PROLOGUE

“Women have often felt insane when cleaving to the truth of our experience. Our future depends on the sanity of each of us, and we have a profound stake, beyond the personal, in the project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other”
–Adrienne Rich

My Story

The days, weeks, and months in my early adolescence leading up to the first time realization that I felt fat are decidedly blurry but jolted through me like a reverberating self-hate shockwave. My focus sharpens when I recall standing in front of a dance studio mirror. I am next to 12 or so other girls near my age, furnished with a body suit and tights and honing in with a special intensity on the differences between others’ bodies and my own. No one ever explicitly told me I was too big at my dance studio, in fact, looking back I was likely underweight for my age. But, in an environment where extreme thinness is key to success, the implicit message that thinner was better was insidiously present in many interactions.

Other venues and contexts contributed to my fat feeling, as well. At home, I had high achievement expectations placed on me mired in a rigid strictness. In my social circle, the trend of being absurdly thin as circulated in sociocultural rhetoric in the 90s and 2000s was all too present. The lack of control and autonomy at home, a parent-induced need for perfection, and external messaging that exceptionally thin bodies were the most attractive all contributed to my ardent dissatisfaction with myself.

This dissatisfaction was made the most evident when I was in the dance studio. I was a good dancer. I was skilled and effortful in my movements. I was not the best in the studio, but I was up there. I loved it, too. But I wasn’t tall. In fact, I’m quite short for a

dancer – 5'2-5'3 in my early adolescence at most. And I wasn't long and lean. I have shorter, more compact limbs, and muscular legs. This proved unsatisfactory to me. Maybe I couldn't change my height, but I resolved to be better than good at dance. I committed to perfection.

The route to perfection involved losing weight and, I imagined, consequently eliminating that fat feeling. After exhausting my grandma's hand-me-down recipe books, some of which extolled the benefits low fat cooking, I was at loss for resources on how best to lose weight. It was 2004 and although my family had had a computer and Internet access for several years, the Internet was a much different space than it is today. There was not such an automatic tendency, even back then, to 'Google' something to garner immediate results. It wasn't until I depleted my other options that I considered using the Internet for weight loss information.

I would wait until late evening when my parents thought I was in bed, and sneak hurriedly downstairs to our office to use the looming, grey desktop computer. A thrilling wave of fear would resound through me, lifting the hairs on my arms to the sky like a thousand little lightning rods. I knew I was doing something that I was not supposed to be doing, although I could not place a finger on what exactly made it bad. With pointed anticipation I would sign on to my favourite pro-Ana websites. These consisted primarily of now dated looking message boards, and aspirational images of very thin models, designed by young girls and women who had a loose grasp on the use of HTML. As I finally hit the time of day that I could participate in this digital world of girls and women who all felt just as fat as I did, I would feel a nostalgic sense that I was among old friends.

At first these boards seemed relatively innocuous. I didn't even know what eating disorders were, really, except for maybe that one girl with anorexia I had glimpsed on the TV as my mom watched a late afternoon episode of Oprah. I was already fully subscribed to an idea that being thin was the most important thing I could be so I didn't notice or become alarmed as I gradually let my desire to become thinner completely control my waking life.

My pursuit of thinness was bolstered by inspirational images that I printed from these websites and curated in a notebook. Thinspiration, images of very thin, model-like women with bones protruding from their angular bodies, usually accompanied by an inspirational quote acted as fuel for my obsession. I pored over these images repeatedly to distract myself from how hungry I felt. I regularly used the bodies in the images as a benchmark for my own weight loss success. Although many factors contributed to my descent into disordered eating, thinspiration was a significant influence in maintaining my fervent desire to be thin that lasted most of my adolescence.

I continued to feel desire to be very thin and feed my destructive habits for several more years. It was not until I simultaneously had a health scare and came upon the ideology of feminism, also online, that I emerged on the other side of my six year long haze. It felt like a revelation. Armed with a better understanding of the sociocultural forces that contributed to the arduous and difficult experiences I had in my teens, I set out to extract the deeply embedded remnants of patriarchal indoctrination that were stuck in me like burrs. I struggled to free myself from feeling like I was not valuable if I was not deemed to be physically perfect. Even though I had made an effort to shirk the ideal, the desire to pursue looking like the ideal above all other endeavours would seep out. It was

sometimes difficult to direct my focus to school or work related activities if I felt anything less than completely satisfied with my appearance. I also found myself comparing myself to the women around me in regard to appearance, and having to consciously stem this automatic tendency. I tried to subdue these remnants through several different avenues. I realized I needed to surround myself with friends who were not also preoccupied with their own bodies and appearance, so I shifted friend groups. I gave up looking at online media that purported the thin ideal and I tried to focus more on eating and exercising for enjoyment rather than weight loss. Finally, I educated myself more fully on oppressive body ideal standards for girls and women and made every effort to absorb this counter message. Even so, no matter how much work I did to be able to reject societally endorsed female body and appearance ideals, they are ever-present. There was no way to escape these ideals completely. I have utilized this realization as kindling to fuel a new fire. A fire that I hoped would, in some small way, help to consume the overhanging standards girls and women are subject to.

Coupled with my own motivations to enact change, I had felt reassured in recent years. Thinspiration and associated content was banned from several big social networking sites. It felt like progress. I felt optimistic. It was not until recently as I casually scrolled through my Instagram feed and came across hordes of fitspiration images, eerily similar to thinspo, that I realized the ideal was still being insidiously pressed upon girls and women. I experienced a not so nostalgic barrage of memories as I realized fitspiration looked a lot like the thinspiration I used to look at. I questioned myself. These images were supposed to espouse healthy eating and exercise, not debilitating thinness. Upon first glance, this might be the message one might receive from

fitspiration. But I looked closer. What I saw provided me with questions; questions that I wanted answers to. The overarching question in my mind was something like: is the experience of viewing fitspo for girls and women today anything like what viewing thinspo was for me fifteen years ago? Maybe – but maybe I was completely off the mark. I felt a drive to investigate further and so I generated this research idea and subsequent study to add something to what has been, until very recently, a relatively unexamined topic. Disallowing these ideals set out for girls and women to be continuously recycled and made palatable for mass consumption is my impetus behind this current research endeavour. It is with this that I embark on my contribution to curbing the epidemic that is “feeling fat” for all those that have ever and will ever feel that way.

My Story in Context

I have included my story in this work to reveal my motivations that led me to undertake this research. I have engaged in narrative inquiry embedded in my overarching intersectional feminist worldview (Crenshaw, 1989). Adherents to both narrative and feminist research methodologies espouse the need for researchers to make ourselves transparent within the research and to share our personal experiences (Hilfinger Messias, & DeJoseph, 2004). As narratives emerge through relational transactions between the researcher and participants, it is impossible for the researcher to stay silent or to demonstrate a kind of “...perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62). My endeavour to share my personal history in relation to the research topic gives needed context to my role in the emergent narratives through relational exchange with participants. As a woman who came of age during the infancy of online and social media networks, I have been and continue to be influenced by messages

of the body ideal and its association with girls' and women's inherent worth. To deny my previous and current relationship with an enduring sociocultural narrative would be to erase a factor that allowed the participants to relate to and open up to me.

I developed relationships with the research participants guided by my intersectional feminist ideals. As an intersectional feminist I aim to live my life in all arenas by interacting from the base of feminist values that I hold (Crenshaw, 1989). This includes utilizing my personal and professional privileges in social justice and advocacy work. In an effort to be a social justice oriented researcher and practitioner, my goal with this research is to share the stories of girls and women who have direct experience with fitspiration on social media to a broader audience. Additionally, the act of story sharing itself can be an empowering experience for participants. Finally, I aim provide a novel contribution to the developing literature base on this topic.

The context of my own life and experiences I have had therein ultimately lead me to this research. A few years ago, I was doing a clinical internship with a non-profit organization partnered with a government agency in Canada and I worked primarily with adolescents. I worked with adolescents of all genders, but it was through work with adolescents who identify as girls that I came to realize a common thread between all of the conversations I was having, regardless of the adolescent girl's presenting concern. The common thread was an underlying dissatisfaction with her own body or other aspects of her appearance, typically in relation to peers deemed to be more ideal, or social media figures such as fitspiration models. I reflect on how the stories I heard from many adolescent clients mirrors the premise of normative body discontent. Normative body discontent is a label for the dissatisfaction regarding weight and/or appearance girls and

women in the Western world experience (Liimakka, 2011). This discontent with one's body weight and appearance is a norm rather than an exception (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984). Normative body discontent is theorized to result from sociocultural ideals that girls and women are vulnerable to internalizing (Liimakka, 2011). It is learned through the sociocultural context of female body ideals to align one's self worth as a girl or woman with how well they match the ideal (Peterson, Grippo, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2008). Normative discontent was prevalent in the adolescent population I worked with and I could not help but wonder if this was related to social media use (i.e., fitspiration and other idealized images) as well as the recent general decline in Canadian adolescents' mental health and wellbeing (Gandhi et al., 2016).

In Canada, over the last decade, adolescents' mental health and wellbeing have generally decreased (Gandhi et al., 2016). Adolescent girls' mental health is reported to be more greatly affected than adolescent boys' as girls typically experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and body dissatisfaction amongst other challenges (Angold, Erkanli, Silberg, Eaves, & Costello, 2002; Ferreiro, Seone, & Senra, 2014; van den Berg, Mond, Eisenberg, Ackard, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2010). Coupled with the fact that adolescent girls are the group most likely to use visual based social media, specifically fitspiration, and have more of a tendency towards upward appearance comparison, I felt that this was an untapped topic of importance (Carrotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015; Fardouly, Pinkus, & Vartanian, 2017). Additionally, many of the female adolescents I spoke with during my clinical internship had never talked about fitspiration with anyone before. When I inquired as to why not, I generally received responses that indicated they either did not feel comfortable going to their parents about it because it

might not be seen as a real problem, or that their parents may not understand due to not having grown up with social media themselves. This spurred my curiosity as to what was reflected in the literature in regards to adolescent social media use, fitspiration specifically, and parenting practices surrounding adolescent social media use.

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

In this introduction, I briefly describe the background for this research and why it is needed. In addition, I highlight the methodology and ethical considerations, acquaint the reader with research participants, and introduce the two manuscripts formulated from this research. These manuscripts contain stories and plotlines that were derived from the process of narrative inquiry. The two manuscripts are complementary and their content unfolded, respectively, from the initial research puzzle.

Background

Social media use in Canada. The use of technology for accessing social media is a popular activity for many North Americans. In our Canadian context, this trend toward social media use is pervasive (Canadian Internet Registration Authority, 2014). While social media use is prevalent across generations, adolescent girls and mothers of children under 18 are some of the predominant users of social media. These two groups tend towards the use of visual based social media networks more than other groups (Lenhart, 2015). Visual based social media networks are those on which the primary method of engagement is through content such as photographs, videos, and other types of images. Visual based social media networks contain a variety of images with diverse subject matter. Images of women's bodies are a category that is well represented within the array of images shared on these networks (Carrotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015) Previous research has determined that the use of visual-based social media to look at any type of image of other people can result in detrimental outcomes such as decreased body satisfaction, drive for thinness, and increased disordered eating behaviours (Ferguson, Munoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014).

Social media and body image outcomes. Use of social media to consume images of people has been linked to negative body image and body satisfaction outcomes for girls and women (Ferguson et al., 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Although time spent using social media has been correlated with negative body image outcomes, it is the interactive nature of social media and specific types of use that are more clearly associated with said outcomes (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Users who engage in activities surrounding visual content such as posting or sharing photos of themselves; as well as commenting, liking, or simply looking at other people's photos tend to experience increases in weight dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, thin ideal internalization, self-objectification, and basing self-worth on appearance (Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). Effects such as these have also been correlated with individuals' interaction with fitspiration, specifically, on visual based social media networks (Carrotte et al., 2015; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

Fitspiration on social media networks. Images of extremely muscular women with low body fat, stylized in an inspirational fashion and circulated on social media networks are colloquially termed fitspiration, or fitspo. Fitspiration is typically accessed via visual based social media networks (Carrotte et al., 2015). As previously mentioned, these are the social media networks that adult mothers and adolescent girls frequent. This research defines fitspiration as fitness-based visual content intended for inspiration that typically display idealized, carefully perfected, and muscular physiques primarily of women with very low adiposity, often portrayed in a disembodied and objectified manner and often accompanied by a work-out inspiring quote, phrase, or caption.

Fitspiration has become increasingly represented in the variety of images visual based social media users interact with. This is particularly true for adolescent girls and adult women (Carrotte et al., 2015). Fitness content including fitspiration pages, detox pages, and diet and fitness plan pages are widely viewed by adolescent girls age 15 to 17 who are social media users (Carrotte et al., 2015). Although adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 17 engage most often with fitspiration, adult women also engage with it heavily, more so than adult men (Carrotte, et al., 2015). Other than Carrotte et al.'s (2015) study, the current available research on fitspiration focuses solely on an adult female population.

For young adult women, acute exposure to fitspiration images is associated with increases in negative mood, state body dissatisfaction, and lowered appearance self esteem, mediated by appearance comparison, compared to a control group not exposed at all (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). In the longer term, women who follow more fitness boards that contain fitspiration images on Pinterest are significantly more likely to report desire to lose weight and intent to engage in extreme weight loss behaviours (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). This association is mediated through appearance comparison and is significantly increased by women's endorsement of the thin ideal (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The psychological outcomes of viewing and engaging with fitspiration seem to be generally negative for adult women social media users. As of yet, there has been no research directly examining whether these effects also occur for adolescent girls who view and interact with fitspiration. Considering the paucity of literature on adolescent girls' use of social media for various kinds of engagement with fitspiration, it

remains to be seen whether the relationships of fitspiration engagement and associated outcomes for adult women also hold true for adolescent girls.

It is prudent to learn how social media use to view fitspiration images are experienced by adolescent girls and what protective factors can be identified, if any. Adolescence is an important developmental phase during which girls can be more cognitively and affectively vulnerable due to their still-developing frontal lobe of the brain (Anderson, 2015). The frontal lobe serves as the centre for executive function, decision-making, empathy, and impulse control, among other functions (Anderson, 2015). Developmental immaturity of the brain creates an increased vulnerability to adverse mental health outcomes (Anderson, 2015). Adult mothers of children under 18 are, in general, also using visual-based social media networks much more than other groups. It can be surmised that they encounter fitspiration on these networks. Additionally, mothers play a pivotal role in regulation, guidance, and communication surrounding their children's social media use (Anderson, 2016; Carrotte et al., 2015, Lenhart, 2015).

Mothers guiding daughters through social media use. Parents are in a position to provide integral support to their children, aiding in protection from potential negative psychological outcomes of social media use and media messaging (Brausch & Decker, 2014; Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012; Meier & Gray, 2014). Although all parents and caregivers can be important figures in guiding and regulating adolescent's media use, research has indicated that mothers more often guide their children in regards to media use (Anderson, 2016; Nikken & Jansz, 2006). Some researchers have asserted that fathers may play an equal role in monitoring media use (Anderson, 2016); however,

mothers tend to lead communicating with their adolescent children as to what is appropriate to share online, to view online, and online behaviour towards others (Anderson, 2015; Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005). Additionally, as mothers are more engaged with social media than fathers, they generally have more direct experience with it (Anderson, 2015; Duggan, Lenhart, Lampe, & Ellison, 2015). Proactive conversations and communication related to social media use, but not specifically monitoring or regulating it is where mothers outpace fathers and other guardians in guiding their children. This is particularly influential in the context of conversations regarding appearance and body ideals as portrayed in media.

Mothers, daughters, and body satisfaction. Mothers are also important when it comes to guiding their daughters in regards to general body satisfaction (Curtis & Loomans, 2014). Mothers have strong influence on their daughters' body satisfaction via mechanisms such as negative feedback, disapproval of their daughter's figure, and their own internalization of media messages regarding the thin ideal (Arroyo, Segrin, & Andersen, 2017; Cooley, Toray, Wang, & Valdez, 2008; Curtis & Loomans, 2014). Mothers' opinions surrounding body shape, weight management, and adherence to the thin ideal can be substantially influential on how adolescent daughters feel about their bodies (Arroyo & Andersen, 2016; Kluck, 2010). A conversational focus on body appearance and weight demonstrated by mothers is associated with higher depressive symptomology, greater prevalence of extreme weight control behaviours, and greater prevalence of binge eating in adolescent daughters (Arroyo et al., 2017; Bauer, Bucchianeri, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013). Conversely, warm parent-child bonds that promote secure attachments within family, peer, and romantic relationships may shield

adolescents from body ideal message susceptibility and associated body dissatisfaction (Patton, Beaujean, & Benedict, 2014). In light of the above relationship and given that social media use to view fitspo is detrimental to women it is prudent to learn more about adolescent girls' experiences of fitspiration as they are vulnerable to negative body image outcomes (Anderson, 2015). Correspondingly, mothers are using visual based social media to view fitspo at high rates and reportedly doing more communicating with children about social media use than fathers (Anderson, 2015). In consideration of gaps in the literature, it is imperative to learn more about both adolescent girls' and mothers' experiences of fitspo as well as the presence or lack thereof of fitspo related interactions between mothers and adolescent daughters.

Research Puzzle

The purpose of this research is: (1) To capture the storied experience of what viewing of fitspiration images of very thin and muscular women's bodies via social media is like for adolescent girls' (age 15 to 17); (2) To learn whether these adolescent girls are guided by their mothers in regards to this viewing and if so, how; (3) To capture mothers of adolescent girls' (15 to 17) storied experience of exposure to fitspiration images of very thin and muscular women's bodies via social media; (4) To capture the storied experience of these mothers of adolescent girls' understanding, guidance, and communication in regards to their daughters' social media use specifically regarding fitspiration.

In efforts to structure exploration of the research puzzle, my initial thoughts were to interview dyadic pairs of mothers and their adolescent daughters. However, upon further reflection and discussion with my supervisor, we deemed interviewing dyadic

mother-daughter pairs to be disadvantageous to eliciting the rich and detailed data sought. Interviewing dyadic pairs within a study of four participants may have resulted in self-editing of participant disclosures due to not feeling safe with the lack of anonymity to their family member. Pseudonyms would not have effectively disguised individual's storied experiences within the dyadic pairs. The knowledge of who said what upon release of the final thesis could have caused distress or conflict within the two mother-daughter relationships. It is also possible that good outcomes and closer bonds may occur with dyadic pairs included in the study; however, the risk could not be overlooked. Thus, in order to protect anonymity and to honour familial relationships, two adolescent girls and two mothers of adolescent girls were invited to participate, who were all unrelated.

As this topic is nascent in the literature, an initial exploration utilizing qualitative methods is suitable. Qualitative methods are suitable because they are utilized to explore a topic in depth and create a foundation of knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative modality was selected for this research as it fosters the deep examination of the storied experiences of a few participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This narrative inquiry was framed by a critical feminist theoretical paradigm.

Methodology

Theoretical paradigm. This study is predicated from a feminist paradigm. Feminist scholars and activists work to, “destabilize hierarchical categories of difference” (Bodwitch, 2014, para. 5). As a feminist researcher, I emphasize addressing structural inequalities through research focused on the perspectives of marginalized people (Bodwitch, 2014). A primary underlying assumption of feminist research is that women and other marginalized groups experience oppression through varied means and that this

experience differs based on the intersecting identities of a person (Maguire, 1996). I embarked on this research process under the assumption that women and girls are marginalized and experience oppression, specifically in regards to the body image ideal as defined societally.

Qualitative research is an appropriate medium through which to conduct a feminist inquiry because as a feminist researcher, I was able to address questions that are relevant to the participants' lives whilst respecting their values, knowledge, and subjectivity (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). I place value on women's experiences as a reputable source of knowledge and acknowledge that while intertwined with my interpretations, participants were speaking on their own behalf.

My aim in conducting this research was not only to describe the participants' storied experiences but also to be part of a process by which women's and girls' oppression is challenged (Gorelick, 1991). From awareness stems social action; following this research project I will continue to advocate with and for people of all gender identities in resisting oppressive body ideals as defined societally. Narratives derived due to this study may highlight potential areas of advocacy in the realm of social media literacy as well as raise awareness of how consumption of fitspiration via social media impacts some adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls. Points of social justice action and/or inquiry may also emerge in order to provide a roadmap for advocates.

Mode of inquiry. This two-part research emphasizes empowering both adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls to share their stories in regard to consumption and guidance of consumption of fitspiration images. Narrative inquiry was suitable for this aim given its allowance for the deep examination of the storied

experiences of a few participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry moves away from generalizations and instead the aim is to create texts that offer readers information that they can interpret on an individual basis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, participants are seen as embodiments of lived stories and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry involves the exploration of what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described as the three dimensional narrative space. The 3D space of narrative inquiry includes the exploration of interactions of a participant's narrative both with themselves and their social environment, the continuity of their narrated experience (i.e. past, present, and future), and the contextual situation of their narrated experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative methodology aligned with my feminist aim of hearing the voices of adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls and assisting in empowering them to describe their experiences firsthand while honouring the ongoing nature of participants' storied lives (Ardovini, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Narrative interpretation. My interpretations of the narratives emerged from examining the data in detail, my personal views, and the contrast of the data with the frameworks from which I was working (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My personal views and experiences inevitably became intertwined with my interpretation of the data, thus co-constructing meaning. This intertwining of myself with the data adds a dimension beyond what the participant has communicated, as it becomes the communication filtered through my interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent. An ongoing ethical consideration involved obtaining and maintaining informed consent or assent from participants. Assent was obtained from each adolescent participant via an assent form and ongoing verbal reaffirmation. Adolescent participants' parent(s) or guardian(s) also signed a consent form for their child's participation. I invited parents or guardian of the adolescents to decide collaboratively with their child whether the adolescent will participate (Grady et al., 2014).

Data retrieval. I explained to participants that they could opt out of the study at any time prior to the end of data collection and beginning of data interpretation. Participants were made aware that they could no longer opt out after that point. The online blog was provided to the participants to keep if they wished to. Participants received a copy of their story that they could confer on, edit, and amend as desired within a two-week period of receiving their document.

Emotional trigger. During the course of this study there was a risk of emotional upset to participants because issues discussed were potentially sensitive. Qualitative interviews can also create new or challenging ways of shifting participants' self-stories (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). Finally, there was a risk of stress due to questioning in qualitative interviews (i.e., participants may have questioned whether they have provided the 'right' answers). I provided a list of counselling services and psychologists to all participants prior to the start of interviewing in the case that they required further follow-up or emotional debriefing.

Confidentiality and anonymity. I maintained both confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and their respective data. Confidentiality was only to be broken in the

case of participant disclosure of harm to self or another, which was made clear to participants in the informed consent or assent process. Participants were asked to develop a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. None of the participants wished to choose their pseudonym, so I developed one for them. I asked participants for their affirmation that the pseudonym chosen was acceptable to them.

Thesis Overview

The four participants were assigned the pseudonyms: Ana, Dana, Elaine, and Miriam. Ana, a 17 year old described herself, “I’m in high school, one semester left then I am going to University. I want to study psychology, Bachelor of Arts. Yeah I just kind of found an interest in grade eleven in psychology.” She presented in our interview as soft spoken and shy. Quickly, she revealed a strong sense of conviction and a sharp eye for critique of idealized female body images informed by her love of psychology. Miriam, the other adolescent girl participant, was age 16 at the time of our interview. In talking about herself, Miriam said, “I’m in grade 12, and I’m 17. I want to go into visual arts but I’m taking a gap year. I really like water colour and ink as my preferred media.” Miriam’s natural creativity, confidence, and assertion of her ideals consistently appeared throughout our interview. The participant mothers of adolescent girls included Dana and Elaine. Dana, a mother of a 15 year old adolescent girl, spoke in concise language and was bold in sharing her experiences. About herself, Dana said, “I mean, I guess for me I was never really a follow the crowd kind of person... Maybe it’s because I’m a little bit rebellious, too. That it’s like, ‘you can’t tell me that I need to wear or look like that...’” Finally, Elaine, a mother of a 17 year old adolescent girl was tentative and thoughtful in her contributions to our conversation. In discussing her inclination toward being a more

tactful and private person Elaine said, “I try not to follow a lot of people or have myself followed or anything like that because, you know, you hear from a lot of people that it’s just, I don’t know, how many friends you have, and this and that.” Ana and Miriam’s stories are presented in the preliminary manuscript, with Elaine and Dana’s following in the second manuscript.

This thesis integrates two separate narrative manuscripts with an overarching feminist perspective to create an interconnected document. The first manuscript highlights the storied experiences of two adolescent girl participants (16 to 17) of viewing fitspiration via social media, interacting with their mothers surrounding social media and body ideals, and methods through which they cope with the effects of viewing. The second manuscript relates the storied experiences of two mothers of adolescent girls (15 to 17) of understanding, guiding, and communicating with their daughters regarding social media and fitspiration. Mother’s storied experiences of viewing fitspiration are also described. Subsequently, convergent and divergent storyline threads between the two narratives in each manuscript are discussed, respectively. Each manuscript concludes with a summary, and provides recommendations for counselling practice, limitations, and directions for future research. The thesis document concludes with an epilogue.

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**Manuscript I: #FITSPO: ADOLESCENT GIRLS' STORIES OF VIEWING
FITSPIRATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

Abstract

This research explores two Canadian adolescent girls' (age 16 and 17) storied experiences of viewing, interacting with, and being guided or not guided by their mothers regarding fitspiration on visual-based social media networks. The research puzzle, formulated via a feminist narrative approach is, "*What are the storied experiences of adolescent girls (age 15 to 17) of viewing, interacting with, and being guided by their mothers regarding fitspiration on visual-based social media?*" Semi-structured interviews and online participant fitspiration blogs comprised the data. Data was collected and interpreted using a feminist narrative approach. Four common threads in the two narratives emerged as the adolescent girls experienced: (1) inescapable and oppressive culture of appearance expectation for girls and women; (2) self-comparison and body dissatisfaction from viewing fitspiration; (3) perception of mothers as helpful by displaying body confidence and proactive discussions; (4) the ideology of body positivity aided the girls in resisting the ideal. One divergent thread between adolescent girls emerged in regard to their mothers' knowledge and regulation of their social media use. Storyline threads are further examined in context. Implications for counselling practice and future research directions are provided.

Keywords: Social media, fitspiration, qualitative, narrative inquiry, feminist theory.

#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' Storied Experience of Viewing Fitspiration on Social Media

The use of technology for accessing social media is a popular activity for many Canadians as approximately twenty-four million Canadians used electronics to access social media in 2013-2014 (Canadian Internet Registration Authority, 2014).

Adolescents, defined as age 13-17, are some of the heaviest users of social media with 81% having some sort of social media profile (Lenhart, 2015; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Indeed, adolescent girls engage with social media more than adolescent boys with 61% of girls using Instagram, 51% using Snapchat, and 33% using Pinterest compared to adolescent boys' with 44% using Instagram, 31% Snapchat, and 11% Pinterest (Lenhart, 2015). Lenhart underscored that adolescent girls tend towards using social media networks on which the primary source of engagement and interaction is with visual based media. Visual based social media is primarily comprised of pictures and video content (Lenhart, 2015). It is notable that adolescent girls primarily use the aforementioned networks to engage with image content as interaction with visual based content on social media has been associated with some adverse psychological outcomes (i.e., Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). This is particularly true in regard to images displaying models that adhere to the sociocultural female body ideal.

Engagement with Pictures of People on Social Media and Body Dissatisfaction

The use of social media to engage with visual content that depicts images of edited, perfected, or idealized female and male bodies is associated with negative body image outcomes for girls and women (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Although time spent on social media has been correlated with negative body image outcomes, it is the

interactive nature of social media and specific types of use that are more clearly associated with said outcomes (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Social media is different from other forms of media in that those who use it are, "...simultaneously information sources and receivers" (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016, p. 101). Female users who engage in social media activity surrounding images and other visual content such as posting or sharing photos of themselves; as well as commenting, liking, or simply looking at other people's photos tend to experience increases in weight dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, thin ideal internalization, self-objectification, and basing of self-worth on appearance (Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). These outcomes are mediated by appearance comparison.

Appearance Comparison and Body Dissatisfaction

Appearance comparison, a common endeavour for girls and women, is a type of social comparison. Social comparison is the tendency for people to evaluate their value via comparing themselves to others on personal qualities in question (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison can occur in multiple different directions on relevant dimensions, chiefly upwards and downwards. Upward social comparison is the tendency to contrast oneself to others deemed to be better in regards to relevant dimensions (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison is something that the vast majority of people engage in with frequency; this is particularly true for adolescent girls (Fardouly, Pinkus, Vartainian, 2017).

Girls and women tend to engage in upward social comparison automatically and frequently. Appearance comparison is the most common type of social comparison that girls and women engage in throughout various life contexts (Fardouly et al., 2017). While

appearance comparison also occurs in multiple directions, it is upward comparison that is typically associated with negative psychological outcomes (Fardouly et al., 2017). Social media is a common venue on which upward appearance comparison occurs. Although there is scant research on adolescent girls' use of social media, the effects of appearance comparison via social media on adult women has been examined. Research with adult women has indicated that the upward appearance based comparison that they engage in via social media tends to be more extreme than in other contexts and results in more significant decreased mood and decreased state appearance satisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2017). This occurs regardless of whether a woman is typically dissatisfied with her body or not (Fardouly et al., 2017). These effects on women are pervasive and can be influential in the long-term.

Negative psychological outcomes associated with appearance comparison via social media can have lasting effects. That is, for young women, using social media as an arena for appearance based comparison has predicted higher levels of body image concerns and disordered eating up to four weeks later, whereas use related to peer competition catalyzed even more peer competition, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating six months later (Ferguson, Munoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2014; Hummel & Smith, 2014; Smith, Hames, & Joiner, 2013). Additionally, researchers who examined causality indicated that twenty minute duration of consumption of social media networks such as Facebook by women to view image-based content depicting people, subsequently experienced more significant concern about weight and shape than women in a control condition who did not view social media (Mabe, Forney, & Keel, 2014). More research needs to be conducted in order to assuredly state causality and identify all underlying

factors in the observed correlations. Additionally, research needs to extend to more diverse populations and to those groups that utilize visual based social media the most, such as adolescent girls (Lenhart, 2015). Regardless, it can be gleaned from current research that use of social media to engage with visual content of others and as an area for appearance based comparison is associated with body dissatisfaction and other negative body image outcomes. These outcomes are troublesome as body dissatisfaction and other related aspects of negative body image are pervasively challenging for girls and women and tied to further negative psychological outcomes. Although current research focuses on adult women, it can be surmised that similar effects may occur for adolescent girls, as they are generally more cognitively and affectively vulnerable to body dissatisfaction (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, & Alicke, 2013).

Body dissatisfaction is prevalent amongst adolescent girls and women (Balcetis et al., 2013). Body dissatisfaction involves objectifying oneself, having an unusual amount of body surveillance, and having negative feelings about one's appearance (Tiggeman & Kuring, 2004). While presence of body dissatisfaction does not always occur concurrently with negative body image, and they can exist independently of the other, body dissatisfaction does significantly predict future development of negative body image outcomes (Ferreiro, Seoane, & Senra, 2014; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015; van Den Berg, Mond, Eisenberg, Ackard, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2010). The general construct of body image can be defined as the overall perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that an individual has in regards to their physical self (Cash, 2004). An individual's overall body image, whether positive or negative, and sub-constructs such as body satisfaction, interact to produce various outcomes. Trait body dissatisfaction paired with

negative body image results in more dysfunction, emotional distress, and impact on quality of life than does dissatisfaction paired with normative body image discontent (Williams et al., 2004). In other words, an individual who demonstrates negative body image and body dissatisfaction feels negatively about their overall body and its functions and of various parts of their body most of the time. This tends to result in the experience of more negative emotions and less satisfaction with life than those that do not have such negative perceptions (Williams et al., 2004). The longitudinal negative impacts of body dissatisfaction and negative body image are important to consider in light of repackaged female body ideals being purported on social media and sold to girls and women.

Viewing Fitspiration on Visual Based Social Media Networks

Many types of images depicting people are shared on social media, but in recent years online communities that celebrate a very fit and thin idealized, usually female, body aesthetic have become prevalent (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Fitspiration seemingly evolved out of the societal unease that emerged around previous iterations of ideal female body images, namely thinspiration. Once the extreme thinness as depicted in thinspiration was held up as the goal to strive for, now media images that depict athletic, muscular, and low-adiposity figures of women are featured more prominently as ideal (Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012). Images of extremely fit and thin women with low body fat, stylized in an inspirational fashion are colloquially termed fitspiration, or fitspo. This research builds upon Tiggemann and Zaccardo's (2015) description of fitspiration by defining it as fitness-based visual content intended for inspiration that typically display idealized, carefully perfected, and muscular physiques of women and men with very low adiposity, often portrayed in a disembodied and objectified manner

and often accompanied by a work-out inspiring quote, phrase, or caption. The definition of fitspo in the present study furthers Tiggemann and Zaccardo's description by including the inspirational intent behind the circulation of the images as well as the mention of the often disembodied or objectified nature of the images.

Fitness content including fitspiration pages, detox pages, and diet and fitness plan pages are widely viewed by young people who are social media users. Limited research has suggested that the biggest predictor of consuming fitspiration and other fitness content via social media is being a female who is between the ages of 15-17 (Carrotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015). Although females between the ages of 15-17 engage very often with fitspiration, most current research explores the effect of viewing fitspiration on adult women. The available research indicates that for young adult women, acute exposure to fitspiration images is associated with increases in negative mood, state body dissatisfaction, and lowered appearance self esteem, mediated by appearance comparison, compared to a control group not exposed at all (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). In the longer term, women who follow more fitness boards that contain fitspiration images on Pinterest are significantly more likely to report desire to lose weight and intent to engage in extreme weight loss behaviours (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). This association is mediated through appearance comparison and is significantly increased by women's endorsement of the thin ideal (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The psychological outcomes of viewing and engaging with fitspiration seem to be generally negative for adult women social media users and it remains to be seen if this is also true for adolescent girls.

Users of social media are not simply passive viewers, but also active contributors of content. Those who engage with fitspiration on social media may create and post fitspiration as well as view it. Limited research suggests that women who post and curate fitspiration on social media tend to score significantly higher on measures for drive for thinness, bulimic symptoms, drive for muscularity, and compulsive exercise, but not body dissatisfaction (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Holland and Tiggemann determined that of women who actively post fitspiration on social media, 17.5% are at risk for clinical diagnosis of an eating disorder versus 4.3% of a control group who post travel pictures. Fitspiration posters tend towards striving for an ideal body, and disordered eating and exercise symptoms (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Fitspiration and other fitness oriented social media content tends to contain negative or guilt inducing messages about food and diet as well as problematic language that stigmatizes body weight (Carrotte et al., 2015). As such, it is reasonable to assume that the people creating and posting fitspiration endorse the negative and stigmatizing messages and the endorsement is related to their greater disordered eating and exercise symptoms (Carrotte et al., 2015; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). There has not been research completed on the effect of posting fitspiration on adolescent girls, although adolescent girls aged 15-17 engage with fitspiration more frequently than other social media users (Carrotte et al., 2015). Considering the paucity of literature on adolescent girls' use of social media for various kinds of engagement with fitspiration, it remains to be seen whether the relationships of fitspiration engagement and associated outcomes for adult women also hold true for adolescent girls.

It is prudent to learn how social media use to view fitspiration images are experienced by adolescent girls. Adolescence is an important developmental phase during which girls can be more cognitively and affectively vulnerable to media messages disseminated (Ferreiro et al., 2013). Adolescent girls are more likely than boys to have higher body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem (Jacobs, Reinecke, Gollan, & Kane, 2008; van Den Berg et al., 2010). Higher levels of body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls is associated with emergent depressive symptoms and disordered eating behaviour in later adolescence (Ferreiro et al., 2013). Adolescent girls are also the heaviest users of social media to view fitspiration (Carrotte et al., 2015). Emerging literature indicates that there are negative associations on users to both viewing and posting (Carrotte et al., 2015; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). If relationships between engaging with fitspiration via social media and associated outcomes for adult women are similar for adolescent girls, understanding protective factors is critical. Learning more about parents, and particularly mothers, who both use social media more and seem to be influential in regulation, guidance, and communication surrounding their children's social media use is a logical focal.

Mothers Guiding Daughters through Social Media Use

Parents are in a position to provide integral support to their children, aiding in protection from potential negative psychological outcomes of social media use and media messaging (Brausch & Decker, 2014; Homan et al., 2012; Meier & Gray, 2014). Parents are generally less likely to regulate Internet use for older adolescents (>15 years) as compared to younger adolescents and children (<15 years) and they are more likely to co-view and discuss internet content, as well as set more time and content limits on

consumption with younger adolescents and children (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005; Rosen et al., 2008). Although younger children tend to receive more concrete guidance surrounding social media and Internet use, various forms of regulation and guidance via parents does persist into later adolescence.

Although all parents and caregivers can be important figures in guiding and regulating adolescents' media use, research has indicated that mothers more often guide their children regarding media (Anderson, 2016; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg, Krccmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999). Some researchers have asserted that fathers may play an equal role in monitoring media use, specifically; but mothers tend to lead communicating with their adolescent children as to what is appropriate to share online, view online, and acceptable online behaviour (Anderson, 2016; Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005). As well, mothers are more engaged with social media than fathers and so typically have more direct experience with it (Anderson, 2016; Duggan et al., 2015). Proactive conversations and communication related to social media use, but not specifically monitoring or regulating, is where mothers outpace fathers and other guardians in guiding their children. Mothers' guidance is particularly influential in the context of conversations regarding appearance and body ideals as portrayed in media.

Mothers are influential in guiding their daughters in regard to general body satisfaction (Curtis & Loomans, 2014). Mothers have significant impact on their daughters' body satisfaction via mechanisms such as negative feedback, disapproval of their daughter's figure, and their own internalization of media messages regarding the thin ideal (Arroyo, Segrin, & Andersen, 2017; Cooley, Toray, Wang, & Valdez, 2008;

Curtis & Loomans, 2014). Mothers' opinions surrounding body shape, weight management, and adherence to the thin ideal can be substantially influential on how adolescent daughters feel about their bodies (Arroyo & Andersen, 2016; Kluck, 2010; Smolak, Levine, & Schermer, 1999). A conversational focus on body appearance and weight demonstrated by mothers is associated with higher depressive symptomology, greater prevalence of extreme weight control behaviours, and binge eating in adolescent daughters (Arroyo et al., 2017; Bauer, Bucchianeri, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013).

Conversely, warm parent-child bonds that promote secure attachments within family, peer, and romantic relationships may shield adolescents from body ideal message susceptibility and associated body dissatisfaction (Patton, Beaujean, & Benedict, 2014).

Given the complex interactions regarding social media use to view idealized female body images by adolescent girls who are already vulnerable to negative body image outcomes, it is prudent to learn more about their storied experiences fitspiration. It is also important to hear their storied experiences of the role their mothers play in regard to daughters' social media use.

Limitations of Literature Review

A limitation of this literature review is that the literature on fitspiration, specifically, is sparse. As such, I theorized from both the available literature on fitspiration as well as other related literature on the effects of viewing general female body ideal images on social media. Additionally, much of the available literature utilized adult women participants rather than adolescent girls. Although it can be surmised that many of the effects that adult women experience due to consuming female body ideal images and fitspo on social media are shared by adolescent girls, there may be additional

effects that occur for adolescents beyond the current scope of the literature. Research is needed to understand how adolescent girls' experiences of fitspo are the same and/or different than those of adult women.

A second limitation of this literature review is that at time of writing, there is no available literature that explores the interactions of mothers and daughters regarding daughters' fitspiration viewing. Thus, I synthesized information located in the literature regarding mothers and their children's general social media use. I also included available literature on fitspiration viewing to theorize about the possible role mothers have in their daughters' viewing of fitspo.

Research Puzzle

The purpose of this study is: (1) To capture the storied experience of what viewing of fitspiration images of very thin and muscular women's bodies via social media is like for adolescent girls (age 15 to 17) and; (2) To understand the ways in adolescent girls are guided by their mothers, or not, in regard to this viewing and if so, how.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

Participants included two adolescent girls age 16 and 17 at onset of data collection. The criteria for recruitment specified participants be adolescent girls between the ages of 15 to 17, from typically developing and nonclinical populations. Participants had to utilize at least one social media account such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or Tumblr to access idealized images of women's bodies including fitspiration at least several times per week. In this study, nonclinical persons were defined as individuals

who had not been formally diagnosed according to the DSM-IV or DSM-V with any mental disorders, personality disorders, or intellectual disabilities. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling methods. Five adolescent girls responded to recruitment efforts of which two met the criteria for participation. Of the respondents who did not meet participation criteria, one respondent was unavailable for an in person interview, and two had received clinical diagnoses. The adolescent girls who participated in the research were high school students from middle class households and of European-Canadian backgrounds. They were able-bodied and cisgender.

Research Design

Feminist theory. This study was informed by feminist theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hillfinger, Messias & DeJoseph, 2004). Feminist theorists purport that womens' and other non-dominant groups' interests, perspectives, experiences, and concerns are inherently valuable and should be explored in their own words (Ar dovini, 2015). Asking adolescent girls to directly narrate their storied experiences in relation to this phenomenon in their own words, gave space for participants to tell their stories without being diluted or distorted. The feminist prerogative of this research includes efforts to engage in the dissemination of unfolding stories so as to encourage relevant groups to become more aware of the experiences of viewing of fitspiration for adolescent girls and their concurrent interactions with their mothers (Hillfinger et al., 2004). Dissemination of stories will contribute to challenging oppressive sociocultural ideals for those who identify as girls and women.

Feminist scholars and activists work to, “destabilize hierarchical categories of difference” (Bodwitch, 2014, para. 5). Proponents of the feminist paradigm emphasize

addressing structural inequalities through research that is focused on the perspectives of marginalized people (Bodwitch, 2014). A primary underlying assumption of feminist research is that women and other marginalized groups experience oppression through varied means and that this experience differs based on the intersecting identities of a person (Maguire, 1996). This research was developed under the assumption that women and girls are marginalized and experience oppression, specifically in regards to the body image ideal as defined societally.

Narrative inquiry. Via this research I emphasized inviting adolescent girls to share their stories about viewing fitspo and interacting with their mothers surrounding fitspiration use. Narrative inquiry was suitable for this aim given its allowance for the deep examination of the storied experiences of a few participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry aims to create texts that offer readers information that they can interpret on an individual basis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, participants are seen as embodiments of lived stories and experiences rather than an exemplar of the greater culture (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry involves the exploration of what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described as the three dimensional narrative space. The 3D space of narrative inquiry includes the exploration of interactions of a participant's story both with their inner self and social environment, the continuity of their narrated experience (i.e. past, present, and future), and the contextual situation of their narrated experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives that stay as close to participants' experiences as possible were derived from examining the storied experiences in detail and filtering stories through the lens of the researcher's insights and personal experiences as well as the theoretical framework

(Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative methodology aligned with my feminist aim of hearing the voices of adolescent girls and inviting them to describe their experiences firsthand while honouring the ongoing nature of participants' storied lives (Ardovini, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Data Collection

Prior to commencement of data collection this study was approved by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Qualitative interviews. Data collection occurred over three months (January 2017 to March 2017) in a city in Canada. Data was primarily collected through one in-depth qualitative interview with each participant. Qualitative interviewing is a method that is compatible with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants that responded to recruitment efforts were contacted to determine fit. The selected participants that fit the inclusion criteria worked collaboratively with myself to choose interview locations, dates, and times so as to provide the participants with a greater degree of comfort and agency.

During the interview sessions I followed a loosely guiding interview protocol (see Appendix B) in order for the research question to remain the focus with each participant while leaving space for unique stories to emerge within conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During the interviews I asked the participants questions that pointed in each of the three dimensional directions of narrative space and inquiry. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

Participant blogs. Participants were invited to keep private, online, blogs through the duration of the data-collection portion of the study, approximately one and one half months. The intent of the blogs was to learn more about the storied experience of viewing images that objectify and idealize the female form, with a focus on fitspiration, as it was occurring in the participants' lives during the week. Private, password protected online blogs, accessible only to the individual participant and myself were created on the personal blogging site Tumblr. During the data collection period, the adolescent girls received a blog writing prompt via email every week for a period of four weeks. The prompt, which was the same each week, invited participants to submit a selection of images of girls' and women's bodies that they had viewed on social media in the past week that made an impact on them. They were also asked to provide a brief summary of one paragraph minimum regarding their general experience of viewing the images. These images were not limited to fitspiration, but fitspiration acted as an entry point for the four blogs completed by each participant.

Determination of Plotlines

Unfolding of plotlines. Firstly, I transcribed audio-recorded interviews to text, verbatim.. Secondly, I screen captured and curated participant blogs in chronological order. Following this, data interpretation occurred through a series of nonlinear steps. I immersed myself in reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and blog journals in order to get a sense of the texts that were transcribed and curated. I utilized Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) process of 3-D narrative interpretation in order to orient participants' narratives according to past, present, and future as situated in their life context. I combed over the texts in order to look for threads of overarching plot and subplot via exploring

narrative commonplaces at the intersections of time, place, social interactions and social action (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I pored over the transcripts, as I employed a colour coding system in order to organize plotlines and to look for and determine the relationship of overarching plot and subplot threads.

After the interviews, I organized unfolding overarching plotlines according to emphasis or emotional importance placed on them by the participants (Hillfinger et al., 2004). Narratives were kept intact so as to theorize from the cases rather than across cases (Hillfinger et al., 2004). The stories were interpreted and re-told through two formal subsequent interactions between each of the participants and myself as a form of relational transaction (Caine et al., 2013). Through member checks and by asking the participants to authorize and, if necessary, rework the interpretations, divergent worldviews coalesced to construct data collaboratively into stories with convergent and divergent threads. Each participant was contacted once via email one month after the initial interview for any follow-up and discussion about their interview transcript. Each participant was contacted again via email two months after the initial interviews to confer on their completed stories.

Participants' Stories

Miriam's Story

A struggle that is both personal and universal. Miriam, a 17 year old girl, did not always possess the strong sense of confidence and assertion of self that effortlessly emanates from her in the present day. It took a great deal of struggle to transverse the varied obstacles to being okay with herself that the trajectory of female adolescence provided. Living in a culture where there is a minimum expectation of

beauty, body, and appearance routine that those who identify as girls and women must subscribe to in order to be basically acceptable in the world, Miriam found herself being drawn into this way of being and internalizing these messages as early as her pre-teen years (van den Berg et al., 2010).

I think with girls and especially with teenage girls – there’s a really, really high standard of expectation in terms of what you have to look like and do, and dress like and be, just to exist in the world. There’s all this stuff you have to do like shave your legs and put on make-up and do your hair and etc., etc. (L. 615, p. 14)

In early adolescence Miriam observed that the girls and women surrounding her were heavily influenced by sociocultural appearance ideals. Without a way of making sense of the expectations pressed upon her, and encountering a sense of pressure and influence from both her friend group and greater society, Miriam was engulfed in a culture of shame.

You know, it gets you feeling down about your body and down about who you are and there’s so much self-doubt. And the thing that you said about realizing that you didn’t have to buy into this, buy into the expectations that are set upon you, I hadn’t really arrived at that place yet. (L. 816, p. 18)

In the microcosmic world of expectation and shame she was living in, conflict and struggle consumed Miriam’s thoughts. Miriam would both consciously and unconsciously compare herself to others in her group, or images she saw from media sources (Fardouly et al., 2017; Ferguson et al., 2014). As Miriam compared herself to her friends, she noted that she had a more athletic build and tended to be taller than others in her social circle. If her thoughts began to turn towards the negative, Miriam found it difficult to stop them from building on each other and sending her into turmoil of negative thoughts and feelings about herself (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999).

Honestly, I never used to notice how much it would affect me. You know like I said, I haven’t always been so confident in myself, right? So, I never used to be

able to notice how talking negatively about yourself would compile on your psyche and it would start you on a ... you know you have like, one bad thought when you look in the mirror and you go to school feeling like shit and then it goes to, 'I'm so stupid,' and it just compiles, and compiles, and compiles. Then, at the end of the day, you're just exhausted and destroyed.... It's so quick just to fall down the rabbit hole because it's so much extra effort to not do that. (L. 523, p. 12)

The jolt into awareness of the existence of female appearance and behaviour standards shook Miriam's world as she hit adolescence. She also became cognizant that boys and men's bodies are valued for very different reasons (Tylka, 2013). Miriam's process of moving from girlhood to womanhood was made all the more complex, "I think part of it is a universal struggle and part of it is really personal as well" (L.423, p. 10). As Miriam gradually learned to sail her ship through the universal struggle as she experienced it, she became awoken to the shifting female body ideals as portrayed in the media and subsequently, her peer group. The shift in ideal was tangible and it transformed what Miriam and her peers saw as desirable female bodies.

Fitspiration is the same ideal, repackaged. As Miriam traversed the challenges of adolescent maturation, social media networks grew and developed alongside her. From playing a supporting role in her life during her early teen years, to becoming a major player in her daily media consumption, social media influenced Miriam's adolescence immensely. As an outlet for self-expression, social interaction, and connection to the mainline of youth culture, social media networks were appealing to Miriam, "Well, I got Facebook when I was 13 because my mom was very, very strict about me not going on Facebook before the age limit. So, all my friends had Facebook in like, grade 5, right?" (L. 98, p. 3)

As Miriam grew older, novel varieties of social media networks sprung into existence. Miriam tried out several different social media networks over the years, shifting from use of Tumblr for more emotionally intimate journaling purposes, to use of Instagram as her primary network. On Instagram she curated an online aesthetic and readily engaged with visual content. It is through use of Instagram that Miriam first began to notice images of attractive women in fitness gear becoming more and more prevalent, “I follow, like, sports people. So, when I go on my little ‘spotlight’, I don’t know what that’s called, I get a lot of pictures of exercise progress, fitspo, etc. I call it ‘gym-porn.’” (L. 218, p. 5)

Miriam was almost unavoidably viewing fitspiration via the Instagram algorithm that provides users with suggestions on what to view, based on what a user’s greater network tends to post, like, and view. The emergence of fitspiration reflected a shift in body ideals. Miriam is old enough to remember when the female body ideal was one of extreme thinness. She became conscious of fitspo just as mainstream popular culture shifted in the narrative it told regarding what type of female body is attractive (Tiggeman & Zaccardo, 2015). Miriam connected the emergence of fitspo to a surge in popularity of mainstream celebrities who demonstrated a curvaceous ideal look.

This is really weird but with the rise of Nicki Minaj, But, like around that time so, God like ... 2010? There was that shift and it was like, part of me feels really lucky because I grew up in the 2000’s, right? And there was that period in the 2000’s where it was like, really, really, attractive to be super thin and no curves and nothing and I just do not have that body! Like, at all....It was interesting because I actually did notice it. I was like, ‘this is different.’ ... And yeah, like I said, part of me – it was kind of nice because suddenly I was like, *a lot* closer to the ideal body type than I had been. (L. 259, p. 6; L. 335, p. 8)

Even though female body ideal standards had shifted and Miriam was partially appreciative of this, through upward appearance comparison she become privy to the fact

that regardless of the shift, these were still standards and expectations placed on girls and women that were extremely difficult to meet (Fardouly et al., 2017). Through the gradual realization that she would need to go to extreme exercise and diet measures to attain the same body as the fitspo ideal, Miriam revised her opinion of it (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Miriam began to slowly shirk her internalization of the thin ideal.

Well, I think there's aspects of the ideal that are unattainable. Because, like ... and it's weird for me, because I know that I am healthy – I mean you just saw me eat an apple fritter but ... But, I know that I am fairly healthy, I know that I exercise enough, but there's a certain natural body shape, there's a certain natural fat amount that is just like, part of your body. It just exists on you, so it's really hard sometimes to be like, 'I know I exercise, I know I do this', but it's still not attainable. And it probably would be attainable if I like, obsessed over it and that's where it gets dangerous because it's, like, almost attainable. You know what I mean? (L. 285, p. 7)

When Miriam would look at fitspo, regardless of the allegedly healthier message of this type of image, she would often compare her own body to the bodies displayed in the pictures (Fardouly et al., 2017; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). Keeping a blog journal in which she recorded her experience of viewing fitspiration and other idealized female body images for this research indicated to Miriam that she sometimes still is reeled in to engaging in comparison of her body and its specific parts to those depicted in fitspo. See Figure 1.



February 20th, 2017

This came up on my feed with the caption “body goals”. It came from one of those inspo pages for girls- basically just picture after picture of super pretty, trendy women. I had been to a yoga class earlier in the day, my first in several years, and it was mostly women there, as well.

There’s an automatic comparison of this woman to my sweaty, makeupless, Holiday Monday morning self in my brain that got me feeling a little self conscious of my cellulite and my tummy.

It also got me thinking though. I spent an hour today in a room with a bunch of women who were dedicated to their fitness practice enough to be at a yoga studio at 9 AM on a holiday Monday. (Full disclosure, I’m not one of those people, a friend of mine had to drag my butt out of bed.) Most of these women were in better shape than me, and very few of them had bodies like this.

It feels like when it comes to fitspo, there is a false assumption made that strength, fitness, and health can only be present in a person who has a certain body type.



Figure 1. Miriam’s February 20, 2017 blog entry provides an example of a female body ideal image she viewed on social media during the week and highlights her thoughts and feelings experienced as a result of seeing the image.

As demonstrated in her blog post, Miriam at first was victim to body dissatisfaction due to comparing herself to the idealized woman in the fitspo image entitled, ‘body goals.’ Even though she automatically succumbed to the overpowering pull of the body ideal, Miriam was able to think through her viewing more thoroughly. This is perhaps because she was tasked with analyzing her thoughts and feelings for the blog post. Miriam

reminded herself that even in a fitness class filled mostly with very fit women who work out regularly, it is exceedingly rare to have a body as depicted in the fitspo she submitted for her blog.

If it is a particularly good day Miriam might be able to scroll past these images and protectively filter the messaging. If it is a more difficult day for her in terms of how she is feeling about herself, then putting up her blinders, accessing her coping skills, and actively stopping the process of comparison is not so easy (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

I think part of it depends on where I'm at that day. Because sometimes I can just scroll past it, sometimes it doesn't even register as something interesting to me and I just sort of scroll past. And then sometimes it's kind of a bummer because I'm like, 'oh yeah, that's right.' And especially because it's sometimes really different than my other feed. I think there's a lot of comparison that goes on, like in your head. You know, you see something and you always search for the similarity between you and the person in the photo, right? (L. 894, p. 20)

It was with her acknowledgement that the bodies of women portrayed in fitspo are still part of a very narrow spectrum of diversity that shifted Miriam's mindset from pure appreciation to a more balanced viewing that incorporated some critique. Miriam tapped into her ability to reason critically, and her well-developed coping skills to better assess the images. These skills were fostered by Miriam's parents, specifically her mother, and aided in dissecting her fitspo experiences (Pinkasavage, Arigo, Lin, & Schumacher, 2015, Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

I feel like, to me, a lot of fitspo came from when thinspo was no longer socially acceptable so they had to like, find another way to subvert womens' body expectations, almost. Like they had to find another way to control body image, so they were like let's just do fitness instead. Because it's still skinny, it's just skinny in different places, you know? (L. 249, p. 6)

Miriam saw fitspo being touted by Instagram celebrities, bloggers, and even people in her peer group as a way of celebrating healthy bodies rather than extreme thinness. Looking at the images Miriam saw it differently. The limited diversity of the images was evident to her, “It’s all in this really controlled spectrum of like, kind of chubby, to like, really fit. You know? It’s like this illusion of diversity, almost” (L. 381, p. 9). Although fitspo purported to celebrate a wider array of bodies, the depicted bodies Miriam saw were not representative of a diverse selection of body types. Fitspiration tends to serve white, slender, cisgender, able-bodied women as these qualities are primarily represented. Miriam saw that the white, cisgender, ableist gaze through which images such as those that belong to fitspiration are filtered serves to other bodies that differ from the sociocultural ideal, regardless of the message of increased diversity accompanying fitspiration (Ellis & Goggin, 2015; Yancy, 2008).

The disillusionment Miriam experienced as a result of her realizations about fitspo was influential in her emergent ability to remove herself from being fully immersed in the social media world and to do more positive reframing of body ideal messaging (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Around age 15, Miriam began to formulate her own ideas about fitspiration, catalyzed by her experiences navigating her place in the world as a girl, and informed by both the parenting she received and her growing interest in feminism.

It’s very sneaky. It’s really sneaky because it’s like, ‘health!’ But, like – is it really? Because -- it’s not. I mean everyone has a natural shape and a natural fat amount and like, is it really health? ... I guess so much of it is not really, truly a celebration of girls and of their bodies and of women. So much of it is from either an industry standpoint, like a consumerist standpoint or from a ... almost like it’s for men. Like, it’s sexualized. It’s this tying together of being healthy, and being thin, and being sexual. You know? And like beautiful and sexy. So I don’t think –

I just don't feel like a lot of it is *for* girls. I mean, it's targeted at girls but it's not really celebrating them. (L. 918, p. 21; L. 940, p. 21)

In concert with Miriam's own critiques and moments of realization in regards to the fitspiration uptick and societal schilling of a 'new' body ideal, Miriam received guidance and support from her family, specifically her mother (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2014; Kinsaul, Curtin, Bazzini, & Martz, 2014; Maor & Cwikel, 2016). This support was integral to Miriam's resilience in the face of the appearance demands she felt. It aided her in navigating the relatively unregulated world of social media.

No fat talk and other motherly wisdom. It was because Miriam had grown into mid-to-late adolescence and her technology use surpassed the abilities of her parents that they eventually eased off on any formal regulations (Fletcher & Blair, 2014). Initially, they strictly outlined that Miriam was not to get social media until she was the appropriate age as per each network's guidelines. Miriam's parents, and especially her mother, had set limits on her use of social media to the degree they knew how. It came to a point where Miriam's parents, having grown up in a generation during which there was no social media, did not know what social media networks were available to Miriam, nor how she was accessing them.

When I got Tumblr and Instagram, I was 14/15 and I had kind of realized that you don't actually have to ask your parents before you do everything. So, they can't control it if they don't know that it's there. And also it just came down to the fact that both my parents aren't really super media literate. Like, they're media literate in the important parts like politics and whatever. (L. 646, p. 15)

When Miriam was released from the boundaries her parents had placed on her use during early adolescence due their lower degree of social media literacy, they continued their parenting through a less direct means; verbal guidance. This guidance occurred as part of

ongoing discussions. Miriam and mother had many discussions regarding female appearance and behaviour expectations in the world (Maor & Cwikel, 2016).

From early in Miriam's life, her mom had conversations with her that focused on the topic of body positivity without being labeled as such. Miriam's mom, according to Miriam, is a self-identified feminist. Her mother took it upon herself to share with Miriam messages of body acceptance in the face of an onslaught of external messaging regarding how girls and women should be and look (Andrew et al., 2014; Peterson et al., 2008). Miriam, even at the time, recognized that these conversations she had with her mom were special in that a lot of her peers were not having the same ones with their families.

My mom's always been really cool because my mom's a bigger woman, not like huge but she's always been really cool. When I was little she always made sure to really push body positivity and so I'm really grateful for that. I know that a lot of people don't have that. (L. 454, p. 10)

Miriam's mother engendered body positivity in her daughter by focusing on discussing appreciation for what bodies can do and not equating physical characteristics with self-worth. When Miriam would enter into negative thought spirals about how her body looked, or how her body was different in comparison to peers or media images, she would often persevere on various aspects of her body that she did not like. If Miriam's mother became aware of Miriam's body hating episode she would swiftly aid in redirecting Miriam's thoughts and actions.

So she would catch myself looking in the mirror, pinching myself, or whatever. She would be like, 'that's supposed to be there!' Or whenever I would be like, 'oh, I'm feeling really fat today!' Or, 'Ugh, I eat a lot and I'm so bloated!' She would be like, 'that's just your body.' (L. 493, p. 11)

Miriam's mother also prioritized a focus on discussing the separation between personal characteristics and what one looks like. There was a major emphasis in her guidance on valuing who Miriam is as a person versus how Miriam appears on the outside, or how well she adhered to the ideal (Kinsaul et al., 2014).

She wouldn't be like, 'no you're so smart,' because I think the idea was that I should know that stuff already and I think to a certain extent I did know that stuff already... But if you're just focused only on your body then you forget, right? So there was never a reminder of, 'these are all of your great qualities,' because like, you should know them. Because you live them. But you're just forgetting about them. (L.571, p. 13)

Miriam's mother would theorize through her feminist framework about businesses that stand to earn a lot from girls and women making purchases based on their dissatisfaction with their appearance. She would share with Miriam that there is a capitalist reason behind social media and other media messaging that pressures girls and women (Rubin, Nemeroff, & Russo, 2004). Miriam's mother emphasized that the exact message shifts and changes as society evolves but one fact remains the same, there are those who stand to earn a lot of money from purporting the need to meet the female ideal.

(Mom would say things like) 'a whole lot of people have a lot invested in you not loving your body and not being comfortable in your body.' And like also, we have a similar body type I think and she's not as active as I am, but she brings a lot of that logic and a lot of that critical analysis to it. I think she's been always really, really clear to me about the definition between your body and who you are. (L. 500, p. 11)

These conversations cultivated in Miriam an ability to employ critical thinking in response to viewing content that encouraged any sort of female ideal. She found some comfort in reasoning through and knowing what might be behind her feelings in response to such imaging.

So, I think for some people it's the not being able to logic yourself out of it as much as you can. If you don't have the resources to step back and go, 'this is why

I am feeling this way,' then you have no explanation so then you're just stuck feeling insecure and feeling not good enough. (L. 461, p. 11)

Miriam's ability to understand, cope with, and reason critically through seeing images of the ideal female body on social media, and specifically fitspiration, was bolstered by her mother's teaching and guidance surrounding the nature of the images. It was also bolstered by her redirections of Miriam's body negativity and emphasis on loving one's body regardless of appearance (Andrew et al., 2014; Patton et al., 2014). These layers of protection and education aided Miriam in her move toward finding her place in and aligning with the feminist philosophy of body positivity.

Gaining a body positive identity, discovering a sense of belonging. Miriam stumbled upon body positivity groups on social media much in the same way she had initially come across fitspiration; the suggestions page. Body positivity is a loosely defined set of philosophies utilized by communities who seek to disrupt the oppressive hierarchy of the mainstream female body ideal (Sastre, 2014). Body positivity communities have flourished online, particularly on social media networks. Body positivity communities espouse challenging the normalization of thin, muscular bodies, promoting body acceptance, showcasing diverse bodies within visual content, and emphasizing inclusivity (Sastre, 2014). Online body positivity communities provide a digital space in which girls and women can engage in a performance of self that is non-normative and share their stories, ostensibly without judgment.

Miriam found these body positivity groups on social media right as she broke away from her old group of friends that held fast to a culture of girl shame, and moved into a new group of people that had more diverse interests and hobbies.

It's definitely a different conversation being had...it introduced me to a lot of cool concepts and ideas that I had never really kind of stumbled on. Like my mom had taught me body positivity but she had never called it that. (L. 669, p. 15)

Miriam saw these groups of people undertaking the task of making the acceptance and love of one's body, however it looks, appealing to young girls and women. Body positivity groups were doing this through posting images of individual users that were unedited and showed skin imperfections, cellulite, and body hair on women's bodies of all sizes, shapes, and colours. The message that healthy and skinny are not always correlated was also prevalent on these newfound groups' pages (Marcus, 2016).

And I feel like that's where social media is really valuable! Because, for me, it was all these women broadcasting all these choices that they made about their bodies, about their lives, like not shaving your legs, or that trend of taking a picture with your armpit hair. (L. 738, p. 17)

Miriam observed these body positivity messages and accounts to be running parallel to the more mainstream community of fitspiration (Marcus, 2016). Miriam saw body positivity as an antidote to the viral nature of fitspo and the dissatisfaction with her own body she had felt as a result of viewing it. She had always been exposed to body positivity from her mother, but to see that there was a greater community out there, assembling and pushing back against the ideal that was being hammered down on them, reinforced Miriam's resolve.

And there is, I think, alongside the cultures of expectation on Instagram, there's also these cultures of intense positivity.... Especially, yeah, I think among millennials and, I don't know, post-millennials. This intense, almost aggressive, support for one another and empathy for one another that I think rides counter to the fitspo culture and the Instagram model culture. (L. 746, p. 17)

Miriam began to put all of the valuable pieces of critical thinking, resiliency, and knowledge that she had obtained from various sources into a coherent worldview from which she could remove herself from the cultures of expectation, reflect on them, and just

be (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Where once she was constantly pushing down her thoughts, feelings, and monitoring her behaviour due to shame as well as picking her body apart for the aspects of it that were not comparable to bodies in images she consumed, she was now shirking a focus on appearance and looking to what she could physically do with her body athletically (Homan & Tylka, 2014).

I think what appeals to me about body positivity is that it's girls supporting each other when they look beautiful and supporting each other when they don't look beautiful and being able to laugh about it and being able to connect through it, right? ... So it's like a connection that girls can have and I feel like even girls I know who do post work-out progress, like rugby girls, that's more a celebration of what you can *do* with your body... Whereas so much of fitspo is just a celebration of what you've done *to* your body. (L. 958, p. 21; L. 970, p. 22)

Empowerment was a feeling that Miriam had to get used to. Although Miriam did have a protective shield bolstered by her parents' discussions with her, it was not a linear process to emerge from said cultures free of residual self-doubt. Miriam, in the present day, is aware that learning to love oneself in the current cultures of expectation and shame that girls and women face is an ever-evolving process. With a sense of community, purpose, and empowerment fuelling her and shifting her focus from appearance to performance, Miriam feels more confident than ever about herself and her ability to combat the mainstream female body ideal, "don't underestimate girls because I think there's a lot more power and a lot more competency than people think" (L. 988, p. 22).

Ana's Story

Building a foundation of positive body image. Ana is self-admittedly a naturally shy person. Her junior high school years were a time when she was more focused on activities such as reading books rather than engaging in use of social media.

In fact, at that time in her life, social media sites such as Instagram were not as predominant in her world as she perceives them to be today. Ana did not get into use of social media until she was an older adolescent. When Ana began to explore the world of social media, she had already been engaged extensively by her parents in proactive conversations regarding media use so as to lay a foundation for her online experiences (Maor & Cwikel, 2016; Patton et al., 2014).

I think they felt that I was able to navigate through social media in a way that wouldn't harm me because I had already been taught enough to sort of experience it in a way that wasn't going to influence me as a person or have negative consequences, I suppose. (L. 907, p. 20)

Ana's parents, and her mom specifically, started early in her many discussions with Ana regarding mass media and appearance related topics (Anderson, 2016). In Ana's family, a focus on academic achievement and participating in hobbies and other activities was something that was emphasized as being more important than one's appearance (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Maor & Cwikel, 2016).

(My mom) always instilled this value in my sister and I that it's not about appearance and it's so much more important for us to be focusing on school and grades and that that's what's really important. Like who we are as people is so much more important. (L. 757, p. 17)

Ana's mom would raise these discussions in a natural way by bringing to Ana's attention real time examples of people who were confusing their personal value and worth with their appearance. Ana would learn from these conversations. She consequently internalized a strong desire to achieve academically and otherwise in addition to any appearance-based activities she undertook (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

(My mom would) highlight instances where maybe for some people that had been too much of a focus and it has kind of misdirected them. And how she'll say stuff like, 'beauty can only get you so far. Looks can only take you so far...' She'll just sort of bring that about through, not necessarily in a rude way, but by pointing out

instances where it's not going to help you, really, unless you also focus on things besides appearance. (L.772, p. 17-18)

These real time examples and discussions that Ana's mother engaged in with her would also include discussions about physical appearance standards and what does and does not constitute a truly healthy body (Maor & Cwikel, 2016). This occurred especially in light of Ana participating in some recreational modeling as well as ballet classes. That is because these are two activities that typically have strict body standards, "she's always made it clear what a *true* sense of healthy body is and like being thin doesn't always mean that you're necessarily healthy. And especially with modeling when that's such a predominant theme." (L. 821, p. 17)

Ana had these ongoing and comprehensive conversations with her mother regarding appearance, health, and personal qualities throughout her childhood and adolescence. These conversations were complemented by Ana's mother's routine display of a strong sense of personal confidence and self-esteem (Cooley et al., 2008; Curtis & Loomans, 2014; Palazzolo et al., 2010).

I think lots of the time people sort of, especially at a younger age, want to act like your parents do and you sort of follow in line with that. My mom has never really indicated any sense of lack of self-esteem. I have always viewed her as a really confident person and I think that's how I sort of, that's where my sense of confidence has derived from. It was my mom being a confident woman. (L. 724, p. 16)

There were certain actions, or lack thereof, that Ana's mother took that really stood out in terms of a tutorial on how to display confidence (Andrew et al., 2014; Palazzolo et al., 2010). Her mother's way of being is something that Ana took note of and more consciously emulated as she grew older, "she's not like very self-deprecating and tries

not to point out flaws. She's not a super 'look at me' kind of person. And I think she just shows her confidence through who she is as a person and her drive." (L. 752, p. 18)

Ana's parents expended effort to have comprehensive conversations with Ana about many topics. Their focus on assisting Ana in developing a healthy sense of self, and an appreciation of her appearance and body was something that Anna perceived as being a form of preparation that could be applied to her life as she matured (Andrew et al., 2014). By the time visually-based social media such as Instagram started becoming more prevalent, Ana felt her parents were confident in her ability to navigate these networks due to the foundation they had helped her lay. Ana's parents did not enact any regulations on her social media use. Regardless, Ana felt both prepared to use it and that her parents trusted her personal judgment.

I think once I reached a certain age it was more ...they've always had this sort of approach to parenting like, if you give us a reason *not* to trust you, we won't, sort of. But, I think they trust that I can make informed decisions. But, yeah I haven't really had any restrictions or barriers which I think can be both good and bad but I think that then, definitely, it doesn't sort of give me this sense of being restrained and needing to let myself ... like not held back by them and feeling like I need to break outside of that or do anything to like, work around it. (L. 865, p. 19).

Upon embarking on her initial social media use, Ana had a sense that her parents felt that they had sufficiently taught her enough so that they could feel comfortable with giving her independence around her phone (Eastin et al., 2006). Ana felt she had a strong, supportive base to return to throughout her social media explorations (Patton et al., 2014). Ana and her parents engaged in proactive conversations regarding topics such as media literacy, body image, health, and self-confidence so that a foundation for future critical media consumption and a strong sense of self was laid early on. This foundation has assisted Ana in becoming a critical and reflective consumer of the societally endorsed

female body ideal and a champion of diverse representation. Ana also drew from her well-constructed foundation as she matured and navigated through the maelstrom that is the ascent through adolescent girlhood.

Learning to be a girl in a body idealistic world. Ana had, throughout her adolescence, become more conscious of the societal standard that is put forth through multiple outlets regarding what makes one, in the eyes of some people, valuable as a girl or woman in the world. Ana came to notice, through critical reflection encouraged by her parents, and engendered through her interest in such topics, that there's a dominant representation of ideal looks in the media (Kinsaul et al., 2014; Pinkasavage et al., 2015). These messages filtered down to Ana through outlets such as television, film, the fashion industry, magazines, self-made Instagram models, celebrities on social media, or other social media accounts such as the Victoria's Secret models.

I think it is sort of this dominant representation of sort of, specific looks that people then feel they need to sort of match because of this idea of wanting to fit in and wanting to meet different standards that are kind of established through social media. (L. 220, p. 5)

In later adolescence, Ana became a regular user of social media networks that are youth centred such as Tumblr and Instagram. Ana began using Tumblr, and later, Instagram to post pictures and written comments about her life. She also used these networks to keep up with what friends, bloggers, and celebrities were up to (Kim & Chock, 2015). A few years ago, it became evident to Ana that being super thin was no longer held up societally as the most attractive female body type in the way it was previously. Fitspiration and its associated content seemed to emerge on her social media networks, accompanied by other blatant female body ideal trends (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Ana found that

the revised societal standards of female beauty in fitspiration included different, but specific requirements.

I think there's some common themes that would come up amongst the photos would be just things like larger chests and really small waistlines and really like, larger butts, and... yeah there's certain specific body types that just are being focused on. Yeah just really unattainable ideas of bodies. I definitely think there's a lack of diversity too as far as like ... there's definitely more white females on the pages and not a range of different cultures that are represented ... (L. 138, p. 4)

Ana would, and continues to, open up Instagram 4 or 5 times per day. She would often scroll through both her newsfeed which is populated by pictures posted by users that she specifically follows, as well as the 'home' page, which utilizes the Instagram algorithm to display pictures that are related to what Ana typically 'likes' or what her friends or other people she follows are 'liking.' It is through this use that Ana noticed the staggering similarity of the womens' bodies in fitspiration pictures.

I think maybe if you're having one of those days where you're just, you feel like you don't look your best or you just haven't worked out in a while or something... It can be kind of degrading because I feel like they really present beauty and a healthy body in a way that's really kind of singular and not diverse in a way that represents all of the various body types and ways that people could consider beauty to be. (L. 45, p. 1).

Ana would and continues to see fitspo images, sometimes through looking at user's accounts that may have posted fitspo. At other times more involuntarily as she opened up her home page and saw fitspo, or received notifications as to the fitspiration that people she followed had 'liked.' Ana noticed these images some days more than others. When she really stopped and looked at these images, she found herself comparing to them (Fardouly et al., 2017; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Ana had mitigated negative feelings as a result of comparison through conscious reflection and reframing, but these strategies were and are not foolproof (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Through

keeping a blog journal to record her experiences of viewing fitspiration and other idealized female body images on social media throughout the week, Ana was able to narrate both her tendency to self-compare and her ability to consciously critique these images. See Figure 2.

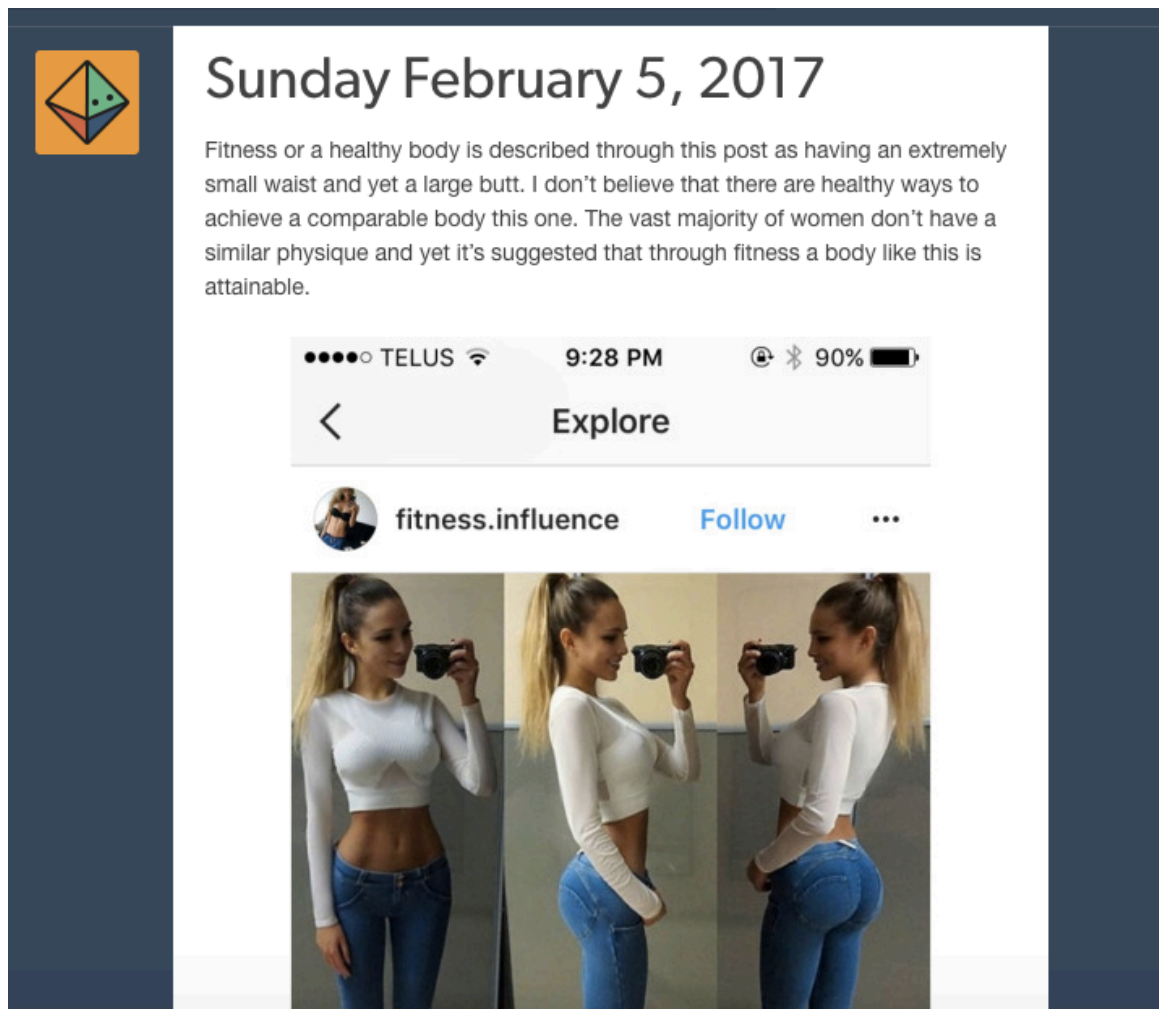


Figure 2. Ana's February 5, 2017 blog entry displays an example of the female bodies that are projected as ideal on a fitspiration Instagram account and exemplifies her critique of the perceived attainability of this body type through exercise techniques.

Ana demonstrated a critical view of fitspiration on social media through her journal entries. She communicated her knowledge that the bodies in these images are altered in various ways that make them unattainable for most people. In her journals Ana was able to apply logic to the images she was viewing and analyze the messages she was

receiving. Regardless, the influence of fitspiration messaging is strong and Ana, as demonstrated in further journal entries, could not always avoid being affected by it.

Messaging about women's and girl's body ideals and the value of appearance for women and girls above all other attributes has intermittently affected Ana's sense of self confidence and security in her embodiment of herself. See Figure 3.

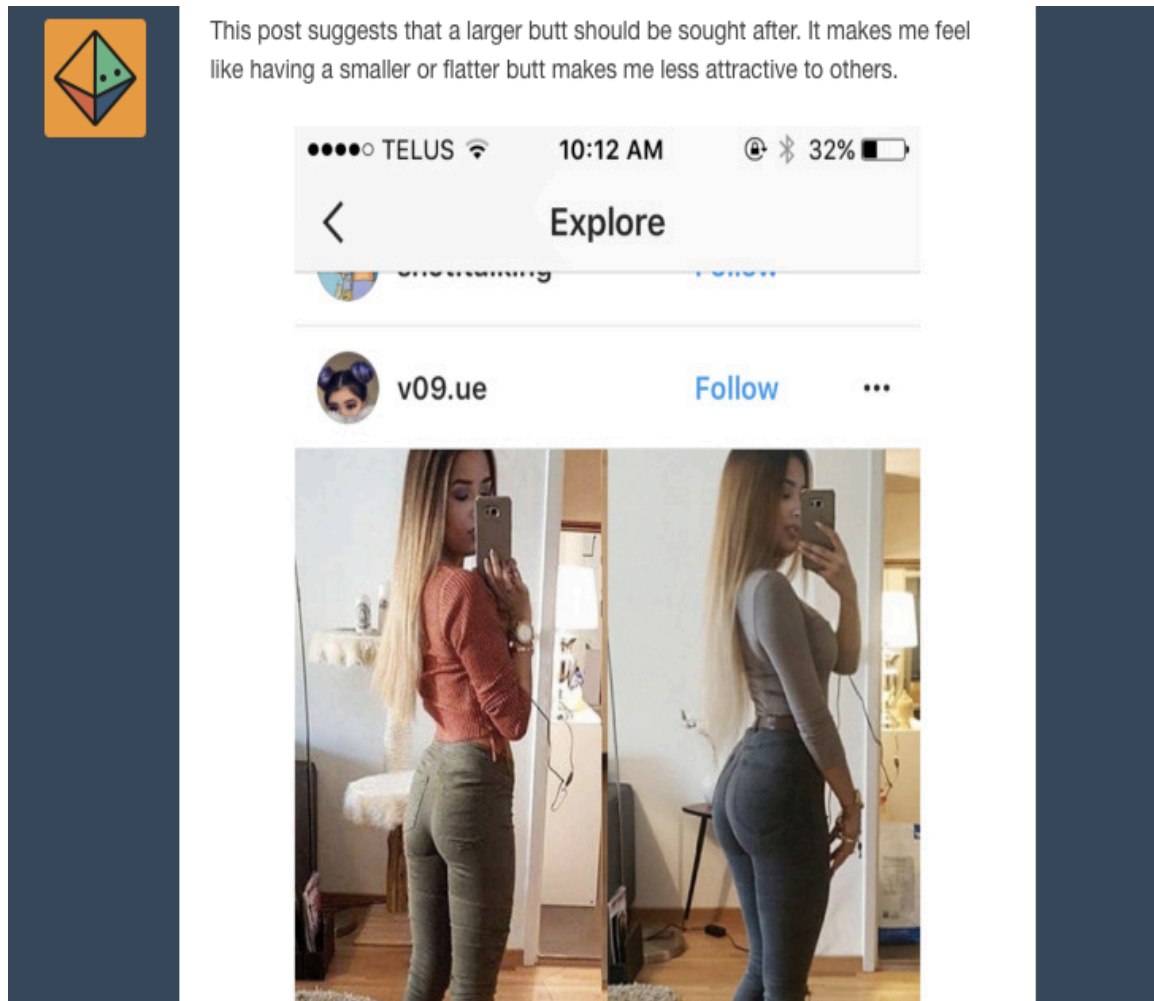


Figure 3. Ana's subsequent blog submission from February 5, 2017 provides an example of a female blogger whose buttocks are displayed by this Instagram account as an idealized goal and illustrates Ana's thoughts during self-comparison to the image.

Although bolstered by a finely honed ability to critically analyze fitspiration images, Ana still compared herself to the women depicted. It takes cognitive effort to dispel the tendency to automatically compare, and as subsequent journal entries showed, Ana could

not always resist the pull of self-comparison. Even though Ana is well versed in body ideal critique, her shield of knowledge and rationality is permeable. The tendency to compare herself and the resultant body dissatisfaction Ana experienced is not eliminated by possessing the ability to critically filter images. Her feeling of not being okay with her own buttocks in comparison to the model is indicative of this. However, fitspiration was not the only source of body comparison for Ana. Ana's ability to critique messages and combat self-comparison was challenged in other arenas as well.

Not only would Ana sometimes compare herself to images in media, but also to her peers at school (Fardouly et al., 2017). These comparisons tended to alert her to the differences between herself and others, as well as herself and the societally endorsed ideal.

Yeah I think it's definitely degrading and it can just bring your confidence down tremendously. For me, I've always been one of the taller kids in my grades and classes and while I have found ways to just embrace it and be good with it, yeah stuff like that kind of gets drawn out. Then you start to feel self-conscious about it and yeah so ... I think it really makes you re-evaluate the, kind of, self-worth that you have or like the value you place on yourself. I don't think it really encourages you to sort of put yourself out there. Like, I've always been a naturally more shy person and so I think stuff like that sort of puts up some barriers to sort of discourage me from overcoming the shyness. (L. 474, p. 11; L. 483, p. 11)

When Ana saw other girls and women who fit the appearance and body ideal held up as more valuable individuals whose lifestyles should be strived for, she wondered about herself and whether she was as worthy as them (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). Ana would question whether her accomplishments meant anything if she was not simultaneously valued for her appearance.

I think just a sense of feeling like you're not as Not at the same level as others and you don't ... you're not as valued in society, maybe? Maybe as some would be just based on appearance. I think that would be sort of how I would define it. (L. 496, p. 11)

Even though she had the advantage of her parents regularly engaging with her in proactive conversations about body image and ideals, she found herself subscribing to these messages as they permeated her protective barriers and seeped in through the cracks (Pinkasavage et al., 2015).

If I've been on vacation and had some photos in a bathing suit or something and then seen other photos of models in bathing suits and stuff. I think there's definitely a strong emphasis then on more differences that you find and you sort of begin to pick yourself apart and sort of, just comparison, really. Between what body parts that you're maybe self-conscious about and that aren't comparable to others. Yeah I think it just becomes sort of a dangerous thing where you start to really pick yourself apart and focus on too many flaws rather than what you like about yourself. (L. 458, p. 11)

Although Ana does not emerge unscathed after viewing fitspiration and other idealized female body images on social media, her foundation of critical thinking does allow her to redirect any negative thoughts she has about herself in comparison to the images and reframe them effectively, although not without extensive cognitive effort (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Ana often reflects on the nature of fitspo images, "I definitely think there's a great deal of objectification that happens because there is so much emphasis placed on specific body parts rather than the person as a whole" (L. 79, p. 2). It is obvious to someone with strong critical thinking and coping skills as Ana possesses that these images present a message of exercise as a method for attaining the idealized female body rather than legitimate performance or body functionality goals (Homan & Tylka, 2014).

I think it's that they use certain angles or crop off faces, even to that extent that really focuses on the certain body parts. I think there's the side where maybe if someone has worked really hard and is showing their progress in that sense there can be a personal sort of attribute that's reflected with maybe like, persevering and working hard to achieve what they want with their body. And I see that as a really positive thing. But then I think the darker side to it is driven by the

emphasis that is definitely directed towards particular body parts. I think that's where it becomes an issue. (L. 530, p. 12)

Additionally, Ana has often noticed that these images are sexualized in a manner that is obvious yet nonsensical as she perceives athletics and sexuality as generally not compatible. It is the sexualization of the women in the images that Ana has found particularly jarring (Bell, Donovan, & Ramme, 2015).

Ana: Yeah, I think that kind of comes about when things have a tone of sexualization to them and when it's more revealing than necessary to show how fit the person is and I think that's where the line is crossed.

Cara: Yeah, so it's like, well, typically people don't work out in the equivalent of lingerie, that's not comfortable.

Ana: Yeah!

Cara: So, what would be a red flag for you like, oh this image seems sexualized?

Ana: I would say like the pose that a person's in, what they're wearing, definitely. Um, you know, I think just how revealing it is. (L. 549, p. 13)

Whether it is an objectification of a certain body part that adheres to the societal ideal, or the unnecessary sexualization of a woman in an image that is supposed to display athletics, Ana has critically reflected and continuously reminds herself of the ways in which the messages are twisted and imbued with what qualities are considered valuable in women and girls (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Ana recognizes that not all adolescent girls and women are privileged in having this type of critical base and she is an advocate for things like increasing the diversity and realistic nature of the images and disseminating a counter message of body positivity and acceptance.

Moving toward a body positive movement. Ana has become, through her personal experiences and effortful learning, a proponent of more comprehensive and diverse representation of women's bodies in social media. Additionally, Ana is a supporter of broader dissemination of messages of accepting one's body and focusing on

other aspects of the self rather than solely appearance (Kinsaul et al., 2014). Ana believes that there is a chance that fitspo images are more significantly affecting adolescent girls who are younger than her. This is because she feels there is a developmental process that occurs in adolescence for girls that results in the establishment of a more solid sense of self and an ability to assert one's way of being in the world (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011).

I think that's what's helped me, too. Being at this age now, I've kind of reached a more developed sense of self-esteem, I guess, and confidence. So I don't think it influences me as much. I think you're more easily influenced at a younger age, obviously. (L. 683, p. 15)

Ana has arrived at this more developed sense of self-esteem and confidence by actively putting up boundaries between what society and those that subscribe to sociocultural ideals want her to be, and what she truly wants for herself, "I think to draw the line between who you are and maybe what society thinks you should be and that you can kind of separate those worlds" (L. 707, p. 16).

Even though Ana believes that many adolescent girls eventually learn through experience and develop to the degree that they are able to assert themselves in the world, there is still preventative work that could be done in order to lessen the impact of fitspo on girls. Ana emphasizes the importance of advocates working together to implement change in terms of what types of bodies are primarily represented in both traditional and social media. Social media representation of different types of bodies, particularly those that have been traditionally othered in the media, is something that Ana feels would do justice to people who do not find bodies that look like theirs celebrated (Ellis & Goggin, 2015; Yancy, 2008).

I just think a greater sense of diversity and showing that being healthy, like, just a core message of healthy doesn't always mean being skinny. And just showing different body types that are healthy and I think, really, if people on social media could find more ways in which the personality and integrity of a person is preserved and represented and their spirit comes across rather than just superficial sort of exterior components. (L. 939, p. 21)

In concert with a more societal change in terms of what the images of womens' bodies in media look like and how diverse they are, Ana purports that younger girls could benefit from learning more about critical media consumption. She also advocates for the separation of personal value and appearance, and appreciating one's body regardless of what it looks like, for girls at a younger age (Kinsaul et al., 2014; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

I think just for teens, developing the ability to really just differentiate between social media and who they are as a person and to try to connect the two in a way that is just most reflective of who they are. (L. 926, p. 21)

Moving forward, Ana asserts that these learning opportunities need to come about for adolescent girls in a manner that feels rounded and natural rather than academic and like a lecture. These actions, Ana believes, can be undertaken in concert with advocacy for a greater shift in societal messaging and expectations. Ana is hopeful that these types of preventative measures via movements in concert with advocacy work for broader societal change will inform and improve the experience of adolescent girls in current and upcoming generations.

Storyline Threads Overview

Interpretation of the narratives by the researcher uncovered both convergent and divergent storyline threads between participants' storied experiences. Four common threads in the two narratives emerged as both adolescent girls experienced: (1) inescapable and oppressive culture of appearance expectation for girls and women; (2)

self-comparison and body dissatisfaction from viewing fitspiration; (3) perception of mothers as helpful by displaying body confidence and proactive discussions; (4) the philosophy of body positivity aided the girls in resisting the ideal. One divergent thread between adolescent girls emerged in regard to their mothers' knowledge and regulation of their social media use.

Convergent Storyline Threads

Culture of appearance expectations for girls. A similar storyline for both Ana and Miriam resulted from their respective descriptions of their developing awareness of the greater sociocultural factors at play in the dissemination of the female body ideal. Miriam described this all-encompassing pressure as a, "...culture of expectation" (Miriam transcript, L. 747, p. 17). Miriam's consciousness of how this culture affected her drive to attain the body ideal developed throughout her adolescence and she consequently began to separate herself from being blindly subscribed to it. Similarly, Ana described outgrowing the notion that pursuit of the female body ideal was a worthy pastime as she progressed through early and mid-adolescence. This was a process of learning to accept her body and celebrate it as she matured affectively and cognitively (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011). When Ana was younger, like Miriam, she found it more difficult to reflect on why it was she felt dissatisfied with her body and appearance in comparison to images of the target ideal. Both girls felt badly about themselves often with little inkling as to the sociocultural factors at play in influencing body dissatisfaction. This tendency for both participants to automatically upwardly compare themselves to female body ideal targets is normative for girls and women (Fardouly et al.,

2017). That both participants regularly felt body dissatisfaction as a consequence is also in alignment with the norm (Fardouly et al., 2017).

An additional shared thread between Ana and Miriam is that as they aged they were better able to reflect on systemic messages that contributed to body dissatisfaction and more fully cleaved their respective attachments to the ideal. Even so, they have not been able to fully protect themselves from the effects of comparison to the ideal. Both girls told stories of how they continue to be affected by body ideal messaging. The need to have to actively reject these messages through cognitive effort continues to be a daily chore for both participants (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Even though they are now both adept at more critically filtering the messaging bolstered by their mother's guidance, it is an endless struggle. Both participants felt that despite all of the protective factors they had in place, they were still not immune to the effects of body ideal messaging via social media. Specifically in regards to fitspiration, both Ana and Miriam travelled a similar trajectory, ultimately to rejection of the images. Ana and Miriam initially felt that the alleged focus on health present in fitspo was encouraging. This changed for both girls as they, through different avenues, came to a shared realization that fitspo catalyzed body dissatisfaction in them, similar to other body ideal images.

Body dissatisfaction from viewing fitspo. Miriam and Ana both told stories of what it had been like for them to view images of fitspo on visual-based social media networks and their resultant self-comparison and body dissatisfaction. Both adolescent girls also demonstrated, through their blog entries, real-time analysis of fitspo images and descriptions of feeling body dissatisfaction.

Ana described coming across images of fitspo on her Instagram account via her greater network of people she followed. Others would like, comment on, and share fitspo images and in turn, these images passed across Ana's home page. Ana told of how viewing fitspo would make her feel. When she was having a day during which she was not feeling positively about her own body, seeing fitspo would trigger feelings of inadequacy and inferiority in Ana. Ana discussed comparing her body to the bodies of the models in fitspo and looking for discrepancies and similarities. Discrepancies in body parts or size that were located by Ana would result in her feeling dissatisfaction with her own body (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). In a blog entry, depicted in Figure 3, Ana wrote about comparing her buttocks to that of the fitness model illustrated. She ultimately felt inadequate in comparison. This occurred despite Ana displaying in her previous journal entries a deft ability to break down and dismiss the message implied by fitspo images.

Similarly, Miriam came across fitspo images through her greater Instagram network. In addition, fitspo was also circulated through Miriam's friend group via text messaging. Miriam, in a departure from Ana's story, was in her early adolescence more heavily invested in attaining the female body ideal. As she aged, Miriam began to reject pursuit of the ideal more readily (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011). Even so, when Miriam saw fitspo she described comparing her own body to the images. Although Miriam discussed feeling closer to the fitspo ideal than the thin ideal, she still felt far away from the bodies depicted. In a blog entry, shown in Figure 1, Miriam compared herself to the fitspo image and consequently felt dissatisfied with herself. Miriam related the viewing experience back to her real life endeavour of taking a yoga class in which

there were many very fit women. Miriam rationalized her brief body dissatisfaction by referring to the very fit women in her class that also did not look like the fitness ideal depicted in the fitspo image. Although this thinking aided Miriam in rationalizing the truly unrealistic nature of the bodies in fitspo, she did still have to actively combat the tendency to self-compare.

Both Miriam and Ana compared themselves automatically to the fitspo images they viewed (Fardouly et al., 2017). Comparison of their own bodies to the target ideal bodies in fitspo resulted in both participants feeling dissatisfied with aspects of their own bodies as is consistent with the current literature (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). These feelings of body dissatisfaction were for both participants, pervasive. The feelings of devaluation and inferiority that Miriam and Ana discussed experiencing after looking at fitspo affected them on both an acute and a generalized scale and both participants continue to have to actively reject and cope with these feelings. As Wong-Wylie and Russell-Mayhew (2010) articulated, one can be an informed and critically conscious individual with a host of coping and filtering mechanisms at the ready. Even so, experiencing embodiment within the greater sociocultural landscape of the pervasive female ideal results in self-comparison, regardless. Separating oneself from the tendency to self-compare is not easy for anyone, even body image researchers, but the feelings of body dissatisfaction the two participants described experiencing were to some degree cushioned by the guidance they received from their mothers.

Mothers' body confidence and discussions. Ana and Miriam both experienced their mothers as important guiding figures in their development. The two adolescent

participants narrated stories of their mothers' displays of body confidence, lack of focus on appearance, and commitment to involving both daughters in open discussions regarding body ideals, media messaging, and the importance of achievement over appearance. Ana described her mother as being someone who was not terribly concerned with garnering attention based on her appearance. Instead, Ana perceived her mother to focus her energies on career and interpersonal pursuits as well as the continual improvement of personal character. Ana's mother would also encourage Ana to spend time on academics and hobbies. These qualities are reflected in the literature as contributing positively to adolescent body satisfaction (Arroyo & Andersen, 2016; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013). Rather than explicitly tell Ana that she should not strive towards attainment of the female body ideal, her mother would reiterate the importance of academics and achievements and subtly redirect Ana in that direction.

In Miriam's world, she experienced her mother as someone who was comfortable in her own skin even though she was a different size than what is generally perceived as ideal. Miriam's mother never displayed overt concern about her body. Rather, it was a matter of fact to Miriam's mother that her body was bigger than others, but no better or worse. This neutral acceptance of her body paired with her feminist critique of media messages purporting the female body ideal provided Miriam with a sense that her mother was confident (Andrew et al., 2014; Arroyo et al., 2017). Additionally, Miriam's mother would guide Miriam through periods of body dissatisfaction by steering her thoughts towards academics, hobbies, athletics, and other capabilities Miriam possessed. The obvious demonstration of a strong sense of self in the face of external messaging, explicit rejection of pursuit of the female body ideal, and adept redirection to pastimes deemed

more constructive for their daughters are commonalities between the two mothers in the narratives that emerged readily. Both adolescent girls' mothers engaged in explicitly proactive conversational attempts at guiding their daughters, as well.

Ana and Miriam described how their mothers respectively engaged in proactive, educational body and appearance conversations with them. Miriam told stories of how her mother approached these conversations from the perspective of a feminist informed critique of the greater sociocultural landscape. Miriam's mother would reflect on the pressures girls and women face and from where she believed these pressures stem, primarily capitalism. These feminist reflections and discussions engaged in with Miriam aided her in learning about and developing a filtering system that she could utilize when barraged with body ideal media messaging (Pinkasavage et al., 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Similarly, Ana's mother allotted time throughout Ana's adolescence to engage in educational discussions related to navigating the pressure to fit the female body ideal. Ana described her mother as approaching conversations from an educational standpoint, giving Ana real examples of girls and women who have been derailed by pursuit of the body ideal (Maor & Cwikel, 2016). As both mothers had loosely guiding conversations with their daughters, they allowed both Miriam and Ana room to explore other ideas and philosophies independently. Bolstered by their family bases, both girls discovered and became interested in philosophies that emerge from the principles of body positivity.

Body Positivity an Entry Point

Both Ana and Miriam learned about and subscribed to philosophies of body positivity. These philosophies, whether clearly demarcated as body positivity like the

social media pages Miriam accessed, or less overtly aligned with the title, as with the instruction bathed in body positivity that Ana received from her mother, eventually aided the girls in resisting the pull of the fitspiration body ideal. The emphasis on body acceptance and the display and celebration of diverse bodies within body positivity communities assisted Miriam and Ana in challenging the hegemony of the female body ideal in their minds (Sastre, 2014). Body positivity groups also espouse inclusivity and a safe space for all to share without judgment (Sastre, 2014). This aspect was something Miriam felt drawn to. Miriam emphasized the radical positivity she experienced on body positivity social media pages. It was radical to Miriam in that it seemed very novel to her. Miriam grasped on to the inclusiveness and was drawn in to learning from other women who posted non-ideal self-images in resistance.. Ana also learned about many of the philosophies guiding body positivity from her mother. Ana felt that celebrating body diversity was the most impactful aspect of body positivity that she learned about. Through platforms for body positivity, diverse bodies are made visible and the increased visibility is in itself an act of resistance to the mainstream ideal (Sastre, 2014). Ana described how seeing diverse bodies made her feel more accepting of her own and made her feel more comfortable in challenging the power of the female body ideal. While body positivity philosophies were helpful to both girls, they were only a starting point from which both Miriam and Ana investigated further, learned more about feminism and body ideals, and synthesized information to produce their own personal philosophies. Although both girls shared many convergences in their storied experiences of fitspiration, they did experience a marked difference in terms of to what degree their mothers regulated their access to and use of social media.

Divergent Storyline Thread

Mother's differences in social media regulation. The major divergence in storyline threads between the two adolescent participants is the different styles of regulation of social media access and use by the mothers. Ana described her mother as not enacting many regulations in regard to her social media use. Ana perceived that her mother felt that she had prepared her to navigate social media independently. As a result, Ana was able to freely access social media at will. Comparatively, Miriam's mother attempted to engage in strict regulation of her daughter's use when Miriam was younger. Miriam was banned from using social media networks in early adolescence. Miriam's household was fairly typical in that parents tend to more greatly restrict and monitor their younger children's online activities (Wang et al., 2005). Miriam, despite her parents' regulations, covertly accessed social media as her parents remained unaware of her use. The general regulations enacted by Miriam's parents, and lack of regulations from Ana's parents were the limit to which both girls were parented regarding social media use. Fitspiration, specifically, was not on either girls' parents' radar.

Neither participant described their mothers as having any direct conversations with them regarding fitspo, specifically. Regardless, Ana and Miriam both shared about their mother's efforts to engage in proactive conversations about the female body ideal in general and their encouragement of critical media consumption. Both adolescent participants discussed feeling as though their mothers were likely not aware of fitspo to the extent that they could talk about it with them. As the majority of fitspo users are adolescent girls between the ages of 15 to 17, that the mothers of participants in this research were not well versed in fitspo is consistent with the literature (Carrotte et al.,

2015). Even though fitspiration was not addressed specifically, Ana and Miriam both discussed feeling as though they were lucky and that their mothers did a thorough job in guiding them through the pressures of the female appearance standards via media. Although Miriam and Ana's mothers differed in their style of social media monitoring and regulation, they were similar in the content of their proactive discussions and as such both adolescents described feeling satisfied with their experiences.

Discussion

Summary

There is a pervasive culture of appearance expectation for those that identify as female that the current generation of adolescent girls are not free from. Female body ideals are spread through traditional media and social media networks, having morphed and been reworked in order to seem like they are touting positive messages embedded in healthy living (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Both Miriam and Ana were acutely aware of the body and appearance standards and expectations that they faced both from greater sociocultural messaging and direct pressures from peers. They were conscious that girls and women who more readily meet these ideals are more likely to be valued by others and that not meeting the ideals themselves left them feeling degraded and depleted (Fardouly et al., 2017; Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). Tools of oppression such as being shamed, or disregarded if they do not meet the ideal have been used on Ana and Miriam. Before Miriam learned more about feminism from her mother and online, she did not have a well-established ability to protectively filter body messaging, nor a strong base of self-efficacy (Pinkasavage et al., 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Thus, she bought into the ideals without question. Although Ana was less embroiled in

the pursuit of the body ideal, both adolescents had to progress through a developmental process of learning to be okay with themselves in order to be able to look at body ideal messages with a critical eye (Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013). As the female body ideal shifted from very thin to very thin and muscular as depicted in fitspiration, both adolescents noticed this and were affected by it.

The shift in ideal from very thin to the very thin and very muscular female bodies as displayed in fitspo was at first encouraging to the girls. It seemed as though ideals were shifting in a positive and inclusive direction. Ana and Miriam have both fought an automatic tendency to engage in upward appearance comparison with other girls and women, particularly on social media (Fardouly et al., 2017). Despite their attempts at curbing comparison, on more difficult days it was too cognitively challenging to prevent. Upward appearance comparison with girls' and women's bodies that meet the endorsed ideal as presented in fitspiration resulted in feelings of dissatisfaction with their own bodies (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Kim & Chock, 2015; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). For Miriam, it was through comparing herself to the bodies in the images and finding discrepancies even though she is an athlete that indicated to her that the images were still representative of a generally unattainable ideal (Fardouly et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo). In Ana's case, an ability to protectively filter body related messaging that she built up through guidance from her mother signalled her to notice what she deemed to be the unrealistic and fake nature of the images and to recognize when they were affected her feelings about her own body (Patton et al., 2014; Pinkasavage et al., 2015). It was through these respective processes that both adolescents came to reject fitspiration as an aid to healthy living. Additionally, the lack of body

diversity in the images reinforced for both girls that the images represented a narrow slice of the spectrum of what bodies can look like. The lack of representation of body variety in fitspiration aided in the girls' eventual rejection of the images as plausibly attainable. Ultimately, fitspiration images were not inspiring or motivating to either participant and instead of making them feel as though they would like to engage in fitness, they typically felt more dissatisfied with their bodies after viewing fitspo.

The adolescent participants' negative feelings about their bodies were mitigated by a foundation of body positivity fostered by their mothers and online body positivity networks. Online body positivity networks aided Miriam in discovering a set of philosophies that ran counter to the mainstream female body ideal touted in fitspo. The safe online space provided for Miriam a starting point from which to learn more about alternative body values (Sastre, 2014). Additionally, through repeated discussions about the unrealistic nature of media messaging, the difference between appearance and personal qualities, and encouragement to focus on other endeavours such as schoolwork and hobbies, the mothers communicated strong messages of acceptance and positivity to their daughters (Andrew et al., 2014; Patton et al., 2014). This encouraged the adolescents to each apply what they gleaned to their independent use of social media. Additionally, their mothers modeled behaviours and attitudes that displayed confidence, self-worth, and a lack of focus on their own bodies. This helped both adolescents learn how to be a girl in the world and consequently assert themselves and their body positive ideals (Arroyo et al., 2017). Warm, open relationships with their mothers in which open discussions were welcome aided in the adolescent girls' learned ability to let the negative

body feelings they had due to fitspo wash away to the degree possible (Patton et al., 2014).

Despite all of the guidance and cushioning that both participants' relationships with their mothers provided, the effect of fitspiration viewing on the girls was still challenging. Both adolescent participants are from backgrounds that provided them with a degree of privilege and protection in terms of having resources available to them for coping with oppressive sociocultural messaging. Even with advantages and support systems in place beyond what many adolescent girls possess, both participants reported being significantly negatively affected by viewing fitspo. They were not always able to engage their learned coping mechanisms. Social comparison on the basis of appearance and consequent negative psychological outcomes is the norm for most girls and women (Fardouly et al., 2017). While protective factors like mother's guidance can aid in bolstering protective filtering mechanisms, the profound effectiveness of these images at inspiring body dissatisfaction in girls and women cannot be ignored. In summary, although the adolescent girls experienced negative body feelings post viewing fitspo on social media, their dialogues with their mothers supported the girls cognitively and emotionally as they navigated social media use. Despite each participant's respective journey through these experiences under the guidance of their mothers, their resistance against the onslaught of feelings of body dissatisfaction due to fitspo remains an actively participated in endeavour.

Recommendations for Counselling Practice

This research illuminates the pervasive nature of fitspiration and other non-fitspo female body ideal images on social media and the unavoidability of viewing it as an

adolescent girl who uses these networks. Simply viewing the images resulted in upward appearance comparison for the participants and this, despite protective factors, tended to result in state body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2017; Mabe et al., 2014). As body dissatisfaction is a precursor to the development of negative body image and other adverse psychological outcomes such as low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and disordered eating it is integral for counsellors to be aware of and to examine the role social media use might play for their clients who present with body dissatisfaction and self-image challenges (Ferreiro et al., 2014; van Den Berg et al., 2010). Counsellors working with adolescent girls can aid in building positive body image and satisfaction through developing a sense of empowerment composed of high self-efficacy and general positive self-esteem through things like embodying activities (i.e. athletic undertakings focusing on functionality, mindfulness, and critical message filtering). These can aid in mitigating the negative body satisfaction effects of viewing body ideals on social media, even if they still experience some degree of body dissatisfaction (Fardouly et al., 2017; Homan & Tylka, 2014; Menzel & Levine, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008; Pinkasavage et al., 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Additionally, the philosophies of body positivity and concordant online communities, while questioned by some as possibly enforcing a new set of body ideals and corporeal performance standards, can be an effective starting point in getting girls interested in alternative body messages (Sastre, 2014). Body positivity online communities are run by girls and women for girls and women. Seeing other real girls and women discussing philosophies of body acceptance and celebration as well as highlighting their ‘flaws’ according to dominant culture without shame can be an

impactful experience for girls who are typically exposed to only mainstream messaging (Sastre, 2014).

Additionally, it is integral for counsellors to be aware that the experience of fitspiration is difficult even for girls who are very close to the appearance ideal in terms of ethnicity and body shape as the participants in this study were. Individuals who may shift even farther from the ideal in terms of appearance cannot be ignored. Individuals with different levels of ability, skin colours, adiposity, gender identification, resources, and other diversities, must be considered. If the experience of the female body ideal is challenging for those who are still well within sociocultural appearance standards, what is the effect on those who depart from that ideal more significantly? Research in this area is still in its infancy, but from a practitioner's perspective, it is prudent to keep this question in mind. Areas for intervention may differ from person to person, but if an individual lives in a family with a mother or other female guardian, this research provides first-hand experiences between adolescent girls and mothers that may act as a guiding point for exploration of this issue within counselling.

Although all parents and guardians are important figures in their children's learning to navigate the online world and developing the ability to protectively filter body ideal related messaging, this research indicated that mother's guidance and modeling was particularly significant to the adolescent girls. The warm, positive relationship that both girls had with their mothers and the proactive, educational discussions embedded in critical thinking engaged in proved significant. These conversations provided both girls with a set of tools with which they could navigate the incoming fitspiration messaging (Andrew et al., 2014; Patton et al., 2014; Maor & Cwikel, 2016). Emphasizing parent

psychoeducation surrounding fitspiration, encouraging engagement in proactive discussions with children, and directing children's energies to embodying activities such as exercise aimed at functionality and mindfulness may be a helpful way to build resiliency for some families (Homan & Tylka, 2014; Menzel & Levine, 2011).

Finally, this research indicates that there is still a long way to go in fighting for girls and women to be recognized as valuable for more than their external appearance and to combat the pervasive messaging surrounding body ideals. Despite both participants access to considerable coping resources, they were still affected negatively by female body ideal messaging. This exemplifies the insidious and difficult to resist nature of these images and associated messages. Thus, the issue is much bigger than what individual or familial coping mechanisms can combat. As such, there is a social justice imperative for counsellors and other mental health professionals to advocate for change in oppressive structures wherever possible (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014). Calling for more expanded diversity in age, body shape, skin colour, gender, and ability, as well as reduction sexualization and objectification, and messages that emphasize more than looks in depicted girls and women is a start in changing the style of representation in both traditional and social media. Engaging in advocacy work with established organizations, through social media collectives, or in individual practice is integral to changing the systemic appearance oppression faced by many.

Limitations

Proponents of other paradigms of research may perceive a limitation of this research to be the small sample size. From the perspective of narrative research, generalizability is not a goal. Individual stories are inherently valuable through the lens of

feminism and the modality of narrative inquiry. This area of research is understudied and starting from an individual storied perspective is appropriate and advantageous.

Another possible limitation of this research is a perceived bias that this research supports the notion that it is primarily mother's responsibility to guide their daughters and be more knowledgeable in regards to social media use. The focus on mothers as the parents who are more likely to be involved in guiding daughter's social media use may seemingly contribute to discourses about mothers bearing all responsibility for the wellbeing of their children. Certainly, this perspective is not endorsed by this researcher. Rather, the exclusive focus on mothers emerges from the aforementioned discovery that mothers more often than fathers guide their children in regards to media use, communicate regarding appropriate online behaviour, and are more engaged with social media themselves (Anderson, 2016; Duggan et al., 2015; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Wang et al., 2005). This study's focus on mother's and daughters' experiences acts as a starting point for research in this relatively unexamined area.

Directions for Future Research

Future research might focus on learning more about the experiences of clinical adolescent populations that engage with fitspiration as previous research has indicated that frequent consumers of social media fitness content are much more likely to self-report disordered eating behaviours (Carrotte et al., 2015). Additionally, it would be prudent to learn more about the experiences of adolescents who create, post, and curate fitspiration pages as their adult women counterparts who post fitspiration tend to score higher on measures of drive for thinness, muscularity, and compulsive exercise (Holland

& Tiggemann, 2016). Finally, research that explores the experiences of adolescents who are directly parented surrounding fitspiration and other ideal images via social media is recommended to learn more about the relationship that occurs between parent and child specifically in regards to fitspiration viewing.

Research that explores the relationship between consumption of fitspiration and body image outcomes for adolescent girls, specifically, is needed. Additionally, research that explores specific parenting practices and other strategies as protective factors for adolescent girls viewing fitspiration and other idealized images via social media would be informative.

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**Manuscript II: MOTHERS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' STORIED
EXPERIENCES OF FITSPIRATION**

Abstract

This research explores two Canadian mothers of adolescent girls' (age 15 to 17) storied experiences of viewing, communicating with, and guiding their daughters regarding fitspiration on visual-based social media networks. The research puzzle, formulated via a feminist narrative approach is, "*What are the storied experiences of mothers of adolescent girls (age 15 to 17) of viewing, communicating with, and guiding their daughters regarding fitspiration on visual-based social media?*" Semi-structured interviews and online participant fitspiration reflection journals comprised the data. Data was interpreted using a feminist narrative approach. Four common threads in the two narratives emerged as both mothers experienced: (1) unfavourable views of general adolescent social media use; (2) daughters altered their appearance due to viewing fitspiration; (3) proactive and reactive conversations with their daughters regarding body image and social media; (4) coping mechanisms to resist body ideal messaging themselves, though not infallible. A differing thread between the two mothers emerged as: (1) different social media monitoring styles regarding their daughters' use. Discussion of implications of these storyline threads for counselling practice, strengths and limitations, and future research directions follows.

Keywords: Social media, fitspiration, qualitative, narrative inquiry, feminist theory.

Mothers of Adolescent Girls' Storied Experiences of Fitspiration

While the use of digital technology to access social media is a popular pastime for many Canadians, adult women who are mothers and adolescent girls are some of the foremost users of social media networks (Canadian Internet Registration Authority, 2014). Adult women who are mothers and adolescent girls, age 13-17, are heavy users of visual content based social media in particular; with 81% of mothers using Facebook, 40% using Pinterest, and 30% using Instagram, and 61% of girls using Instagram, 51% using Snapchat, and 33% using Pinterest, respectively (Lenhart, 2015; Duggan, Lenhart, Lampe, & Ellison, 2015; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Comparatively, to adolescent boys, 44% use Instagram, 31% Snapchat, and 11% Pinterest. Of adult men who are fathers, 66% use Facebook, 15% use Pinterest, and 19% use Instagram (Duggan et al., 2013; Lenhart, 2015). Adult women who are mothers and adolescent girls are using visual content based social media more often where pictures, video content, and other images are prevalent (Lenhart, 2015). Not only are mothers heavier users of social media, they are also more likely than fathers to guide their children in regards to media use in general (Anderson, 2016; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peters, & Marseille, 1999).

Mothers Guide and Communicate With Children about Social Media Use

Parents and caregivers are in a position to guide and support to their children as they navigate the relatively novel online world of social media (Brausch & Decker, 2014; Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012; Meier & Gray, 2014). Although all parents and caregivers can be important figures in guiding and supporting their children through social media use, it is mothers who more often engage in these parenting

behaviors (Anderson, 2016; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Some researchers have asserted that fathers may play an equal role in monitoring media use, specifically; but mothers tend to lead in communicating with their adolescent children as to what is appropriate to share online, view online, and acceptable online behaviour. (Anderson, 2016; Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005). In addition, mothers are more likely to be engaged with social media themselves, particularly visual based social media, providing them with more direct experience than fathers (Anderson, 2016; Duggan et al., 2015).

Increasingly, social media is home to a multitude of idealized images of the female body. It is through visual based social media networks that girls and women, including mothers, are being exposed to and interacting with these images. Media, including social media, is one of the primary platforms through which female body ideals act as a threat to young girls' and women's body satisfaction and associated levels of negative and positive body image. As such, mother's conversations and communications with their daughters surrounding body image, media ideals, and diet and exercise habits, among other related topics are particularly salient and influential on their daughters (Curtis & Loomans, 2014; Kluck, 2010; Smolak, Levine, & Schermer, 1999).

Mother's Influence on Daughter's Body Attitudes

Mothers are important agents whose words and actions can be influential in their daughter's general body satisfaction (Curtis & Loomans, 2014). Although fathers and other caregivers can also be influential, mother's impact on their daughter's body satisfaction is of particular interest in light of the higher likelihood that mothers are on social media themselves and are guiding and communicating with their children about

social media use (Anderson, 2016; Duggan et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2005). Daughter's body satisfaction may be affected by receiving negative feedback, or disapproval of their figure from their mothers, and seeing their mothers model desire to match the thin ideal (Arroyo, Segrin, & Andersen, 2017; Cooley, Toray, Wang, & Valdez, 2008; Curtis & Loomans, 2014). Dissemination from mothers to daughters about body shape, weight management, and level of adherence to the thin ideal can affect adolescent daughter's feelings about their bodies, substantially (Kluck, 2010; Smolak, et al., 1999).

Conversational focus on body appearance and weight by mothers, whether it is positive or negative, is associated with negative outcomes for adolescent girls such as higher depressive symptomology, greater prevalence of extreme weight control behaviours, and higher rates of binge eating behaviour (Arroyo et al., 2017; Bauer, Bucchianeri, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Kluck, 2010). Conversely, warm parent-child bonds that promote secure attachments within family, peer, and romantic relationships may shield adolescents from body ideal message susceptibility and associated body dissatisfaction (Patton, Beaujean, & Benedict, 2014). Of parents, mothers generally are the main communicators regarding their children's social media use, and are especially influential in their daughter's conceptions of their own body image, satisfaction, and desire to adhere to the thin ideal. It is because of mother's role in daughter's body satisfaction and social media use that it is relevant to explore it in relation to the outpouring of fitspiration images being viewed by adolescent girls on social media.

Women's Social Media Use and Associated Body Image Outcomes

The use of social media to engage with visual content that depicts images of edited, perfected, or idealized female and male bodies is associated with some negative

body image outcomes (Holland & Tiggeman, 2016; Tiggeman & Zaccardo, 2015). Social media use and correlated negative body image outcomes are mediated by the interactive nature of social media (Holland & Tiggeman, 2016). Social media involves more consumer participation than traditional media and those that use it are both creators and consumers of content (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Specific types of social media activity related to visual content such as posting or sharing photos of oneself, and commenting, liking, or viewing other peoples photos is associated with increases in weight dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, thin-ideal internalization, self-objectification, and basing self-worth on appearance for social media users (Kim & Chock, 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014). These outcomes are mediated by appearance comparison.

Appearance Comparison and Body Dissatisfaction

Upward social comparison based on appearance is the most common type of comparison that women engage in throughout various life contexts. Upward appearance comparison as it occurs on social media networks is often more extreme in nature than in other contexts. As a result, women who engage in upward appearance comparison via social media experience decreased mood and decreased state appearance dissatisfaction regardless of whether she is typically dissatisfied with her body or not (Fardouly, Pinkus, Vartanian, 2017). Negative psychological outcomes associated with upward appearance comparison on social media can have lasting effects. Effects such as higher levels of body image concerns and disordered eating are seen in those who use social media as a platform for social comparison up to four weeks later, as well as longer term body dissatisfaction and disordered eating six months later (Ferguson, Munoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2012; Hummel & Smith, 2014; Smith, Hames, & Joiner, 2013). Although

causality cannot be declared, it is reasonable to assume that use of social media to interact with visual content and subsequent upward appearance comparison is certainly associated with negative body image outcomes. Body dissatisfaction and other related aspects of negative body image are prevalent issues for girls and women and are tied to other, more pervasive, negative psychological outcomes.

Body dissatisfaction is prevalent amongst adolescent girls and women (Balcetis, Cole, Chelberg, & Alicke, 2013). Body dissatisfaction involves objectifying oneself, having an unusual amount of body surveillance, and having negative feelings about one's appearance (Tiggeman & Kuring, 2004). While presence of body dissatisfaction does not always occur concurrently with negative body image, and they can exist independently of the other, body dissatisfaction does significantly predict future development of negative body image outcomes (Ferreiro, Seoane, & Senra, 2014; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015; van Den Berg, Mond, Eisenberg, Ackard, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2010). The general construct of body image can be defined as the psychological experience of embodiment and the overall perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that an individual has in regards to their physical self (Cash, 2004). Trait body dissatisfaction paired with negative body image results in more dysfunction, emotional distress, and impact on quality of life than does dissatisfaction paired with normative body image discontent (Williams et al., 2004). The longitudinal negative impacts of body dissatisfaction and negative body image are important to consider in light of the fitspiration body ideals being disseminated on social media networks that adolescent girls and adult mothers use.

Women's Use of Social Media for Fitspiration

Fitspiration images are amongst the many varieties of visual content shared on social media. Fitspiration images emerged out of online communities that came into existence in order to celebrate a very fit and thin idealized, usually female, body aesthetic in aim of inspiring a fitness-based lifestyle (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Female body ideals on social media shifted from previous iterations of ideal female bodies such as in thinspiration, to the fitter ideal as is currently prevalent (Homan et al., 2012). This research builds upon Tiggemann and Zaccardo's (2015) description of fitspiration by defining it as a fitness-based visual content intended for inspiration that typically display idealized, carefully perfected, and muscular physiques of women and men with very low adiposity, often portrayed in a disembodied and objectified manner and often accompanied by a work-out inspiring quote, phrase, or caption. The definition of fitspo in the present study furthers Tiggemann and Zaccardo's description by including the inspirational intent behind the circulation of the images as well as the mention of the often disembodied or objectified nature of the images.

Young women who are social media users tend to view more fitness content than other groups including fitspiration pages, detox pages, and diet and fitness plan pages. In fact, some research has suggested that two of the biggest predictors of consumption of fitspiration and other fitness content via social media are being a female; age 15-17 (Carotte, Vella, & Lim, 2015). Young women who view and interact with fitspiration experience negative psychological outcomes associated with their engagement with such content. Acute exposure to fitspiration images in young adult women, mediated by appearance comparison, is associated with increases in negative mood, state body

dissatisfaction, and lowered state appearance self-esteem compared to a control group (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

In the longer term, women who follow more fitness boards that contain fitspiration images on Pinterest are significantly more likely to report wanting to lose weight and intent to engage in extreme weight loss behaviours mediated by appearance comparison and significantly increased by endorsement of the thin ideal (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The engagement with fitspiration images and other fitness content on social media that depict very thin and muscular female bodies seems to catalyze upward appearance comparison by young women, particularly if they have internalized the thin ideal. These comparisons are associated with short-term decreases in mood and body satisfaction as well as longer term desires to shed weight by completing strict weight loss and diet behaviours (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Adolescent girls and mothers are the primary users of visual-based social media and also engage heavily with social media fitness content. They are not only consuming this content, but by the nature of social media, creating it as well.

Those who use social media are simultaneously consumers and creators of content. This holds true for the online community of fitspiration. Women who post and curate fitspiration on social media tend to score significantly higher on measures for drive for thinness, bulimic symptoms, drive for muscularity, and compulsive exercise, but not body dissatisfaction (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Of women who post fitspiration on social media, 17.5% are at risk for clinical diagnosis of an eating disorder versus 4.3% of a control group who post travel pictures, according to Holland and Tiggemann. Fitspiration and fitness content pages tend to contain negative and guilt inducing

messages about food and diet as well as problematic language that stigmatizes body weight (Carrotte et al., 2015). If fitspiration posters and curators are more likely to aim for an ideal body as well as experience disordered eating and exercise symptomology, it can be surmised that there may be a relationship between poster's cognitions and what they create and disseminate on social media. Considering the risk of adverse psychological outcomes associated with viewing and posting this content as well as mother's greater likelihood of both using and being the primary guides and communicators about social media use, it is prudent to learn more about the experience of social media use for fitspiration by girls and women as well as parental figures' roles surrounding this use.

Limitations of Literature Review

A limitation of this literature review is that the literature on fitspiration, specifically, is sparse. As such, I theorized from both the available literature on fitspiration as well as other related literature on the effects of viewing female body ideal images on social media in general. Because the topic is nascent within the literature, there may be additional effects that occur as a result of fitspo interaction for girls, women, and people of other genders beyond the current scope of the literature. More research is needed to determine if the same relationship between fitspo and negative body image outcomes hold true for other groups of people.

A second limitation of this literature review is that at time of writing, there was no available literature exploring or documenting the interactions between mothers and daughters regarding daughters' fitspiration viewing. Thus, I synthesized information located in the literature regarding mothers and their children's social media use. I also

included available literature about fitspiration to theorize about the possible role mothers have in their daughters' use. A strength of this research is that it adds to a significant gap within the literature given that no one has explored this topic before.

Research Puzzle

The purpose of this study is: (1) To capture mothers of adolescent girls' storied experience of exposure to fitspiration images of women's bodies via social media; (2) To capture the storied experience of mother's understanding, guidance, and communication in regards to their adolescent daughter's social media use specifically regarding fitspiration.

Methods

Participants and Recruitment

Participants included two adult mothers of adolescent girls between the ages of 15 to 17. The criteria for recruitment specified participants be mothers of adolescent girls who are between the ages of 15 to 17, from typically developing and nonclinical populations who utilize at least one social media account such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or Tumblr to access idealized images of women's bodies including fitspiration at least several times per week. In this study, nonclinical persons were defined as individuals who had not been formally diagnosed according to the DSM-IV or DSM-V with any mental disorders, personality disorders, or intellectual disabilities. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling methods. The mothers of adolescent girls who participated in the research were both in their mid to late forties from middle class households, of European-Canadian background, and were cisgender. One participant was able-bodied whereas the other experienced a physical disability due to chronic pain.

Research Design

Feminist theory. This study was undertaken from a qualitative narrative inquiry approach informed by feminist theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hillfingher, Messias & DeJoseph, 2004). Feminist theorists purport that women's and other non-dominant groups' interests, perspectives, experiences, and concerns are inherently valuable and should be explored in their own words (Ardovini, 2015). Asking mothers of adolescent girls to directly narrate their storied experiences in relation to this phenomenon in their own voices and with their own words, gave space for participants to tell their stories without being diluted or distorted. The feminist prerogative of this research includes efforts to engage in the dissemination of unfolding stories so as to encourage relevant groups to become more aware viewing and parenting related to fitspiration (Hillfingher et al., 2004). Dissemination of stories will contribute to challenging oppressive sociocultural ideals for those who identify as girls and women.

Feminist scholars and activists work to, “destabilize hierarchical categories of difference” (Bodwitch, 2014, para. 5). Proponents of the feminist paradigm emphasize addressing structural inequalities through research that is focused on the perspectives of marginalized people (Bodwitch, 2014). A primary underlying assumption of feminist research is that women and other marginalized groups experience oppression through varied means and that this experience differs based on the intersecting identities of a person (Maguire, 1996). This research was developed under the assumption that women and girls are marginalized and experience oppression, specifically in regards to the body image ideal as defined societally.

Narrative inquiry. This research involves mothers of adolescent girls sharing their stories and in regard to viewing of and interacting with their daughters surrounding fitspiration images. Narrative inquiry was suitable for this aim as it is focused on deep examination of the storied experiences of a few participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry moves away from generalizations and instead the aim is to create texts that offer readers information that they can interpret on an individual basis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, participants are seen as embodiments of lived stories and experiences considered inherently valuable to gaining insight on topics of interest (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry involves the exploration of what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described as the three dimensional narrative space. The 3D space of narrative inquiry includes the exploration of interactions of a participant's narrative both with themselves and their social environment, the continuity of their narrated experience (i.e. past, present, and future), and the contextual situation of their narrated experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narratives that stay as close to participants' experiences as possible were derived from examining the storied experiences in detail and filtering stories through the lens of my own insights and personal experiences as well as the theoretical framework (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative methodology aligned with the researcher's feminist value of hearing the voices of mothers of adolescent girls and inviting them to describe their experiences firsthand while honouring the ongoing nature of participants' storied lives (Ardovini, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, in press).

Data Collection

Prior to commencement of data collection, this study was approved by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Qualitative interviews. Data collection occurred over three months (January 2017 to March 2017) in a city in Canada. Data was primarily collected through two in-depth qualitative interviews with each participant a method that is compatible with narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants that responded to recruitment efforts were contacted to determine fit and subsequently interview dates and locations. Of the seven participants that responded to the invitation to participate, two fully met the participation criteria. The other five women were ineligible based on one or more of the following: (1) daughter not within the correct age range, (2) daughter with clinical diagnoses, or (3) mother not available for in-person interview.

During the initial interview sessions, time was allocated to build rapport and go over the letter of consent. I utilized a loosely guiding interview protocol (see Appendix B) in order to pursue the research question while allowing space for unstructured stories to emerge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During the interviews I asked questions that pointed in each of the three dimensional directions of narrative space and inquiry. Interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy. One of the mothers was contacted via telephone with two follow-up questions to expand on information gathered during the initial interview. This occurred because this participant had a time constraint on her availability for the initial interview, and upon reading through the transcript, I wished to gain elaboration on points of discussion.

Participant blogs. A second form of data collection was the invitation to participants to keep private, online, blog-based journals through the duration of the data-collection portion of the study, approximately one and one half months. The intent of the journals was to learn more about the storied experience of viewing images that objectify and idealize the female form, with a focus on fitspiration, as it was occurring in the mother's lives during the week. Private, password protected online blogs, accessible only to the individual mother and myself were created on the personal blogging site Tumblr. During the data collection period, the mothers of adolescent girls received a blog writing prompt via email every week for a period of four weeks. The prompt, which was the same each week, invited participants to submit a selection of images of women's bodies that they had viewed on social media in the past week that made an impact on them. They were also asked to provide a brief summary of one paragraph minimum regarding their general experience of viewing the images. These images were not limited to fitspiration, but fitspiration acted as an entry point for the journals. One of the two mothers that participated completed half of the journal entries and the other participant completed no journal entries due to competing demands in their private lives.

Determination of Plotlines

Unfolding of plotlines. Firstly, I transcribed audio-recorded interviews to text, verbatim. Secondly, I screen captured and curated participant online blogs in chronological order. Following this, data interpretation occurred through a series of nonlinear steps. I immersed myself in reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and blog journals in order to get a sense of the whole text that I transcribed and curated. I engaged in 3-D narrative interpretation in order to orient participants' narratives

according to past, present, and future as situated in their life context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I read and re-read texts in order to look for threads of overarching plot and subplot via exploring narrative commonplaces at the intersections of time, place, social interactions and social action (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I pored over the transcripts and employed a colour coding system in order to organize plotlines and to look for and determine the relationship of overarching plot and subplot threads. I organized unfolding overarching plotlines according to emphasis or emotional importance placed on them by the participants as it made sense narratively (Hillfinger et al., 2004). Narratives were kept intact so as to theorize from the cases rather than across cases (Hillfinger et al., 2004). Relational transaction as a process of the stories being re-told through interactions between participants and myself allowed for further interpretation (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). Through asking each mother to authorize and, if necessary, rework the interpretations, divergent worldviews coalesced to construct data collaboratively and allowed for emergence of convergent and divergent storyline threads. Both participants conferred on and gave their feedback via email on each of their stories, respectively.

Researcher voice. Interpretations of the narratives were based on my insights from examining the data in detail, personal views, and the contrast of the data with the frameworks from which I approached the research questions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My personal views and past experiences intertwined with the interpretation of the data, co-constructing meaning, and filtering the ways in which the data was made sense of, and the degree to which my voice or signature are evident in the narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). The intertwining of the

myself with the data adds a dimension beyond what the participant has communicated and aligns with a feminist narrative prerogative to not simply describe the phenomena but be part of a process by which women's oppression is challenged (Gorelick, 1991).

Participants' Stories

Elaine's Story

Social media as a platform for competition. Elaine, a married mother of one young adult male and one 17-year-old adolescent female does not recall exactly when anyone in her family got social media accounts. Social media seeped into their family life slowly and surely, with each member gradually becoming engaged in some form of social media or another. Being interested in social media herself, Elaine signed up for Facebook and soon figured out that not only was it an effective way to stay in touch with others, but that she could also easily access some content and blogs that catered to her interests.

Oh, social media. Well, I do ... I use, what do I use? Actually I do try and limit the social media because I find it's just crazy, right, I mean what's out there is just ... I mean, so much of it is nonsense and I've just learned that I really don't have a lot of, you know, time and so I need to start to, you know, where do I want to put my time? (L. 9, p. 1)

Simultaneously, Elaine observed that other users on social media networks were interacting in ways that she did not feel were necessary. The exhibitionism and competition with others Elaine noted by other users on social media was off putting to her and made her more cautious in her use (Fardouly et al., 2017). It was this perceived competition as well as the nature of detailed sharing that was occurring on social media that made Elaine more cautious in her use.

I think with younger people, the prevalence of the social media is like everybody's gotta know about everything and when and how and, I don't know, I guess as an older person, I just don't see the relevance in that. You know, you'll follow what's important and the rest is kind of a waste, right? (L. 41, p. 1)

Elaine continued to carefully take note of how others, especially younger people, were using social media as she had two adolescent children that were becoming more and more interested in it. She wanted to ensure that she was making informed decisions when setting limits on her own children's use. Elaine realized that social media was an arena for competition with others, but also determined through observation that keeping yourself and your life as represented online interesting is prioritized by a lot of users (Fardouly et al., 2017; Ferguson et al., 2012).

I mean, I think what that public presentation does is it just makes your life difficult. Because then you're always trying to keep up with the Joneses', right? You always just involve yourself in this cycle where you're always having to keep up with others and keep up with yourself. (L. 55, p. 2)

Elaine was able to see the usefulness of social media in that through her own personal use she was able to access healthy living blogs and other online content that she was interested in (Carrotte et al., 2015). In addition to Elaine's appreciation, she was skeptical of some of the content and interactions that she both directly witnessed taking place and heard of second hand. It was these observations that informed Elaine and her husband's considerations in developing their way of making rules around and guiding their children through technology and social media use.

From strict to more flexible social media monitoring. Elaine kept a watchful eye on the development and increase in popularity of social media networks. Through this observation she carefully constructed her own views and opinions on social media, weighing both the benefits and the potential risks (Anderson, 2016; Wang et al., 2005). When her children reached the age whereby their peers began signing up for various social media accounts, Elaine and her husband were hesitant to give in to pressure.

Elaine: Yeah, for a long time they weren't actually allowed to have any social media.

Cara: Oh, okay!

Elaine: I mean, they could text their friends, or call their friends or whatever, take pictures. I still don't think my daughter has a Facebook account. She's seventeen, but she uses Snapchat and Instagram. My son has a Facebook account. I can't remember now when they got them but definitely, we held out. We were like 'you have to be eighteen!'

Cara: Yeah! What was your hesitation with allowing them to have social media accounts at a younger age?

Elaine: I just didn't think it was necessary. (L. 286, p. 7)

Elaine felt that until her children were experienced and mature enough that they could navigate their way through potential obstacles on social media completely independently, that it would be prudent to set some ground rules in regards to technology and social media use (Wang et al., 2005). Elaine attempted to walk a fine balance between letting her kids gain their independence with their phones and other technology and monitoring their activity to the extent that she could step in if anything were to go awry (Anderson, 2016).

Elaine: There was a set time where the phones would have to be on the counter downstairs, right. And they would have to be getting ready for bed.

Cara: Oh, okay, that's a good idea, actually.

Elaine: So, yeah, they would be kind of, turned off and done for the evening.

Cara: What was your children's response to that rule?

Elaine: Yeah, they were okay in the beginning. And then, of course, we needed to know the passwords and we were allowed to look at them any time and look at the content.

Cara: Okay, yeah. Just kind of monitor?

Elaine: Yeah, exactly. Just a monitoring of things that have gone on and they actually seem to have done well. (L. 243, p. 6)

Elaine's children seemed to respond well to regulations their family put forth in regards to technology and social media use. There were some minor complaints on behalf of Elaine's children but these arguments were not influential on Elaine, and she stood firm in their families' decided upon regulations.

We would get the general, ‘well so and so has it’ or whatever. And I’m like, well, so what? You know, not everybody has the same things and I think, too, even with money. I think they realize that we’re alright but that there’s people with lots of money too and that doesn’t mean you can just go spend money like that because there’s consequences to that. (L. 360, p. 8)

In addition to engaging in some monitoring and rule setting in regards to her children’s technology and social media use, Elaine also consciously initiated proactive conversations with her children, particularly her daughter, about what she was seeing in the media and how that differed from real life (Anderson, 2016; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Patton et al., 2014; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Elaine felt it was important to address the fantastical and unrealistic nature of a lot of what is presented in various types of media, including social media. Elaine would watch shows targeted at young women alongside her daughter such as ‘The Bachelor,’ and use it as a jumping off point for discussing the difference between media representation and reality.

Just, you know, what you’re putting out there and then the difference between reality and what’s presented in media. Like reality and media and how things kind of really go. And just making sure that she ... We’re trying to help her think about what’s safe for her and safe as a young woman... You know, you just need to be careful what your messages are, I guess. I’m just trying to help her with her messaging and the things that really go on. (L. 699, p. 16)

As her children grew and matured, Elaine and her husband gradually eased up on the regulations and boundaries they had set around technology and social media use and instead primarily engaged in these guiding discussions (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005; Rosen, Cheever, & Carrier, 2008). Elaine conceded that now in their mid-to-late adolescence, her children were more technology savvy than her. With the realization that a large part of parenting an adolescent is encouraging them to gain their independence and allowing them to make decisions on

their own, Elaine concluded that she had to trust in the foundation she had laid through her mothering and turn to general guidance rather than firm rule setting.

Yeah, well, like I said, in the beginning it was the parenting. But, I guess eventually we've had to be like, well we've talked about this for awhile now and at some point you have to let them ... A lot of that stuff, it gets to the point where it kind of outgrows your technical expertise and they can be doing stuff and you don't even have a clue. And so, you know, you just have to trust them. (L. 335, p. 8)

Emulating fitspiration images. Elaine noticed that as they continued into their adolescence, both her son and daughter although primed with proactive family conversations, were still quite susceptible to ideal appearance messaging they were receiving from social media. She noticed them attempting to emulate the various images on social media that depicted celebrities, models, and bloggers. The societally endorsed movement away from extreme thinness being a female body ideal to the idealization of very fit women's bodies became evident to Elaine (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Her children's buy-in to fitness messaging became tangible for Elaine in that her children, and particularly her daughter, would ask Elaine to purchase items for them that they had seen in fitness and fitspo images on social media (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016).

Because I totally think that, yeah both my kids, they take what they see and then they're very much into the Lulu Lemon and the Nike fitness gear and the this and the that. For her, you know, she's kind of pulled back on being athletically involved...But, yet that's how she dresses, like when she goes shopping. That's a lot of what she's looking at, right. And I'm like, why do you need that? Because, unless you're going to go workout, what's the purpose of that particular item? (L. 737, p. 17)

The media message purported by fitspo that athletic bodies are in and very thin bodies are out as well as the ways in which the athletic bodies are represented and what types of clothing they wear encapsulated Elaine's children (Carrotte et al., 2015; Lewallen &

Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Both children, and particularly Elaine's daughter, wished to copy the looks they viewed in fitness images (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016).

But I think there's, I don't know if it's a pressure, but it's just out there, right. And I think, you know, shop and shop and shop, and you need this, and you need that, and 'more is better'. You know, it's the fitness stuff that she sees and I mean, like I said, both my children seem to be quite susceptible to that, those images. But I guess in some ways I can say, well, more of it is for my son. You know, he's actually, it would be more of a necessity because he's actually *doing* the physical activity. So there's a need for that. Whereas her desire seems to be just to dress that way or have that image. Because it's like, well okay, why don't you go buy yourself a nice blouse? (L. 755, p. 17)

Elaine began to become cognizant of her daughter's social media use and her desire to emulate an athletic image around the time that her daughter did not make the cut for a sports team she had been playing on for years previously. It was with this loss of camaraderie, team support, and a consistent athletic outlet that her daughter started to spend more time alone as well as keep a tighter grip on her phone.

You know, tight lipped on the phone. My son's phone is oftentimes, you know, it will be laying out or you'll see stuff popping up. I have noticed in the last couple of years she tends to be more in her room. Just, you know, quietly away. You know, studying. I think there's more than studying. I think there's more social media going on than I think she'd like to admit to. I think she's a pretty heavy user of the media. Yeah, so I've noticed in the last few years, she used to be very feminine, you know, she liked to dress up. So I've noticed with the sports and that, it's become less, and less, and less. (L. 424, p. 10)

Elaine's daughter, in addition to keeping her phone and social media activities assuredly private, slowly started to spend more time engaging online rather than with her family and friends. While Elaine was not concerned that her daughter was participating in any harmful online activity, she did see the draw towards using social media more as both influential on her daughter's self-image as well as being socially isolating (Fardouly et al., 2017).

And she's less social. So, sometimes I kind of watch and I'm like, hmmm, you know? Are you kind of getting depressed? And I don't think so, but it's just certainly something that I keep an eye on. I try to draw her out and I don't think that's the case, you know, an eating disorder. I don't know. It's hard to say at this point... I think she watches a lot of Netflix, do you know what I mean? I don't think it's just all her ... but you know she's definitely always attached to the phone. I'm not sure that the phone is necessarily a sinister thing. (L. 598, p. 14)

Although Elaine's daughter was no longer participating in athletics to the degree that she did previously and she was becoming less confident in herself and her body, she still wished to present herself as an athletically inclined individual. Even though athletics is no longer ingrained in Elaine's daughter's daily routine, Elaine perceived the message of the fit body ideal to still pervasively surround her daughter from multiple outlets (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Homan et al., 2012).

Yeah. So, I think when she looks at the fitness stuff on social media, you know, her brother and her dad, they're very athletically inclined. There's always those images. Even just television, right. You know, my husband watches a lot of, well we all watch the Olympics and all the football, we watch the soccer. We watch the hockey and track. (L. 525, p. 12)

Throughout her adolescence, to the present day, Elaine's daughter was immersed in fitspiration and other fitness images both on social media and in her daily life. This immersion paired with a significant slow down in her daughter's participation in athletic activity is something that Elaine identified as emotionally strenuous on her daughter. Due to this observation, Elaine attempted to counterbalance any expectation or image-oriented messages with her own messages of a focus on health and wellness (Maor & Cwikel, 2016).

I don't think she's really made me aware of it, but I think I just pick up on it a little. I think there's just, well there's always the growing pains right, and the kids change as they age and mature... But, like I've said, I've noticed that there's definitely pressure. Even with my husband, right, my daughter she's playing less of her sport, but you know, he's like, 'you need to be active! You have to be

active!’ So, he got her a Yoga membership and then it’s like, ‘when are you going to Yoga?’ (L. 542, p. 12)

Elaine felt that this perfect storm of losing her sports team and athletic ambition, increasingly using social media while relatively isolated from family, and both media messaging and pressure from within their family caused her daughter to dress more conservatively and not wear clothes that might outline or show certain body parts.

She’s just more covering. She’s tall, she’s tall and she’s relatively lean. But, yeah, she definitely covers more. Like I said, she does tend to stay in her room more often. Kind of a bit isolating. And, she will eat up there. (L. 592, p. 13)

Elaine would and continues to encourage her daughter to engage in health maintaining behaviours such as a balanced diet and exercise for health-based purposes (Homan & Tylka, 2014; Kinsaul, Curtin, Bazzini, & Martz, 2014; Maor & Cwikel, 2016). Elaine also recognizes that there is a limit to what she can effectively communicate as a mother because of the ubiquitous nature of fitspiration images her daughter consumes. Elaine has seen fitspiration images herself and she perceives the images to be blatantly unrealistic in what they depict fit bodies to be like.

Yeah, it’s always cookie cutter. The images are always this cookie cutter. But, you know it is possible for some people but they don’t really take all those other people and make them in images, like ‘this is attainable for you.’ They’re like, ‘look at this one little skinny, with the abs and the muscles and the zero percent body fat.’ Right? When the reality is that real people can’t do this. (L. 1062, p. 24)

In her perpetual resistance against media messaging that puts forth a female body ideal Elaine acknowledges that it is not easy to simply ignore the messaging, no matter how many proactive conversations she may have with her daughter (Andrew, Tiggemann, & Clark, 2014). Elaine, in the midst of a busy career and other obligations, has and continues to try and draw her daughter out of her shell in order to make attempts to guide her through navigating the mire of idealized body messages. While cookie-cutter images

are constantly being churned out and sold as the epitome of female value, Elaine is not invulnerable to feeling badly about herself either (Fardouly et al., 2017; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

Recognize the ideal and then let it go. Elaine is a woman in the world and as such she has been intimately familiar with the expectations and value that are placed on a woman's appearance (Balcetis et al., 2013). In light of her daughter's struggles with body image and self-esteem, she reflected upon her own development and the trials she faced in attempting to fit in to the notion of the female body ideal (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Rubin, Nemeroff, & Russo, 2004)

Or to be like I've been trying to kill myself trying to look like that and it just never ever happened. You know what I mean? You've got that experience to be like ugh, my God, it's not worth it! I mean, if you spent all your time doing that ... I know the type of training that my husband has to do to compete at the levels that he does. (L. 1016, p. 23)

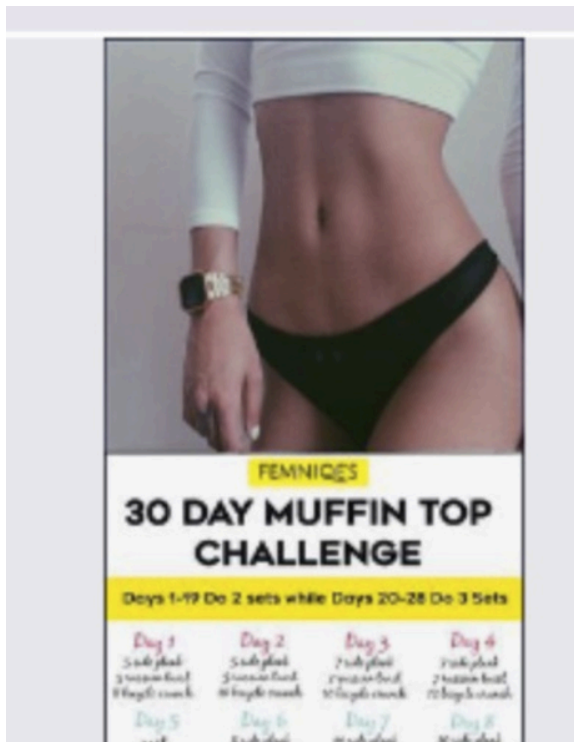
Elaine's acceptance is dependent on what she deems an individual's motivations are for pursuing an extremely fitness oriented lifestyle. Whether the fitness orientation is occurring in pursuit of a tangible athletic goal or whether it is more aligned with producing a more desired or ideal body. Elaine feels similarly about fitspiration on social media and other forms of media, as she sees it as one of the primary vehicles through which the fit body ideal is being disseminated.

Because I think to a certain group it (fitspo) is motivating. And I think to that group that are kind of into the media perceptions and they're focused in that way. I think for normal people, right, I don't think they probably are. I think they probably are just like, 'ah I can't achieve that.' I think, for me, I typically just cast them aside. So if it was me looking at that, I'd be like it's a non-issue because that's so far from So it's like, I don't know. What am I trying to say? For me, it's irrelevant. I would probably even just walk on by and it wouldn't grab a hold of me and I wouldn't really notice. If anything, if it did get my attention at all it would be, it would just make me feel bad, right? (L. 942, p. 21)

Elaine's own body satisfaction fluctuates in response to the messaging she receives as a woman regarding the female ideal and value contingent on appearance (Balcetis et al., 2013; Fardouly et al., 2017). Elaine is sometimes able to erect a wall around herself that is impervious, and sometimes the notion of the ideal slips through the cracks. Elaine, depending on the day, vacillates between being able to acknowledge the images and then let them go and being unable to refrain from comparing herself to the images (Pinkasavage, Arigo, Lin, & Schumacher, 2015; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). On the days that counteracting comparison is a challenge, Elaine tends to feel more poorly about herself (Holmstrom, 2004).

Because it's like, you know, I'm not ever going to be near that perfect. Or, you know, that image. So maybe that is wrong. It probably does say to me or reminds me of where I'm at and where I think many, many people are at. And it makes you feel bad so of course you don't really recognize it. You just kind of keep going. (L. 957, p. 21)

Elaine's daughter is not the only one who has viewed fitspiration on social media. Elaine comes across it both through her greater network posting or liking images and through the algorithmic assignment of images to home pages of various social media networks that she uses such as Pinterest (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). When Elaine comes across these images, she tends to have an automatic reaction whereby she wonders why the women in the images are not of average size or shape, questions the intention behind the images, and occasionally compares herself to the images and their oft-edited perfection (Fardouly et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Keeping a blog journal in which she recorded her experience of viewing fitspiration and other idealized female body images throughout the week for this research indicated to Elaine that sometimes her coping skills are not sufficient. See Figure 1.



I'm a bit jealous really. Why doesn't she have a little muffin top. They always use such perfect model types. I'm not sure that this woman is anywhere near the average body size/type. It's hard to be motivated by an image like this as it seems so unattainable.

Figure 1. Elaine's February 2017 journal entry highlights a fitspiration image that she viewed on social media during the week and provides her automatic thoughts and feelings experienced upon encountering the image.

Although Elaine felt that after a lifetime of learning to cope with not being able to meet the female body ideal that she had good coping mechanisms in place, it was made evident by her real time blog entries that some images still affected her. Elaine reported being interested in accessing blogs and websites that give healthy living advice and recipes. This image was made available to her through a social media network that she utilized for these healthy living tips. Regardless of her motivation for accessing content such as displayed in Figure 1, Elaine described feeling jealousy. This jealousy can be surmised to

occur due to Elaine comparing herself to the target image. According to Elaine, this image does not represent regular, diverse bodies like she sees in the world around her.

The lack of bodily diversity in the fitspiration images runs counter to what Elaine experiences in her own life. Through attending her husband's athletic events, she has witnessed people with a variety of body types completing intense athletic activity (Homan & Tylka, 2014). Elaine is well aware that diverse bodies can comparably complete the same types of physical activity, so it does not make sense to her that fitspiration images would only show one type of body and stake a hegemonic claim on fitness (Ellis & Goggin, 2015; Yancy, 2008).

It's funny we watch triathalon and iron man, right? And they're amazing and they're very motivating and it's like, this is so cool, and exactly that, right? You see so many different body types. (L. 1040, p. 23)

Elaine wishes for more diverse bodies to be depicted in images touting fitness. Although Elaine occasionally feels the twinge of realization that her body does not, and realistically will not, look the same as women's bodies depicted in fitspiration, she has the life experience and willingness to critique these images that acts as an essential protective factor in being able to acknowledge the images and then simply let them go (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011). Where Elaine continues to feel uneasy is in regards to how these images are affecting youth who often do not end up achieving the replication of the media images they come across.

And so when you don't achieve that, how do you feel? Are you disappointed, are you ... do you know what I mean? Where does that come into play with yourself? Your self-esteem right?... You saw that image and you couldn't make it because of these factors... As a young person, you don't know that though, right? And then eventually, like you say, you know, and it's just little bits like in the book. It's just small things that happen year after year which expands that gap. But you know that's what the image is based on, right? Being this person, being this fitness person. (L. 1157, p. 26)

Elaine knows what it is like to struggle with body image and how challenging it can be to learn to not hold on to the automatic reaction one has when comparing oneself to an idealized body displayed in media images. Through refocusing her personal goals to be about adding more healthy options to her and her families' lifestyle rather than engaging in punitive measures when they do not completely adhere to the rigorous health routine espoused in fitspiration, Elaine aims to keep on in her endeavor to remain unsubscribed to the narrative of the societal ideal (Andrew et al., 2014; Maor & Cwikel, 2016; Patton et al., 2014). She hopes that this style of engagement in healthy living paired with open discussions about media versus reality will aid in the maintenance of her daughter's body image and self-esteem and mitigate any potential negative effects of fitness media.

Dana's Story

A rapid loosening of regulations. Dana and her daughter, Alexis (15), have had an occasionally torrid relationship with social media networks, technology, and each other surrounding the use of these networks. In their family, both Dana and her husband both work outside of the home full-time. The balancing act of mothering a teenage girl and maintaining her obligations outside of the home is not a simple one, and Dana is continually conscious of being there for her daughter and guiding her in regards to the challenges she experiences while managing her available time effectively (Patton et al., 2014). Dana was juggling these same responsibilities when her daughter, Alexis, first entered adolescence. Smart phones, computers, and the social media networks that often accompany them have thus far been a significant part of Alexis' adolescence as she matures as part of a generation that has easy and immediate access to technology.

I mean she would kind of bug us for a cell phone when she was around 10, I think it was. Hmm. 10 or 11, maybe. And we were like, 'no, there's no way!' And of course she says, 'every kid in the class has a cell phone.' Well, I doubt that, but anyway. So, we ended up ... we did get her a cell phone because she was walking home from school by herself. So it was like – well, okay but it's just going to be mostly for that. And then of course it just expands from there. So, yeah that's how it kind of started. (L. 43, p. 1)

Dana and her husband held out for a few years before allowing Alexis to have a smart phone just as she entered adolescence. They had originally intended for Alexis to use the smart phone to stay in contact with them and to ensure her safety. As Alexis began to use her smart phone for more purposes besides staying in contact with her parents, Dana and her husband conceded that it might not be realistic to restrict her use.

Dana: I don't know – it just kind of happened, I guess. And then ... I mean, I don't mind it now so much because then we can always text her. If she's at the mall – 'well, okay. What are you doing now?'

Cara: Keep tabs.

Dana: Always. Like, 'what time are you coming home?' So, that part I would say, yeah, 100% better than when I grew up where – being a parent now. Yeah, I like that. And we told her that, 'if you don't answer us back, then that's it.' Her cell phone is her life. (L. 100, p. 3)

Dana was initially a bit bewildered with Alexis' connection to her smart phone. It seemed to Dana that parting with the smart phone was overly difficult for Alexis. Dana noted that Alexis had her phone on her person almost all of the time. The high frequency of use both concerned and led Dana and her husband to attempt to put some restrictions on Alexis' phone time (Brausch & Decker, 2014; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg, et al., 1999).

We did put some limits on her social media. That she had to use it less. She didn't like it or understand why so we explained to her that it's bad for your eyes to be staring at a screen for a long time and we want her to be hanging out more with her friends. (L. 140, p. 4)

Dana and her husband were firm in their emphasis surrounding phone use. Alexis combated these regulations a little bit, but Dana did not experience any significant negative reaction.

Dana had a lot of things to balance in her daily life, and determining to what degree she wanted to place restrictions on Alexis' smart phone and social media use was one more thing. Dana harkened back to her own youth and recalled her tendency towards rebelliousness. In light of this remembrance, Dana determined that she wanted to pick her battles when it came to limits on her daughter's social media use as she did not want her daughter to feel oppressed.

And I don't want to be one of those parents where all of the sudden the kid is now totally rebellious because it's like where do you draw the line with the strictness and the rules and it's like ... ugh. Yeah it's definitely tough. I think it's harder with a girl than it was with my boy – the teenage years. (L. 634, p. 14)

As Dana and her husband gave Alexis space to explore use of her smart phone and social media networks more independently, Dana noted that Alexis joined networks such as Instagram and Snapchat (Anderson, 2015). Dana also saw how the various networks that the young people were interested in were constantly changing and noted that the adolescents she interacted with would often abandon a formerly popular network for the next best thing. Dana was casually watchful of what Alexis and her peers were engaging in on social media and she noted that Alexis primarily used social media for things like checking out new make-up trends, band and music group pages, as well as fitness content and fitspiration.

I guess right now because they're always changing their whatever excites them, or whatever they're interested in – a lot of make-up right now, um, some of the bands ... like Twenty-One Pilots is a big one, what else is does she look at? She was into the fitness stuff. You know Fabletics or whatever the heck it's called?

And Nike, and all that. Lulu Lemon. She's still into it but it goes in waves, sort of thing. (L. 146, p. 4)

Alexis made it known to Dana what she was looking at on social media by pleading with Dana to buy her many of the items or clothes that she saw in various social media images (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Dana felt exhausted by Alexis' seemingly continuous quest to garner new make-up, fitness wear, or other items and to emulate the girls and women she saw depicted on social media. Dana saw this as an unrelenting quest to continuously get the newest and most trendy items that would contribute to the image her daughter wished to portray. Dana saw both Alexis and her friends attempting to emulate these images, yet still not seeming to be satisfied with themselves or their own appearance (Ferguson et al., 2014; Meier & Gray, 2014).

She's seeing what her friends have, or, I don't know why. I feel like they're just not – they don't know how to be happy, kind of thing, on their own. That's how I see it. Why do you think getting that colour of lipstick is going to make you feel better? Or, go to any one of those retail stores for a pair of leggings. What's the difference between that and the one hundred dollar ones at Lulu Lemon or ... Sportchek and stuff, so...(L. 213, p. 5)

Dana noticed both Alexis and her friends attempting to portray an image of fitness more than they were previously. Dana also kept watch on her daughter's dieting and exercise behaviours in relation to this as Dana felt that Alexis would cycle through periods of intense diet and exercise related to her consumption of fitspo and other fitness media (Carrotte et al., 2015). It was this cyclical drive towards trying to become thinner on Alexis' part that made Dana wonder how best to monitor her daughter and broach discussion with her.

The pursuit of an idealized image. Dana's attempts at implementing guidance and limitation setting around social media, diet, and exercise practices cycled as did

Alexis' periodic engagement in fitspo induced body shape management. Dana saw that Alexis was developing throughout puberty and that Alexis' course of development progressed differently than those in her friend group. The difference in body type was something that Dana perceived to be concerning to Alexis (de Guzman & Nishina, 2014; Jin Yu, 2016). Dana consequently noticed that Alexis was both concerned by her weight and motivated to lose weight.

She is concerned about her weight. And I mean she's not ... well, her friends are like sticks, kind of thing, right? So they're small. They don't have the hips and stuff whereas she has, like, a little bit of a booty and unfortunately she got her boobs from me like when I was young and in junior high. Because I guess I was skinny everywhere else – they really look bigger. So she does have a bigger chest for a young girl. And her friends don't. She just has a different body shape than they do, sort of thing. So, a lot of them are like really long legs and just, you know, really no butt or anything. (L. 403, p. 9)

Dana observed her daughter's newfound body dissatisfaction to occur simultaneously with the body changes her daughter experienced as a result of normal adolescent development. The dissatisfaction Alexis began to experience became evident to Dana in Alexis' outward expression of dislike of her body and anxiety surrounding making her body visible to others.

Yeah, they're different. So, that's what she sees and I don't even know why, how it even started, but her body image maybe ... at least a year ago, for sure, that she was concerned about it. And it's like, "well, what? What do you mean?" She didn't want to get a new bathing suit and I'm like, "what are you talking about?" ... "You're skinny! You're tiny!" But she doesn't see it that way. She doesn't see herself as being tiny because the friends are shaped differently, I guess? (L. 421, p. 10)

Dana watched over her daughter carefully as she saw Alexis developing her own ideas about exercise and healthy eating. Alexis employed these ideas with the end goal of losing weight (Homan & Tylka, 2014; Bell, Donovan, & Ramme, 2016). Dana noticed

her daughter looking at fitspo and other fitness and healthy eating content on social media every time she felt the need to lose weight (Carrotte et al., 2015).

So then she'll go through a wave where she'll want to, like, "okay, I'm going to do however many sit-ups," or a little work out routine that she sees. She does that, but then she is very active already – she was playing a club level of a sport, and then was on another sports team at school, and then a third sport three days a week... Or she'll try to kind of watch what she's eating. But her perception is – if I don't eat as much then I am going to be better off than even eating healthy. And I'm like, "no, Alexis, you have to! Especially at your age – you're growing and stuff. You need food!" (L. 438, p. 18)

Dana also sensed that Alexis was influenced to lose weight in unhealthy ways because of the messages she received from certain peers in her social circle (O'Dougherty, Schmitz, Hearst, Covelli, & Kurzer, 2012). Dana perceived that Alexis' interactions with her peers regarding weight loss occurred both on social media and in person. There was also a trickle down effect by which other girls' mothers' expressed a need for fitness and slimness to them (Arroyo et al., 2017). This message, in turn, affected Alexis and her conception of healthy eating and desire to lose weight.

I know she had talked, like this was a while ago, about – some of the girls were talking about another girl, I guess, or commenting online maybe that she was a little bigger or something. So right away my daughter got paranoid. She does have another friend that – her mom is like a fitness buff, you know? And, you know, good for her, but then she forces the daughter to be that way. When, I mean, I don't think it's 100% you've got to be in that. I think a child or a teenager should be allowed to have, whatever, a bag of chips every once in awhile ... some sort of treat or snack or um ... I know she has restricted and she always portrays that on my daughter, almost. (L. 519, p. 12)

Frustration built for Dana as she saw all the various avenues through which Alexis was being influenced by fitspo and fitness messaging. It seemed to Dana that despite her best efforts to mitigate this influence, it was still occurring with cyclical regularity (Kluck, 2010). In response to this behaviour, Dana had and continues to increase her efforts to have discussions with Alexis and to fend off and replace messaging that directly or

indirectly encourages unhealthy behaviour (Andrew et al., 2014; Kinsaul et al, 2014; Maor & Cwikel, 2016).

Oh, well the weight stuff – it's got to be from social media. She gets her dieting and work out ideas mostly from online, but through her friends, and sometimes us, too. She's tried a few different ideas she has found online. I always have to correct her on this though and explain that she needs food from all the food groups because she's growing and developing still. (L. 515, p. 12)

Dana sees guiding her daughter toward healthy attitudes and behaviours in regards to her body, fitness, and healthy eating as a battle she is constantly engaging in (Maor & Cwikel, 2016). Dana's attempts to redirect her daughter to what she feels is a healthier lifestyle, freed from the influence of fitspo and other influences are ongoing.

Teaching is a constant battle. Dana has always felt that guiding her daughter and teaching her about topics related to self-esteem, body image, and healthy living is of the utmost importance (Patton et al., 2014). Since Alexis was young, Dana has made every effort to instill in her a sense of what's healthy versus not healthy (Maor & Cwikel, 2016). Dana looked for opportunities to speak with her daughter about these topics and readily grabbed them when they made themselves available.

And I get, yeah teenage girls, they're dealing with hormones and stuff, but I really want her to think about – why do I need this, why do I want this? I don't want her to not want anything or to not look forward to anything but that's where I am kind of like ... how much do I say? How much do I try to steer her away from that stuff? (L. 235, p. 6)

It was and is difficult for Dana to ascertain when she should step in, how much she should say, and whether it was the right time to do so in regards to these conversations (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003). Regardless, Dana was assured of the importance of having these conversations and teaching her daughter to the extent possible.

Dana had been keeping track of her daughter's social media use and her seemingly cyclical movements through stages of wanting to lose weight through diet and exercise (Anderson, 2016). It was because of these observations that Dana felt it necessary to engage in discussions with Alexis surrounding the difference between social media and reality and the edited or enhanced nature of many online images (Andrew et al., 2014; Peterson, Grippo, & Tantleff-Dunn, 2008).

We've talked about how most of the images on social media and other media aren't realistic and that everyone has different body types and shapes. That that's okay and the world would be boring if everyone were the same. They're like brainwashed for some reason and I don't know why. I mean, I know why. They want to feel confident, but that's not always the way to feel confident. (L. 264, p. 6)

The conversations about the nature of idealized images on social media were something that Dana felt like she was doing a thorough job of, yet she understood that she could not independently change Alexis' mind. Alexis seemed to listen to her and take in the information that Dana was attempting to teach her, but Dana still witnessed Alexis engaging in dieting and exercise behaviours that she deemed unhealthy (Ogle & Damhorst, 2003).

Alexis came home one day, I don't know what we gave her for lunch, but now she's trying to get off of bread, one time. And it's like, 'it's a sandwich, okay? Just eat the sandwich for crying out loud. Put tuna on it or whatever. Eat the sandwich -- you need that. What are you going to eat? Some fruit and celery sticks for lunch? No! You need more than that.' (L. 530, p. 12)

Alexis' reactions to Dana's efforts to have conversations and teach her ranged from neutral to negative. Dana felt that a lot of times Alexis responded to the conversations well, but there were other times where her adolescence bled through and Alexis criticized Dana or rejected her teachings.

So it's a constant battle, I would say, trying to teach her. And, of course, you're trying to teach her what's good and then she gets mad because she thinks you're trying to – you're being bossy or something, right? Yeah, because she knows everything, right? At her age. Do you remember? (L. 459, p. 11)

This commitment to teaching has not always been easy for Dana. Due to the uncertainty she felt, Dana would often walk a fine line in her own mind in an attempt to determine what was the right amount of teaching and guidance.

I don't know...it's not always easy. Because then she doesn't make the right decision or it's like, "oh shoot, I knew I should have said something to her," or ... Right? But, you want them to feel confident in whatever decisions they're making or if they're making the right decision or not. And you see everything. You're like, "oh my God, what do I say now, do I say something? Do I just let it go? Maybe I'll just ask her this way or maybe" ... it's a constant, I don't know, game. (L. 613, p. 14)

Allowing her daughter to make her own decisions and to give her the space to make mistakes and see them through has sometimes been challenging for Dana. Dana believes that through experience Alexis will develop an ability to move beyond the desire to emulate fitspo and other idealized imagery (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011). In the meantime, Dana is doing the amount of teaching she determines is necessary on a case-by-case basis and waiting for Alexis to mature emotionally and cognitively. As a woman who has gone through a similar process in order to end up in the space of resolute confidence she is in today, Dana is certain that Alexis will pass through the maturation process similarly (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013).

Learning to feel okay with who you are. Dana understood where Alexis was coming from in terms of wanting to emulate images and adopt the appearance of women in the images she saw on social media. Dana has, like many who identify as women, been through her own years of struggle with learning to be confident and okay with her appearance (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013). Although

Dana has experienced this struggle, she also has always embodied a sense of rebellion against the culturally sanctioned ideal.

I mean, I guess for me I was never really a follow the crowd kind of person....Maybe it's because I'm a little bit rebellious, too. That it's like, "you can't tell me that I need to wear or look like that, so I look the same as you, so we all are the same together." (L. 291, p. 7)

It was this rebelliousness and disdain towards fitting in with everyone else that allowed Dana to carve out her own path throughout adolescence. Dana established a unique look and identity and while in some small ways she attempted to emulate certain aspects of the ideal, for the most part she touted individuality. Dana looks at her daughter's experience of wishing to fit in with her peer group who try present themselves similarly to images of the idealized female body and has a hard time fully understanding it (Rubin et al., 2004).

Dana feels occasionally baffled in regards to the pack mentality of the girls in their pursuit of the image.

They kind of want to stick together in this group. I'm sure there's other kids or other girls in the same grade that maybe don't follow that, of course, but I don't know. It's like – what group do you want to be with? I guess... That's what I don't like. I don't know. I like the more individuality. To me – that stands out more and it gives you more credit because you're braver for kind of believing in something else, I guess. (L. 339, p. 8)

Dana purports standards of individuality and critical thinking in her own dealings with media images and the ever-present messages about how women should look like and be. It is through personal experience with trying to adhere to the ideal, and her subsequent break away from that, as well as employing critique towards messages of the female ideal that has assisted Dana in taking an assured stance against any perceived pressure she may feel (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013). Dana likens her growth and movement away from any shred of adherence to the ideal to

her realization that purchasing and wearing uncomfortable clothing items like lingerie was not really something she was doing for herself in order to feel good (Rubin et al., 2004).

You know what, it was probably from ... in my teenage years or just after that where I had bought some lingerie, I still have it – trust me I don't wear it anymore, and I just was never ever comfortable in it. And, I mean, that could be me. I mean some people could be totally comfortable in it and that's their prerogative. I just was never comfortable and I thought, you know what? This is stupid. Because I am doing it for someone else, and it's not for me... Why do I have to do that for that person? Why do I have to do something that makes me feel uncomfortable to make that person happy? Right? And so it's like, nope, sorry – I can't do it anymore, I don't want to do it anymore. It comes with age, or something, you finally realize. (L. 702, p. 16)

Dana has a strong ability to remain relatively unaffected by messaging regarding the female body and appearance ideal. Dana was not able to complete the online blog journal portion of data collection due to her many obligations as a mother working full-time. The lack of time available to complete this ongoing portion of sharing her story is indicative of the time constraints that exist for mothers. This is evident in Dana's concern about her daughter's activities, yet lack of time and other resources required to guide her daughter in the way she would like.

While she remembers her own trajectory towards being okay with who she is, she sometimes feels frustrated when Alexis is not able to see what Dana perceives to be the fakeness of social media images (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). To Dana's experienced eye, the falseness of some of the content on social media is blatantly obvious.

Well, social media stuff – I think it's okay. I think it has its benefits as well. I mean, it's great for these stores and business to get their product out there. Okay, great, that's smart, but as far as social media goes I think there's also a lot of false things out there. There's always this false advertising where it's like – how do they get away with this? I think it's giving you false hope or false ... whatever. (L. 749, p. 17)

The disconnect from reality that Dana sees in the images being circulated amongst social media networks that adolescent girls use is troublesome to her. Without the experience of maturity and outgrowing the desire to fit an idealized image, Dana fears that adolescent girls, including her daughter, are at a major disadvantage.

It's not all truthful. It just depends on like – the wording. They can word it however they want to word it. With teenage girls and stuff they don't have the experience or knowledge to decide – they just believe it. (L. 758, p. 17)

Dana's critiques of traditional media and social media centre on her belief in the capitalist foundation of the dissemination of the female body and appearance ideal. She sees the perceived need to try to imitate this ideal as grounded in a money making endeavour by corporations (Kinsaul et al., 2014; Pinkasavage et al., 2015; Rubin et al., 2004). Dana sees the products, clothing, and exercise accoutrements necessary to fit into the fitness inspired image ringing up a lot of dollars for those that the female pursuit of this image benefits (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016).

I always just think that this world is kind of – nobody's truthful, everybody's out for a buck, this is how you should be – everybody is just out to make money, they don't care what they tell you. They just want to make the money. And it's like – well what do you want to make all that money for? Who needs to have all those billions of dollars? Can't we all just be happy? (L. 766, p. 17)

Dana knows that there are people out there that stand to make a lot of profit off of people, and in this case specifically those who identify as girls and women who are pressured into emulating ideal images (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016; Rubin et al., 2004). It is the possession of this ability to rationalize the whys behind the appearance ideal messages that aids Dana to frame what she sees accordingly and to minimize the impact it has on her (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

As Dana continues on her mission to teach her daughter about the forces at work behind fitspo messages and guide her to becoming okay with herself and her body she envisions a future in which adolescents are taught to question what is presented to them on social media both at home and at school.

I think if they taught it in school – to guide them in the right direction a little bit. And they know it's happening. Like I said my daughter's school kiboshed Instagram or Snapchat, one of those, and maybe... I don't know.... Instagram is the big one. That maybe if they know that then they can maybe integrate that into their teachings and teach them more about life and what to watch out for and stuff. Real life issues. Sometimes history or social studies may not be as important nowadays – it is to know some, of course. But they need to teach some of this other stuff. And at home as well – it's not easy to be working full-time and policing every little thing. (L. 789, p. 18)

It has been challenging for Dana to engage in all of the parenting practices that she believes to be necessary surrounding her daughter's social media use, viewing of fitspo, and dieting and exercise related behaviours (Maor & Cwikel, 2016; Patton et al., 2014). Dana has worked hard in supporting her daughter thus far, and looks towards her daughter's maturation through adolescence and own experiential learning as an end-point to needing to so closely manage her daughter's social media use.

Storyline Threads Overview

Interpretation of the narratives by the researcher revealed both similarities and differences in storylines between Dana and Elaine's narrated experiences. Four common threads in the two narratives emerged as both mothers experienced: (1) unfavourable views of general adolescent social media use; (2) daughters altered their appearance due to viewing fitspiration; (3) proactive and reactive conversations with their daughters regarding body image and social media; (4) coping mechanisms to resist body ideal

messaging themselves, though not infallible. A differing thread between the two mothers emerged as: (1) different social media monitoring styles regarding their daughters' use.

Convergent Storyline Threads

Unfavourable views of adolescent social media use. A common storyline between both Dana and Elaine was their mainly unfavourable view of what their daughters were being exposed to on social media. Elaine perceived social media to be an arena whereby users engage in exhibitionism and competition with others, constantly having to make their social media personas better and more interesting. Similarly, Dana saw her daughter and friends using social media to compare themselves to idealized images, wanting to purchase more appearance related items as a result, and never quite being happy with themselves. The literature does indicate that social media is a powerful platform on which strong upward appearance comparisons occur readily for young girls and women (Fardouly et al., 2017). It is this appearance comparison, particularly to fitspiration that has been associated with negative psychological outcomes such as lowered mood, body dissatisfaction, and intent to engage in extreme weight loss behaviours (Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Elaine and Dana saw their daughters using social media for these purposes, but they described being differentially engaged in social media use themselves. While Elaine described using social media quite often to look at things like healthy living blogs, Dana did not report using social media much at all. However, both mothers did note that the fitspiration images that their daughters were looking at did not seem realistic or attainable. This was concerning to both mothers in that they feared their daughters were being overly influenced by their viewing of these idealized images.

Daughters influenced due to fitspiration. Elaine and Dana both told stories about their daughter's susceptibility to media images and in particular idealized images including fitspiration on social media. Elaine's daughter desired to emulate the fitspiration images specifically and Dana's daughter was also in constant pursuit of an idealized image that was bolstered by her viewing of fitspo. Both mothers have daughters who are in the female age bracket whereby they are most likely to access and view fitspiration and other fitness related content on social media (Carrotte et al., 2015). Although little research has been completed on the effect of engaging with fitspiration on adolescent girls; with adult women viewing, interacting with, and posting fitspiration has been associated with outcomes such as lowered mood, body dissatisfaction, desire to lose weight, and current and future intention to engage in extreme diet and exercise behaviours (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). As such, it is not anomalous that both daughters engage with fitspiration and that both mothers perceive their daughters to be influenced towards dissatisfaction with their bodies as a result.

Interpretation of the data revealed that both mothers perceived their daughters to be affected by fitspiration in some similar and also different ways. Dana perceived her daughter to be using fitspiration via social media to both aid her in cyclical weight loss attempts and obtain more appearance related items such as fitness wear. Relatedly, Elaine felt that her daughter is influenced to emulate fitspo by dressing like the depicted models in order to combat negative body image, yet also displaying a desire to obtain fitness items as seen on social media. Although Dana was unaware of the full extent to which her daughter engaged with fitspiration, the posting and curating of fitspiration by women

is associated with disordered eating and exercise tactics (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). Additionally, researchers have indicated that accounts on Instagram populated by traditional celebrities, bloggers, Youtube personalities, and those that are famous solely on Instagram are very influential in the purchase behaviour of young female users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). This is reflective of both Dana's and Elaine's daughters' experiences as described in the narratives.

Although both daughters' communication with their mothers about fitspiration was described as limited, they reportedly found avenues through which to tangentially discuss fitspo with their mothers. According to Elaine and Dana, both daughters' main point of contact regarding fitspiration has been their requests for their mothers to purchase fitness related items that they have viewed in fitspo images. Thus, both mothers have perceived their daughters to be susceptible to the purchase habit influence of Instagram accounts (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). Like Dana, Elaine perceived her daughter to be exhibiting signs of low self-esteem and negative body image. While Elaine was not able to definitively determine that viewing fitspiration was causing her daughter's feelings of negativity towards her body, Elaine did believe that fitspiration must have some role. As viewing of fitspiration has been associated with outcomes such as increased negative mood, state body dissatisfaction, and lowered appearance self-esteem in adult women, it is not unreasonable to assume this may also be the case for adolescent girls like Elaine's daughter (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Considering the effects both mothers perceived fitspiration and other idealized images to have on their

daughters, Dana and Elaine committed to having both proactive and reactive conversations with their daughters surrounding social media use.

Proactive and reactive social media conversations. In light of what both Elaine and Dana had experienced in their lives regarding pressure to meet the female body ideal, as well as their knowledge of what their daughters look at on social media, both mothers aimed to engage in educational conversations with their daughters. Elaine described looking for opportune moments during which to address media related topics with her daughter. Whether it was while jointly watching television, or when her daughter requested Elaine to purchase an item seen on social media, Elaine would take time to discuss media representation with her daughter. Elaine's conversations with her daughter tended to focus on which images on social media are representative of reality and which are not. In addition, she emphasized the need to be conscious of one's own image in a world where girls and women are oppressed and at risk (Maor & Cwikel, 2016). Dana also emphasized the difference between reality and media imaging with her daughter, but also often chose to focus on educating her daughter with a capitalist critique (Rubin et al., 2004). The nature of the female body ideal according to Dana was to make a small number of people wealthy by virtue of girls and women who feel inadequate then purchase appearance related items (Rubin et al., 2004).

Both Dana and Elaine described questioning their tactics surrounding conversations and whether they were doing too much or too little. Both mothers found it difficult to balance these types of conversations on top of all their other parenting and life responsibilities. Dana, in particular, emphasized that it would be helpful for education to come from other outlets, as well. Simultaneously, both mothers recognized that they had

been through a similar process of attempting to attain the ideal and that eventually with more life experience they hoped that their daughters would grow out of it just as they had (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013).

Mothers cope with effects of viewing fitspo. The final overarching convergent storyline to emerge from interpretation of the data was that both Elaine and Dana had reported going through a developmental process of learning to be okay with themselves (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013). As a result, both mothers felt that they had developed coping skills whereby they can be exposed to fitspiration and other idealized images themselves and not hold on to any negative thoughts or feelings that are elicited (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Dana told a story of always being rebellious and never fully subscribing to the female ideal. She felt as though she was able to shirk the ideal through critiquing what she perceived as capitalist motivations behind the schilling of various iterations of the ideal (Rubin et al., 2004). Similarly, Elaine narrated her experience of having developed coping mechanisms through which she can let go of any bad feelings about herself if she compares herself to images of the female body ideal (Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Elaine also described focusing on what bodies can do rather than what they look like, and tapping in to her knowledge that a range of bodies can complete athletic activity as helpful (Homan & Tylka, 2014).

Both mothers discussed occasionally experiencing negative thoughts and feelings as a result of viewing fitspiration or other idealized images. Elaine directly narrated her experiences of viewing fitspo and having to resist the tendency to compare herself. In her blog, Elaine critiqued a fitspiration image message that displayed an idealized female

body. Even so, in the same blog, Elaine admitted that she could not help but feel a bit jealous of the woman depicted. Even with a good ability to critique idealized images, Elaine was not invulnerable to fitspo messaging. Similarly, Dana described the odd occasion whereby she felt badly about her body in comparison to images of the ideal, but that this was rare. Dana, due to many competing obligations in her busy life as a working mother was not able to complete her journal entries. Thus, even mothers who are privy to media criticism and have strong coping skills are affected by idealized images including fitspo. With limited cognitive, affective, and time resources, the effort required to resist self-comparison and to guide adolescent daughters through fitspo use is enormous. Regardless, Dana and Elaine both hoped to impart skills, knowledge, and understanding regarding social media use to their daughters. They both worked towards this goal through similar conversation habits with their daughters, yet differed in their approach to monitoring and regulation of their daughters' social media use.

Divergent Storyline Thread

Differences in social media monitoring and regulation. The social media monitoring style of each mother differed in the major divergent storyline as revealed by interpretation of the data. During her daughters' early adolescence Elaine tended to be tighter in her regulation, whereas Dana employed looser regulations with her own daughter. During her daughter's early adolescence, Elaine applied tighter rules on her phone use and subsequent social media use. Elaine and her husband ensured her daughter's phone was not accessible at night, and that she was aware of her daughter's social media passwords for monitoring purposes. Conversely, during her daughter's early adolescence Dana attempted to enforce some rules, but quickly found it was not realistic

for her family. As a result, Dana engaged in less direct monitoring of her daughter's social media use. Both mothers' monitoring and regulation styles were carefully considered by each family and adjusted so that they worked for them, respectively.

Elaine's monitoring trajectory aligned with what is reflected in the literature, that parents of younger adolescents typically engage in more stringent monitoring and then provide their children with more digital independence as they age (Eastin et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2005; Rosen et al., 2008). Dana's experience is also reflected in the literature in that she provided her daughter with a more general sense of guidance rather than direct monitoring and regulation (Anderson, 2016; Wang et al., 2005). Both mothers, although locating a style that is best for them, regularly questioned their competency in guiding their daughters through social media use. Although effortful in their approaches to mothering in regards to social media, their comparatively little experience with social media occasionally left them feeling behind. Although both mothers had little direct experience with fitspiration, they attempted to engage their daughters surrounding fitspo and related images with the knowledge, skills, and resources they had available to them. Despite their efforts, the nature of fitspo on social media was overwhelming to the mothers. As both mothers earnestly stated, the challenge is much bigger than any one family can manage in isolation.

Discussion

Summary

Viewing of fitspiration via social media by the adolescent daughters of the two mothers who participated in this research was reportedly impactful on their respective relationships. Both mothers reported their daughters viewed fitspiration and other

idealized images on social media and that the daughters' main point of contact with them was in regards to purchasing items (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). Elaine and Dana perceived their daughters' viewing fitspiration to be associated with negative outcomes such as dissatisfaction with their bodies (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). The mothers both felt challenged in that they regularly questioned to what degree they should communicate with and guide their daughters surrounding this topic. Elaine first engaged in stringent parenting surrounding her daughter's use of social media and eventually eased off and into a more loosely guiding role. Conversely, Dana described engaging in a guidance and proactive discussion role with less direct regulation or monitoring of her daughters' social media use. Both mothers felt that it was difficult for them to fully counteract the messaging their daughters received from social media regarding the female body ideal. They each expressed hope that their daughters would grow out of being so affected by these social media messages and proceed through a developmental course of learning to become okay with themselves and gain coping skills as they both had reportedly done (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

Fitspiration images are pervasive in that although neither mother described being often engaged with social media networks, both Dana and Elaine had encountered fitspiration independent of their daughters. Elaine and Dana were exposed to fitspiration images in their limited use of social media. On days that their coping skills were less available to them, would engage in upward appearance comparison to the images (Fardouly et al., 2017; Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Regardless, both Dana and Elaine told stories of their progression through a developmental realization that they could cope with the messages purported by idealized images and not let the images affect them in a

significant manner (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2011; Pinkasavage et al., 2015). Elaine and Dana both described their hope that their daughters would progress similarly. Additionally, they felt that this developmental trajectory in concert with proactive guidance and discussions would aid their daughters in navigating the world of appearance expectation they are immersed in.

The mothers in this study were both strong in their convictions regarding body ideal issues and social media use. Dana and Elaine, although not immune to feeling confused about the best course of parenting action, stuck to their initial inclinations regarding setting limits and communicating about social media with their daughters. The degree of confidence and conviction displayed by both mothers in their interactions with their daughters and in response to their own experiences with fitspo may not be representative of the norm. Because the participants were both white and of middle-class families, their experiences contain a degree of privilege that other families may not have access to. Resources such as time, money, and access to education are more easily obtained for families that are privileged. Mothers of differing abilities, ethnicities, body shapes, resources, sexualities, and other diversities may face their own unique set of challenges or possess insights unknown to privileged groups. Diverse mothers may also have different knowledge levels in regards to body ideal images and fitspiration. The mothers in this study had a low-moderate level of knowledge about fitspiration specifically, and mothers with diverse identities may know more or less, thus impacting their parenting abilities.

This study revealed that use of social media networks to view fitspiration and other idealized female body images by two adolescent daughters is a concern to both

mothers. Consistent with the power of social comparison, both mothers described seeing their daughters dissatisfied with themselves as a result of viewing fitspiration and other idealized images on social media (Fardouly et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). The mothers who participated also told stories about how they felt challenged by navigating the degree to which they limit and monitor their daughters' social media use (Anderson, 2016; Wang et al., 2005). The mothers described experiencing feelings of powerlessness associated with seeing their daughters dissatisfied with their bodies in combination with being unsure about how involved they should be in their daughters' social media use.

Recommendations for Counselling Practice

Practitioners who work with mothers experiencing difficulties surrounding adolescent daughters' social media use, fitspiration consumption, or body image issues may do well to support these mothers and let them know they are not alone.

Psychoeducation that includes coaching parents on the known ramifications of consuming fitspiration and the ways in which adolescents do so is recommended (Carrotte et al., 2015; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016; Tiggemann & Zaccardo).

Mothers would gain more awareness of what their adolescent daughter is exposed to on social media, and the ways in which social media content can contribute to body dissatisfaction. Awareness on the part of mothers may catalyze their confidence and empower them in discussing such topics with their daughters.

This study also revealed the primary point of contact that two adolescent girls have with their mothers in regards to fitspiration. The conversations between mothers and adolescent daughters regarding fitspo revolved around daughters' requests for their

mothers to purchase clothing and make-up items they had seen in fitspiration images (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). For practitioners, the recognition that mothers and daughters may converse indirectly about fitspiration is important to approaching the subject within counselling (Anderson, 2016; Wang et al., 2005). As practitioners encourage mothers to engage in fitspo conversations through the aforementioned point of entry, they will be better able to identify times when conversations are appropriate. Mothers in this study felt that discussing fitspiration and other female body image ideals without referring to their daughters' behaviour specifically was most effective. Both mothers would use examples external to their family (i.e. from a television show, or discuss friends or acquaintances) to talk about ideals and standards for girls and women. It was through discussing other's experiences with female body ideals, fitspo, and social media use that mothers were able to discuss with their daughters' in a manner that did not put them on the offensive. Additionally, mothers felt more comfortable and objective raising the topic with their daughters from a third-person perspective. Practitioners may utilize this information in psychoeducational efforts with clients and encourage proactive conversations that do not always centre on daughters' or other children's behaviour specifically.

Limitations

A perceived limitation of this research may come from proponents of other paradigms in regards to the small sample size. From a narrative research viewpoint, generalizability of results is not a goal of research. The narrative paradigm celebrates that participants are able to tell their individual, subjective stories. From the perspective of narrative inquiry, embedded in a feminist worldview, individual stories are considered

inherently valuable. The in-depth exploration of subjective, individual stories as facilitated by the narrative modality is advantageous in building knowledge in this relatively unstudied area.

Another possible limitation of this research is a perceived bias that this research supports the notion that it is primarily mothers' responsibility to guide their daughters and be more knowledgeable in regards to social media use. The focus on mothers as the parents who are more likely to be involved in guiding daughter's social media use may seemingly contribute to discourses about mothers bearing all responsibility for the wellbeing of their children. Certainly, this perspective is not endorsed by this researcher. Rather, the exclusive focus on mothers emerges from the aforementioned discovery that mothers more often than fathers guide their children in regards to media use and communicate regarding appropriate online behaviour, and are more engaged with social media themselves (Anderson, 2016; Duggan et al., 2015; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Wang et al., 2005). This study's focus on mothers' and daughters' experiences acts as a starting point for research in this relatively unexamined area.

Directions for Future Research

Future research might focus on the experience of mothers who are more directly knowledgeable about fitspiration and social media in general and how those mothers might parent their adolescent daughters. It would be useful to determine whether there is a difference in how mothers who are well versed in the world of social media narrate their experiences of parenting in regards to social media. Future research may also explore the experiences of mothers who consume or post fitspiration as engagement with

fitspiration has been associated with negative psychological outcomes in women (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Lewallen & Behm-Morawitz, 2016, Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

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EPILOGUE

“...don't underestimate girls because there's a lot more power and a lot more competency than people think.” (Miriam transcript, p. 22, L. 988)

If I were to distil the myriad thoughts and feelings I have experienced throughout the process of this research into one word it would be, awestruck. The awe that I have felt has existed concurrently to other positive and negative emotions, as I have navigated this process. Regardless of other transient feelings, the awe has remained constant. I have felt awe at the seemingly intractable nature of female body ideals and the startlingly pervasive manner in which these images circulate through social media. I have felt awe at learning how viewing and inadvertently being exposed to body ideal images via social media was described by participants as having a decidedly negative effect on their satisfaction with their own bodies, despite numerous easily accessible resources for coping. Similarly, the methods through which the mothers reported acting as best they knew how to deflect these messages and protect their daughters was awe inducing. The awesome stories I was party to hearing and my own relational transaction with participants has, in turn, added to my own story. This experience served as confirmation that my idea that female body ideals have never gone away, they have morphed and been repackaged as fitspiration and other formats that tout healthy living, is shared by others.

A sense of shared experience, cognition, and emotion with the research participants has made me feel simultaneously disheartened and optimistic. I feel disheartened in that I have gleaned from the research process that girls and women are bombarded with female body ideal messages through more channels than ever before. The resultant comparisons, pressures, and strivings have proved all consuming for some

participants. The participants' perceptions of themselves as not aligning with the body ideal was described as negatively influential. The social currency of female appearance referenced by all participants. All the participants discussed, in their unique way, that value is placed on girls' and women's appearance above all other qualities or achievements. When the attainment of the fitspiration female body ideal was dangled in front of participants as something that could easily be achieved through healthy lifestyle choices, they described feeling inferior and bad about themselves in comparison. I, myself, have wrestled with similar feelings over the years.

At the onset of this research, I wished to find out whether the experience of viewing fitspiration and other idealized images via social media was anything like what I experienced viewing thinspiration on the Internet 13 years ago. I discovered that, for the participants in this study, their experiences were eerily reminiscent of my own. We shared a sense of self-comparison to the 'new' body ideal as a target to endlessly work towards. We also shared the experience of having these ideal images continuously pop up in the back of one's mind as a visual echo chamber of slightly dissimilar versions of a perfected female body on a constant, if not conscious, basis. Both of these shared experiences have served as a static reminder to both the participants and myself that regardless of what you accomplish, you are not quite good enough if you are not idealistically attractive as well.

The realization that body ideals have been repackaged exacerbated my feeling that regardless of my academic, professional, and social service endeavours, the treatment I receive in society is ultimately contingent on my physicality. As much as I have continually rejected the prescriptive nature of female body ideals in our society, I

continue to be disheartened at the fact that this does not preclude others from applying the body ideal to me in evaluating my worthiness. I share some privileged physical qualities with some of the participants in this study. I am of European ancestry, slender, a younger adult, have full mobility, and am cisgender. Although I am part of certain oppressed groups in some visible and invisible ways, I am largely closely aligned with the body ideal standard. Similar to my adolescent participants, even being marginally different than the represented ideal is implicated in occasionally feeling negatively about my appearance. Considering the effect these images that communicate body standards have on individuals who are privileged in deviating only slightly from the ideal, I can only surmise the disparity felt for individuals who occupy spaces in society that are less privileged. The negative effects of fitspiration felt by participants were resisted in different ways, one common mode of resistance being support sought from and provided by mothers.

Throughout the research, both adolescent and mother participants talked about engaging in lots of proactive and reactive discussions with their counterpart regarding body image and media messaging. Despite these well-intentioned attempts at shielding themselves and their daughters from body ideal influence, none of the participants were invulnerable to the effects. The adolescent girls implicated in this research, whether directly, or through discussion with their mothers, all had access to readily available supports and were taught message filtering processes. Regardless of these supports, the insidious nature of body ideal images via social media remained a source of upward social comparison and subsequent distress. In discussion about mothering practices surrounding social media, all participants recounted a sense of mothers being cognizant

of the influence daughters face through social media images. This sense of knowing what daughters are being exposed to emerged in the narratives in participants' relation of mothers' attempts to discuss body ideals and appearance pressures with their daughters. All participants differed in the exact approach taken in their family to have these conversations. Regardless, none of the participants conveyed feeling like that support did not exist or could not be accessed. Notwithstanding this, all participants imparted a sense that they or their mothers were not fully aware of what adolescent social media use entails and the exact nature and prevalence of fitspiration, specifically. While the adolescents did not particularly expect this of their mothers, the mothers expressed frustration at not fully understanding the draw to fitspiration. Additionally, the mothers related a sense of confusion as to how much to intervene and what types of interventions would be effective. I find threads of my story in these realizations, as well. Social media is very new. It was even newer in my adolescence. I share a sense of aimlessness with the participants in that my mother also had a dearth of online media knowledge. Even though my mother's intention was good, I was left to my own devices in my adolescence and came out on the other side of online media usage through a process of trial and mostly error. Even with the participant mother's increased knowledge compared to previous generations, all participants acknowledged that there is no roadmap to follow. Even though there is no one, plotted route in existence to determine the way that mothers, daughters, and others should navigate through the onslaught of body ideal images on social media, there is a resistance to mainstream messaging that provides me with a source of optimism for change.

Despite feeling disheartened, I have also derived a great sense of optimism from engagement with this research. Much like myself, the participants all described a sense of having traversed through a developmental process with the endpoint being a rejection of the female body ideal. Although this endpoint is ever evolving, I pulled myself out of full immersion of body ideal pursuit by expanding my input. That is, I diversified my sources of information and began to learn more about feminism. When I began to absorb messages that stemmed from alternative outlets and critically deconstructed the mainstream and often oppressing messages I had previously subscribed to, my ability to think about myself in relation to the ideal developed. All participants shared a version of this experience. The mothers told of coming to a rejection of female body ideals and developing filtering and coping techniques through their experiences. The mothers discussed a lifetime of not meeting the various ideals and the consequent emergence of feeling the futility of striving. This sense of futility aided each mother in turning away from aligning with the ideal and replacing those thoughts with more critical takes on sociocultural messaging. Similarly, the adolescent participants both related their journey to rejection of the body ideal. Ironically, both adolescents felt that this was facilitated for them by the very same social media networks on which fitspiration circulates. Running parallel to mainstream accounts on social media that propagate the female body ideal are a web of communities influenced by feminism that exist under the broad heading of body positivity. In general, body positivity accounts display diversity in representation and celebrate differences in appearance as well as body functionality. This type of representation was located on social media by the adolescent participants and utilized in the same way that I utilized alternative channels of information in my youth. Body

positivity and associated accounts focused on resisting the overarching female body ideal message exposed both adolescent participants to new ways of viewing the female body and celebrating rather than denigrating it. It is this organic generation and spread of the body positivity resistance, right from the smart phones of girls and women, that fuels my optimism. Social media is not simply a tool, but a plane of existence, upon which all people can access diverse ideas, opinions, and points of view. While this developing resistance is not perfect, and often needs to better address intersectionality, it is a space in which girls, women, and everyone else can interact with likeminded people, feel a sense of camaraderie, and challenge the continual repackaging and marketing of an oppressive female body ideal.

Appendix A

LETTER OF INFORMATION / INFORMED ASSENT FORM

#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' and Mothers' Narratives on the Impact of Fitspiration via Social Media

January 7, 2017

Researcher:

Cara Hykawy
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778-994-6115

Supervisor:

Dr. Gina Wong
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You are invited to take part in a research project entitled '#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' and Mothers' Narratives on the Impact of Fitspiration via Social Media'

This form is part of the process of informed assent. The information presented should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve, should you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, you should understand enough about its risks, benefits and what it requires of you to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed assent process. Take time to read this carefully as it is important that you understand the information given to you. Please contact the principal investigator, Cara Hykawy if you have any questions about the project or would like more information before you assent to participate.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Introduction

My name is Cara Hykawy and I am a Masters of Counselling Psychology student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about what it is like for adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls to view fitspiration on social media networks and how mothers of adolescent girls may understand, communicate about, and guide viewership in regards to their daughters' use of social media to look at fitspiration. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Gina Wong.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?

You are being invited to participate in this project because you are a typically developing adolescent girl with no prior history of clinically diagnosed mental health issues who is between the ages of 15-17 and you use at least one social media account such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or Tumblr to look at images of very fit and thin women (fitspiration).

Your parent or guardian will be spoken with to discuss your role in this research, your privacy and confidentiality, and how your participation in this research will contribute to filling in gaps in knowledge. Your parent or guardian must give their consent for you to participate in this research, but they will not be directly asked about information regarding yourself, nor will they be invited to take part in the interviews or data collection process. What you disclose in the research will be kept confidential and your parent(s) or guardian(s) will not be informed of content of conversations or blogs except in the event that you disclose that you or someone you know is at risk of harm.

What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of this research project is to capture the experience of what viewing fitspiration images via social media is like for adolescent girls and to learn whether adolescent girls are guided by their mothers in regards to this viewing, and if so, how. Additionally, this research aims to capture mothers' of adolescent girls experience of exposure to fitspiration images via social media and their potential understanding, guidance, and communication in regards to their daughters social media use specifically regarding fitspiration. Mothers and daughters from different families will be interviewed separately in order to maintain privacy.

What is fitspiration?

Fitspiration or fitspo is a relatively new online trend that has recently exploded in popularity. Fitspiration is a specific type of image that is shared on social media accounts using hashtags such as #fitspiration or #fitspo. Fitspiration can be described as pictures circulated on social media networks that are supposed to inspire those who share them that depict women and men with bodies that are very muscular, very thin, and carefully perfected that are often objectified and accompanied with a quote or phrase. Fitspiration is most often shared on image-based social media networks such as Instagram, Pinterest, or Tumblr.

What questions will this project answer?

This research project has an aim of answering questions such as:

- *How do adolescent girls describe their experience of viewing fitspiration pictures on social media?*
- *How do adolescent girls think about their own bodies in relation to pictures of fitspiration?*
- *What types of pictures of women and girls bodies on social media are adolescent girls looking at, including, but not limited to, fitspiration?*
- *What do adolescent girls think adults should know about fitspiration and social media?*

What will you be asked to do?

As a participant, you will be asked to take part in an initial interview in which you will be asked some questions by the researcher about your personal story regarding fitspiration. You will then have time to discuss your personal experiences with using social media to

look at fitspiration. This conversation will be audio recorded so that the researcher can make sure that everything that is said is captured in detail. Additionally the researcher will take notes throughout. The initial interview will last a minimum of 1 hour and up to a maximum of 2 hours. The interview would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule in the month of January 2017.

After the interview, your interview transcript will be sent to you within a month so that you can fill in possible gaps, clarify statements, and ensure that the researcher has captured what it is that you meant to say. At that time, if you have any further questions or would like to add more information to your interview transcript, you may do so. Additionally, the researcher may have further questions to ask you in order to clarify their understanding of your story.

An optional follow-up interview *may* be scheduled. During this second interview you will be able to see what the researcher has been working on and go over it together. The researcher will take your feedback and incorporate it into the project. If you disagree with any interpretations the researcher has made, you will be able to work with her to revise it. You will be able to ask any questions you have of the researcher and they will be answered in this session. This follow-up interview will take a maximum of 1 hour. The interview would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule in the month of February 2017.

You will also be asked to keep an online journal for 4 weeks in February 2017 (exact timeline to be determined) in order to get a deeper look into your experience. The purpose of this journal is to learn more about your personal experience of viewing images that objectify and idealize women's bodies, with a focus on fitspiration, as it is occurring in your life during the week. The journal will be a private online blog via the website Tumblr that you will write in once per week. You will receive a weekly email reminder from the researcher with a journal writing prompt that will ask you to submit images of the female body that you have viewed on social media in the previous week accompanied by a short summary as to what the experience of viewing these images was like for you. The online blog will be completely private and will only be able to be accessed by yourself, the researcher, and her supervisor Dr. Gina Wong. All email communications will be kept confidential and private.

What are the risks and benefits?

There may be some risks to participating in this research. There may be a risk of emotional upset to you because we will be discussing potentially sensitive issues. If you become upset during the interview, the interview can be paused or rescheduled for another time. Additionally, if you require counselling or other social services, the researcher will help to connect you with such services and a list of services will be provided in advance of the interviews.

You may benefit from this research by assisting in contributing to a growing body of research regarding use of social media for fitspiration consumption. Your voice is important and your experience is valuable. It is beneficial to hear first-hand from women

and girls who are experiencing fitspiration so as to build a base of knowledge on this topic. Your participation may also help in the future development of programs for teens and their parents regarding responsible and critical use of social media.

Do you have to take part in this project?

Involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. You are able to stop or end your participation during the process of interviewing (data collection stage) if so desired. If you wish to discontinue an interview, you may inform the researcher and it will be ended with no negative consequences to yourself. If data has been partially collected, it will be kept unless you request it to be destroyed.

Your data can be removed during your participation in data collection. Once data collection has ended, you will no longer be able to remove your data. You will be informed as to the date that data collection will end. At that time, you will no longer be able to have your interview transcript and journal entries removed from the project.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?

The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use or disclosure.

Your privacy and confidentiality will be maintained to the highest degree possible. Your name will not be attached to your interview transcript or any of your journal entries. Instead, you may choose a pseudonym or one will be assigned to your data files that will be used to identify them.

All of your data (interview recordings, transcripts, and journal entries) will be kept private and secure. Interview recordings will be password protected and stored on the researcher's password protected computer hard drive. Transcripts and other paper items will be kept securely locked in a filing cabinet. Digital files will be password protected and stored on a secure hard drive. Online journal entries will be kept protected by a password known only to yourself and the researcher. Online journals should only be accessed via a secure Internet connection. Email or phone correspondence with the researcher will be kept private and confidential. All confidential information will be accessible only to the researcher, Cara Hykawy, and Dr. Gina Wong.

All information that you provide will be held confidential, except when legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported such as in the case of potential harm to yourself or another.

How will my anonymity be protected?

Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

Your anonymity will be protected to the highest degree possible. Your participation in the study will remain anonymous. Your name will not be attached to the study, nor will it be represented in any way.

Your data will also remain anonymous. Your name will not be attached to your interview transcript or any of your journal entries. Instead, you may choose a pseudonym or one will be assigned to your data files in order to identify them.

How will the data collected be stored?

All of your data (audio recordings, transcripts, and journal entries) will be kept private and secure in password protected/encrypted folders on the researcher's hard drive. Interview recordings will be password protected and stored on the researcher's password protected hard drive. Transcripts and other paper items will be kept securely locked in a filing cabinet. Online journal entries will be kept protected by a password. Online journals should only be accessed via a secure Internet connection. Email or phone correspondence with the researcher will be kept private and confidential. All confidential information will be accessible only to the researcher, Cara Hykawy, and Dr. Gina Wong.

Data will be retained for 10 years from point of collection for potential secondary analysis, at which time it will be disposed of. Secondary analysis would include going over the same data again at a later date with a different research aim in mind. Any proposed secondary analysis would go through a process of ethics approval with the Research Ethics Board.

Physical copies of data files (i.e. paper, USB, CDs, or DVDs) will be destroyed via shredding, or rendering useless. Digital copies of data files stored on the researcher's computer and/or hard drive will be erased using a commercial application such as the program Eraser that is designed to overwrite data files rendering them obsolete.

During the process of data collection and report writing, only Cara Hykawy and Dr. Gina Wong will have access to the data and report. Once the report is complete, Athabasca University will store the report at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room. The report may also be disseminated to academic journals in which it may be published or presented at academic conferences.

All data submitted via the online blog Tumblr will be stored on the private blogs. Following data collection, blog data will be transferred to Word document format and kept secure via password protection on the researcher's hard drive. At the time of the transfer, the blogs will be deleted along with any stored data on the blogs, unless the participant wishes to keep their blog. All confidential blog information will be accessible only to yourself, the researcher, and her supervisor Dr. Gina Wong. The security and privacy policy for Tumblr can be found at the following link:
<https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/privacy>

Who will receive the results of the research project?

The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room and the final research paper will be publicly available.

The report may include direct quotations from your interview transcripts and online journal but they will be reported anonymously.

After the research project is complete, the researcher will send you copies via email so that you may view the finished product. The report will also be viewed by the researcher's supervisor and supervisory committee.

Who can you contact for more information or to indicate your interest in participating in the research project?

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the researcher) by e-mail cara.hykawy@gcap.ca or you may call or text me at 778-994-6115, or my supervisor by phone at 780-434-5856 or e-mail at ginaw@athabascau.ca.

Thank you.

Cara Hykawy

This project has been approved by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

Informed Assent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research project.
 - You have been able to ask questions about this project.
 - You are satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have had.
 - You understand what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do.
 - You understand that you are free to withdraw your participation in the research project without having to give a reason up to end of data collection and beginning of interpretation, and that doing so will not affect you now, or in the future.
 - You understand that if you choose to end your participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be retained by the researcher, unless you indicate otherwise.
 - You understand that if you choose to withdraw **after** data collection has ended, and interpretation has begun your data **cannot** be removed from the project.
-

	YES	NO
I agree to be audio-recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the use of anonymous direct quotations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to write in an online blog journal every week for four weeks in February 2017	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your signature confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits. You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.
- You understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You have been given a copy of this Informed assent form for your records; and
- You agree to participate in this research project.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

LETTER OF INFORMATION / INFORMED CONSENT FORM

#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' and Mothers' Narratives on the Impact of Fitspiration via Social Media

January 7, 2017

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780-434-5856

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled '*#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' and Mothers' Narratives on the Impact of Fitspiration via Social Media*'

This form is part of the process of informed consent. The information presented should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve, should you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, you should understand enough about its risks, benefits and what it requires of you to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully as it is important that you understand the information given to you. Please contact the principal investigator, Cara Hykawy if you have any questions about the project or would like more information before you consent to participate.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Introduction

My name is Cara Hykawy and I am a Masters of Counselling Psychology student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about what it is like for adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls to view fitspiration on social media networks and how mothers of adolescent girls may understand, communicate about, and guide viewership in regards to their daughters' use of social media to look at fitspiration. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Gina Wong.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?

You are being invited to participate in this project because you are a mother to a typically developing adolescent girl with no prior history of clinically diagnosed mental health issues. Your daughter uses at least one social media account such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, or Tumblr to look at images of very fit and thin women (fitspiration). Your daughter will not be directly solicited for information, nor will they be invited to take part in the data collection process. Additionally, you may use social media to look at fitspiration or other images of women's bodies, yourself.

What you disclose in the research will be kept confidential and no one other than the

researcher and her supervisor, Dr. Gina Wong, will be informed of content of conversations or blogs except in the event that you disclose that you or someone you know is at risk of harm.

What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of this research project is to capture the experience of what viewing fitspiration images via social media is like for adolescent girls and to learn whether adolescent girls are guided by their mothers in regards to this viewing, and if so, how. Additionally, this research aims to capture mothers' of adolescent girls experience of exposure to fitspiration images via social media and their potential understanding, guidance, and communication in regards to their daughters social media use specifically regarding fitspiration.

What is fitspiration?

Fitspiration or fitspo is a relatively new online trend that has recently exploded in popularity. Fitspiration is a specific genre of image that is shared on social media accounts using hashtags such as #fitspiration or #fitspo. Fitspiration can be described as pictures circulated on social media networks that are supposed to inspire those who share them that depict women and men with bodies that are very muscular, very thin, and carefully perfected that are often objectified and accompanied with a quote or phrase. Fitspiration is most often shared on image-based social media networks such as Instagram, Pinterest, or Tumblr.

What questions will this project answer?

This research project has an aim of answering questions such as:

- How do mothers make sense of their daughters' use of social media?
- How do mothers experience their daughters' use of social media to look at fitspiration images, specifically?
- Do mothers guide their daughters' social media use? If so, how?
- How do mothers of adolescent girls experience the trend of fitspiration, themselves?

What will you be asked to do? As a participant, you are asked to participate in an initial interview in which you will be asked some questions about your personal story regarding fitspiration. You will then have time to discuss your personal experiences in regards to your daughters' fitspiration consumption via social media and your own experience of fitspiration. This conversation will be audio recorded so that the researcher can make sure that everything that is said is captured in detail. Additionally, the researcher will take notes throughout the interview. The initial interview will last up to a maximum of 2 hours. The interview would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule in the month of January 2017.

After the interview, your interview transcript will be sent to you within a month so that you can fill in possible gaps, clarify statements, and ensure that the researcher has captured what it is that you meant to say. At that time, if you have any further questions or would like to add more information to your interview transcript, you may do so.

Additionally, the researcher may have further questions to ask you in order to clarify their understanding of your story.

A follow-up interview may be scheduled. During this second interview you will be able to see what the researcher has been working on and review it together. The researcher will take your feedback and incorporate it into the project. If you disagree with any interpretations the researcher has made, you will be able to work with her to revise it. You will be able to ask any questions you have of the researcher and they will be answered in this session. This follow-up interview will take a maximum of 1 hour. The interview would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule in the month of February 2017.

You will also be asked to keep an online journal for 4 weeks in January or February 2017 (exact timeline to be determined) in order to get a deeper look into your experience. The purpose of this journal is to learn more about your personal experience of viewing images that objectify and idealize women's bodies, with a focus on fitspiration, as it is occurring in your life during the week. The journal will be a private online blog via the website Tumblr that you will write in once per week.

You will receive a weekly email reminder from the researcher with a journal writing prompt that will ask you to submit images of the female body that you have viewed on social media in the previous week accompanied by a short summary as to what the experience of viewing these images was like for you. The researcher will respond to your blog post each week with acknowledgement that she has read it. The online blog will be completely private and will only be able to be accessed by yourself, the researcher, and her supervisor Dr. Gina Wong. All email communications will be kept confidential and private.

What are the risks and benefits?

There may be some risks to participating in this research. There may be a risk of emotional upset to you because we will be discussing potentially sensitive issues. If you become upset during the interview, the interview can be paused or rescheduled for another time. Additionally, if you require counselling or other social services, the researcher will help to connect you with such services and a list of services will be provided in advance of the interviews.

You may benefit from this research by assisting in contributing to a growing body of research regarding use of social media for fitspiration consumption. Your voice is important and your experience is valuable. It is beneficial to hear first-hand from women and girls who are experiencing fitspiration so as to build a base of knowledge on this topic. Your participation may also help in the future development of programs for teens and their parents regarding responsible and critical use of social media.

Do you have to take part in this project?

Involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. You are able to stop or end your participation during the process of interviewing (data collection stage) if so desired. If

you wish to discontinue an interview, you may inform the researcher and it will be ended with no negative consequences to yourself. If data has been partially collected, it will be kept unless you request it to be destroyed.

Your data can be removed during your participation in data collection. Once data collection has ended, you will no longer be able to remove your data. You will be informed as to the date that data collection will end. At that time, you will no longer be able to have your interview transcript and journal entries removed from the project.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?

The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use or disclosure.

Your privacy and confidentiality will be maintained to the highest degree possible. Your name will not be attached to your interview transcript or any of your journal entries. Instead, you may choose a pseudonym or one will be assigned to your data files that will be used to identify them.

All of your data (interview recordings, transcripts, and journal entries) will be kept private and secure. Interview recordings will be password protected and stored on the researcher's password protected computer hard drive. Transcripts and other paper items will be kept securely locked in a filing cabinet. Digital files will be password protected and stored on a secure hard drive. Online journal entries will be kept protected by a password known only to yourself and the researcher. Online journals should only be accessed via a secure Internet connection. Email or phone correspondence with the researcher will be kept private and confidential. All confidential information will be accessible only to the researcher, Cara Hykawy, and Dr. Gina Wong.

All information that you provide will be held confidential, except when legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported such as in the case of potential harm to yourself or another.

How will my anonymity be protected?

Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

Your anonymity will be protected to the highest degree possible. Your participation in the study will remain anonymous. Your name will not be attached to the study, nor will it be represented in any way. Your data will also remain anonymous. Your name will not be attached to your interview transcript or any of your journal entries. Instead, you may choose a pseudonym or one will be assigned to your data files in order to identify them.

How will the data collected be stored?

All of your data (audio recordings, transcripts, and journal entries) will be kept private and secure in password protected/encrypted folders on the researcher's hard drive. Interview recordings will be password protected and stored on the researcher's password protected hard drive. Transcripts and other paper items will be kept securely locked in a

filing cabinet. Online journal entries will be kept protected by a password. Online journals should only be accessed via a secure Internet connection. Email or phone correspondence with the researcher will be kept private and confidential. All confidential information will be accessible only to the researcher, Cara Hykawy, and Dr. Gina Wong. Data will be retained for 10 years from point of collection for potential secondary analysis, at which time it will be disposed of. Secondary analysis would include going over the same data again at a later date with a different research aim in mind. Any proposed secondary analysis would go through a process of ethics approval with the Research Ethics Board.

After 10 years, physical copies of data files (i.e. paper, USB, CDs, or DVDs) will be destroyed via shredding, or rendering useless. Digital copies of data files stored on the researcher's computer and/or hard drive will be erased using a software application such as Eraser that is designed to overwrite data files rendering them obsolete.

During the process of data collection and report writing, only Cara Hykawy and Dr. Gina Wong will have access to the data and report. Once the report is complete, Athabasca University will store the report at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room. The report may also be disseminated to academic journals in which it may be published or presented at academic conferences.

All data submitted via the online blog Tumblr will be stored on the private blogs. Following data collection, blog data will be transferred to Word document format and kept secure via password protection on the researcher's hard drive. At the time of the transfer, the blogs will be deleted along with any stored data on the blogs, unless the participant wishes to keep their blog. All confidential blog information will be accessible only to yourself, the researcher, and her supervisor Dr. Gina Wong. The security and privacy policy for Tumblr can be found at the following link:
<https://www.tumblr.com/policy/en/privacy>

Who will receive the results of the research project?

The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room and the final research paper will be publicly available.

The report may include direct quotations from your interview transcripts and online journal but they will be reported anonymously.

After the research project is complete, the researcher will send you copies via email so that you may view the finished product. The report will also be viewed by the researcher's supervisor and supervisory committee.

Who can you contact for more information or to indicate your interest in participating in the research project?

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the researcher) by e-mail cara.hykawy@gcap.ca or you may call or text me at 778-994-6115, or my supervisor by phone at 780-434-5856 or e-

mail at ginaw@athabascau.ca .

Thank you,

Cara Hykawy

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

Informed Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research project.
- You have been able to ask questions about this project.
- You are satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have had.
- You understand what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw your participation in the research project without having to give a reason up to end of data collection and beginning of interpretation, and that doing so will not affect you now, or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end your participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be retained by the researcher, unless you indicate otherwise.
- You understand that if you choose to withdraw **after** data collection has ended, and interpretation has begun your data **cannot** be removed from the project.

	YES	NO
I agree to be audio-recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to the use of anonymous direct quotations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to write in an online blog journal every week for four weeks in February 2017	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your signature confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits. You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.

- You understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You have been given a copy of this Informed assent form for your records; and
- You agree to participate in this research project.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix B

Adolescent Interview Questions

1. Describe your experience of using image based social media (i.e. Instagram or Pinterest) to look at images of fitspiration.
2. What do you think and feel about looking at, or interacting with these images (i.e. commenting, liking)?
3. What do you think and feel about your own body while or after you view these images?
4. What do you think the purpose of fitspiration is? How do you use fitspiration to achieve this purpose?
5. What do you think adults should know about fitspo and social media?

Mother Interview Questions

1. Describe what your experience with the use of social media.
2. What do you know about how your daughter(s) use social media?
3. Describe what you experience in regards to your daughter(s) using visually based social media (i.e. Instagram or Pinterest) to look at images of fitspo, specifically.
4. Do you and your daughter talk about images of girls and women in media? If so, what do you talk about?
5. What is your direct experience with fitspiration?

Appendix C

Ana's Story

Foundations of Media Literacy and Self-Love

Ana is self-admittedly a naturally shy person. Her junior high school years were a time when she was more focused on activities such as reading books rather than engaging in use of social media. In fact, at that time in her life, social media sites such as Instagram were not as predominant in society as she perceives them to be today. Being a more reserved person, Ana did not get into use of social media until she was an older adolescent. When Ana began to explore the world of social media networks, she had already been engaged by her parents in proactive conversations regarding media use so as to lay a foundation for her online experiences.

I think they (my parents) felt that I was able to navigate through social media in a way that wouldn't harm me because I had already been taught enough to sort of experience it in a way that wasn't going to influence me as a person or have negative consequences, I suppose. (Ana transcript, p. 20)

Ana's parents, and her mom specifically, started early in their discussions with her regarding mass media and appearance related topics. Ana had many foundational discussions with her parents from a young age. In Ana's family, a focus on academic achievement and participating in hobbies and other activities was something that was emphasized as being more important than one's appearance. Ana's mother would regularly have discussions with her regarding appearance standards and the separation of who you are and what you look like.

(My mom) always instilled this value in my sister and I that it's not about appearance and it's so much more important for us to be focusing on school and grades and that that's what's really important. Like who we are as people is so much more important. (Ana transcript, p. 17)

Ana's mom would raise these discussions in a natural way by bringing to Anna's attention real time examples of people who were confusing their personal value and worth with their appearance. Ana would learn from these conversations and consequently internalized a strong desire to achieve academically and otherwise in addition to any appearance-based activities she undertook.

(My mom would) highlight instances where maybe for some people that had been too much of a focus and it has kind of misdirected them. And how she'll say stuff like, 'beauty can only get you so far. Looks can only take you so far. She'll just sort of bring that about through, not necessarily in a rude way, but by pointing out instances where it's not going to help you, really, unless you also focus on things besides appearance. (Anna transcript, p. 17-18)

These real time examples and discussions that Anna's mother engaged in with her would also be a setting in which Ana's mother would discuss physical appearance standards and what does and does not constitute a truly healthy body. This occurred especially in light of Ana participating in some recreational modeling as well as ballet classes as these are two recreational activities that typically have strict body standards.

She's always made it clear what a *true* sense of healthy body is and like being thin doesn't always mean that you're necessarily healthy. And especially with modeling when that's such a predominant theme. (Ana transcript, p. 17)

A missed opportunity on the part of a hypothetical mentor for modeling body positivity as well as healthy eating and exercise choices was a stand out example in Ana's youth. Both Ana and her parents recognized Ana's ballet teacher's lifestyle choices as potentially harmful and while Ana enjoyed participating in ballet, she always carried this parent-emphasized example with her.

As a specific example that I can think of, I had a ballet teacher years ago, too. And not in like a rude sense, but she was extremely skinny and thin but she kept weight off by like smoking a ton and eating soup, basically. Like, a strictly soup diet. And that's sort of one way where my parents were like, 'you don't want to be like that.' Because that's not ... she may appear to be healthy but she really wasn't. From a fairly young age, I had her as a teacher and that was sort of an example that should have been a more positive mentor but it was more of an example of something that I didn't want to aspire to be. (Ana transcript, p. 19).

Ana had these ongoing and comprehensive conversations with her parents regarding appearance, health, and personal qualities throughout her childhood and adolescence. These conversations were complemented by Ana's mother routinely displaying and communicating a strong sense of personal confidence and self-esteem.

I think lots of the time people sort of, especially at a younger age, want to act like your parents do and you sort of follow in line with that. My mom has never really indicated any sense of lack of self-esteem. I have always viewed her as a really

confident person and I think that's how I sort of, that's where my sense of confidence has derived from. It was my mom being a confident woman. (Ana transcript, p. 16)

This confidence is something that seeped into Ana's psyche in an implicit way and influenced Ana in strengthening her own foundation from which to build. Ana's mother recognized their differences in appearance throughout Ana's childhood but chose to celebrate those differences. This showed Ana that it does not matter what variation you may have in appearance, owning what you look like helps in channeling your energies towards other foci such as academics and personal development.

It's funny, too, because most people never really realize she's my mom because we don't necessarily look similar. She's like really short and I'm, like, a lot taller than her but I think that, too. I think she just recognizes that we're both different but, like, that's okay and yeah I think her sense of confidence is something that has definitely transferred to me and influenced me. So I think, yeah, a mother's sense of self-confidence is really influential on a daughter's sense of self-confidence, I guess. (Ana transcript, p. 17)

There were certain actions, or lack thereof, that Ana's mother took that really stood out for Ana in terms of a tutorial on how to display confidence. That display is something that Ana took note of and more consciously tried to emulate as she grew older.

Well she's not like very self-deprecating and tries not to point out flaws ... she's not a super 'look at me' kind of person. And I think she just shows her confidence through who she is as a person and her drive and ...yeah. (Ana transcript, p. 18)

Ana's parents expended effort to have comprehensive conversations with Ana about many topics. Their focus on assisting Ana in developing a healthy sense of self, and an appreciation of her appearance and body was something that Ana perceived as being a form of preparation that could be applied to her life as she matured. By the time visually-based social media accounts such as Instagram started becoming more prevalent and used more widely by adolescent girls, Ana felt her parents were confident in her ability to navigate these networks due to the foundation they had helped her lay. Ana's parents did not enact any regulations on her social media use, but Ana felt both prepared to use it and that they trusted her personal judgment.

I think once I reached a certain age it was more ...they've always had this sort of approach to parenting like, if you give us a reason *not* to trust you, we won't, sort of. But, I think they trust that I can make informed decisions. But, yeah I haven't really had any restrictions or barriers which I think can be both good and bad but I think that then, definitely, it doesn't sort of give me this sense of being restrained and needing to let myself ... like not held back by them and feeling like I need to break outside of that or do anything to like, work around it. (Ana transcript, p. 19).

Upon embarking on her initial social media use, Ana had a sense that her parents felt that they had sufficiently taught her enough so that they could feel comfortable with giving her independence around her phone. Ana felt trusted by her parents in terms of her responsible use and judgment and this positively influenced her in that she felt she had a strong, supportive base to return to throughout her social media explorations.

I think my parents felt that I was able to, yeah, navigate through social media in a way that wouldn't harm me because I had already been taught enough to sort of experience it in a way that wasn't going to influence me as a person or have negative consequences, I suppose. (Ana transcript, p. 21)

Ana and her parents engaged in many proactive conversations regarding topics such as media literacy, body image, health, and self-confidence so that a foundation for future critical media consumption and a strong sense of self was laid early on. This foundation has assisted Ana in becoming a critical and reflective consumer of the societally endorsed female body ideal and a champion of diverse representation. Ana also drew from her well-constructed foundation as she matured and navigated through the maelstrom that is the ascent through adolescent girlhood.

Learning to Be a Girl in the World

Ana has, throughout her adolescence, become more conscious of the societal standard that is put forth through multiple outlets regarding what makes you, in the eyes of some people, valuable as a girl or woman in the world. Ana has come to notice, through critical reflection encouraged by her parents, and engendered through her interest in such topics, that there's a dominant representation of specific looks that many girls and women feel the need to match. These messages made their way to Ana through multiple angles. Outlets such as television, film, the fashion industry, magazines, self-made Instagram models, celebrities on social media, or other social media accounts such as the Victoria's Secret models were all channels through which the value of women's appearance matching an ideal look filtered down to Ana.

I think it is sort of this dominant representation of sort of, specific looks that people then feel they need to sort of match because of this idea of wanting to fit in and wanting to meet different standards that are kind of established through social media. I think it's prioritized a lot. Too much. Especially through media. And I think there's far too many ways that appearance is placed before intellect, or achievements, or abilities, or just personalities in general. Just being a good person, really. And I think that's an issue that I've seen really circulate through social media, just so much emphasis on appearance rather than the genuine spirit of a person. (Ana transcript, p. 5, 12)

It is this primary emphasis on appearance and image above all else that Anna began to find difficult as a maturing adolescent. Even though she had the advantage of her parents regularly and comprehensively engaging with her in proactive conversations about body image and ideals, she found herself subscribing to these messages as they permeated her protective barriers and seeped in through the cracks. Ana would see images of thin, muscular, objectified, and generally unattainable womens' bodies through outlets such as visually based social media networks and tend to compare her own body to the ideal.

Yeah, um if I've been on vacation and had some photos in a bathing suit or something and then seen other photos of models in bathing suits and stuff. I think there's definitely a strong emphasis then on more differences that you find and you sort of begin to pick yourself apart and sort of, just comparison, really. Between what body parts that you're maybe self-conscious about and that aren't comparable to others. Yeah I think it just becomes sort of a dangerous thing

where you start to really pick yourself apart and focus on too many flaws rather than what you like about yourself. (Ana transcript, p. 11)

Messaging about women's and girl's body ideals and the value of appearance in women and girls above all else would intermittently affect Ana's sense of self confidence and security in her embodiment of herself. Not only would Ana sometimes compare herself to images in media, but also to her peers at school. These comparisons tended to alert her to the differences between herself and others, as well as herself and the societally endorsed ideal.

Yeah I think it's definitely degrading and it can just bring your confidence down tremendously. For me, I've always been one of the taller kids in my grades and classes and while I have found ways to just embrace it and be good with it, yeah stuff like that kind of gets drawn out. Then you start to feel self-conscious about it and yeah so ...I think it really makes you reevaluate the, kind of, self-worth that you have or like the value you place on yourself. I don't think it really encourages you to sort of put yourself out there. Like, I've always been a naturally more shy person and so I think stuff like that sort of puts up some barriers to sort of discourage me from overcoming the shyness. (Ana transcript, p. 11)

When Ana saw other girls and women who fit the appearance and body ideal held up as more valuable individuals whose lifestyles should be strived for, she wondered about herself and whether she was just as worthy as them. Ana would question whether she was at the same level as others and whether her accomplishments meant anything if she did not appear valuable compared to the ideal standard. Ana would feel degraded by

these images that would amplify her natural shyness and put up barriers to social interaction.

I think just a sense of feeling like you're not as Not at the same level as others and you don't ... you're not as valued in society, maybe? Maybe as some would be just based on appearance. I think that would be sort of how I would define it.

(Ana transcript, p. 11)

Ana began to have some experiences whereby she used social media in a manner that reflected the insidiously creeping need to feel validated in regards to societal value on appearance. Ana would become focused on getting likes through social media on various posts and felt energized by the rush that an incoming slew of 'likes' would generate.

While this rush would have short-term positive effects on Ana's mood, it would quickly wear off and the process would have to begin again.

Ana: It can be a more instantaneous thing and you don't have to really ... I think other forms of validation are just kind of sporadic and come about through...

Cara: More naturally, maybe?

Ana: Yeah. And ways that are more genuine, I think. And I think while this is definitely not as genuine a source of validation, it is validation for some and it comes so quickly. It can just be like if you're feeling down, post a photo, get the likes, and feel better about yourself.... It does give you that sense of like a compliment, sort of, and it does make you feel good, I think. It is a bit of a rush when all the likes come in and you get kind of excited about it I guess. I think sometimes you read into it more, too and don't realize that some people just kind of like everyone's photos. You feel special if they specifically like your

photo...when maybe it's more... I don't know how to explain it but I think you maybe interpret the situation to kind of be more than it is and think that it's maybe a more personalized or special compliment when that's not necessarily what it is.

(Ana transcript, p. 5, 8)

Ana interpreted 'likes' to possibly be a meaningful form of social media interaction, and deemed likes from people to be communication of a personal sense of approval or targeted compliment. Ana subsequently, through reflection, recognized that reading into likes a lot could attribute meaning to the interaction that the 'liker' may not have even intended. While Ana tended to try and have a balanced view of the images and interactions that were prevalent on her social media accounts, at times she became overtly focused on this type of interaction. Because of its fleeting nature, Ana came to realize that the validation she was getting through these methods, and from subscribing to the image ideal, was not creating lasting self-confidence and assuredness in her.

I feel like I have had experiences where I have become kind of too obsessed with stuff like that and it just ultimately doesn't make me feel good in the end and like I can't find a sense of self-esteem from that. I think I have kind of realized that so I definitely find other ways where I have to get that sense of confidence from that isn't in this sense, through social media. (Ana transcript, p. 9)

As Ana continued to develop and move through adolescence, this realization allowed her to step back from looking for these types of validation, and place more value on validation that occurred in naturalistic settings, and referenced her personal qualities rather than her appearance and body. These more genuine comments and interactions helped Ana to cherish her positive qualities, achievements, and personal values above an

exclusive focus on her appearance and body. Although it was not always easy for Ana to separate her personal qualities that she valued from her appearance, it ultimately resulted in Ana choosing to turn away from striving for the ideal and being better able to determine her own way of being a girl in the world.

Yeah, I think it's more ... I can't necessarily think of a specific experience, it's more of a general sense, I think. But, I always know that I feel a lot better about situations when it's like a face-to-face compliment and I've actually had an *experience* with someone that's really positive rather than through just a social media base sort of connection with someone. I think I just have recognized the difference in sort of how that makes me feel and it's just a lot more genuine, definitely, in a real life scenario. So, I think in real life, being able to get compliments that are more based on me as a person is where it taps into me more and I feel a greater sense of sort of ... it just makes me feel better to have that compliment that's more about me as a person rather than just appearance. (Ana transcript, p. 9-10)

Ana moved from a place of susceptibility to being drawn in to valuing the female body ideal, and subscribing to the aim of being validated on social media to a vantage point from which she could better access her foundational skills and knowledge as developed within her family. From this vantage point she could also critically reflect on how she was choosing to be and what she was choosing to consume. The resolve, resilience, and more solidified sense of self that Ana developed throughout the learning and becoming she did continues to act as a sort of protective layer against external messages regarding body ideals. While this layer is solidly in place, with a renewed emergence of female

body ideals repackaged with a health and fitness label, her protective factors are continually challenged.

Fitspiration, Fakeness, and Female Body Ideals

As Ana became a regular user of social media networks she began using Facebook, later abandoning it to be used only when staying in contact with some family members. More youth centred social media networks such as Tumblr and Instagram are where Ana migrated to next. Shifting to engagement with others more closely within her age range, Ana began using Tumblr, and later, Instagram to post pictures and written comments of her life, and to keep up with what friends, bloggers, and celebrities were up to. Ana noticed that a few years ago fitspiration seemed to emerge on these networks accompanied by other blatant female body ideal trends such as a tendency to idealize larger buttocks. Fitspiration purported to encourage a fit and healthy lifestyle rather than one in pursuit of thinness by posting motivational photos. Where once being extremely thin was at the forefront of ideal. Anna found that the revised societal standards of female beauty in fitspiration included different, but specific requirements.

I think there's some common themes that would come up amongst the photos would be just things like larger chests and really small waistlines and really like, larger butts, and... yeah there's certain specific body types that just are being focused on. Yeah just really unattainable ideas of bodies. I definitely think there's a lack of diversity too as far as like ... there's definitely more white females on the pages and not a range of different cultures that are represented ... (Ana transcript, p. 4)

Ana would, and continues to, open up Instagram 4 or 5 times per day. She would scroll through both her newsfeed which was populated by pictures posted by users that she specifically followed, as well as the ‘home’ page, which utilizes the Instagram algorithm to display pictures that are related to what Ana typically ‘liked’ or what her friends or other people she follows were ‘liking.’ It is through this use that Ana noticed the staggering similarity of the womens’ bodies in fitspiration pictures. Not only were they thin in desirable areas, and curvaceous in others, they were also typically white women without any sign of bodily or cultural diversity.

I think maybe if you’re having one of those days where you’re just, you feel like you don’t look your best or you just haven’t worked out in a while or something...It can be kind of degrading because I feel like they really present beauty and a healthy body in a way that’s really kind of singular and not diverse in a way that represents all of the various body types and ways that people could consider beauty to be. (Ana transcript, p. 1).

Ana would see and continues to see fitspo images, sometimes through looking at user’s accounts that may have posted fitspo, and at other times involuntarily – opening up her home page, or notifications as to what people she follows had ‘liked’ and facing a barrage of these images. Ana noticed and continues to notice these images, some days more than others, and when she really looked at and focused on these images, she would compare herself to them. Comparison to the images has been mitigated by Ana through her conscious reflection on unrealistic standards and application of concepts such as objectification, and the sexualization of women but this barrier is not impermeable. Although Aana does not emerge unscathed after viewing fitspiration images, her

foundation of critical thinking and self-confidence that has been established within her family does allow her to redirect any negative thoughts she has about herself in comparison to the images and reframe them effectively – although not without extensive cognitive effort. Ana does this through reflecting on the nature of the images and how they have been altered, edited, and presented in certain ways to purposefully or inadvertently convey certain messages. Ana often reflects on the fact that fitspiration images are objectified, and present a message of exercise as a method for attaining the idealized female body shape rather than performance or athletic goals.

I definitely think there's a great deal of objectification that happens because there is so much emphasis placed on specific body parts rather than the person as a whole. (Ana transcript, p. 2)

Ana also perceives fitspo images to emphasize appearance as valued in the women depicted.

Cara: What is it about the images that you think indicates that there's a value placed on just appearance over other personal qualities?

Anna: Um, I think it's that they use certain angles or crop off faces, even to that extent that really focuses on the certain body parts. I think there's the side where maybe if someone has worked really hard and is showing their progress in that sense there can be a personal sort of attribute that's reflected...With maybe like, persevering and working hard to achieve what they want with their body. And I see that as a really positive thing...But then I think the darker side to it is driven by the emphasis that is definitely directed towards particular body parts. I think that's where it becomes an issue. (Ana transcript, p. 12)

Additionally, Ana has often noticed that these images are sexualized in a manner that is obvious yet nonsensical as she perceives athletics and sexuality as generally not going together. It is this sexualization of the women in the images that Ana has found particularly jarring and has repeatedly taken note of. She has seen images that are supposedly meant to celebrate and focus on athleticism and health and the women in these images are dressed in outfits that would likely be unrealistic in terms of allowing movement conducive to athletic performance. Ana also interprets the women in these pictures as sexualized when they are posed provocatively rather than in a more athletic or performance related stance.

Ana: Yeah, I think that kind of comes about when things have a tone of sexualization to them and when it's more revealing than necessary to show how fit the person is and I think that's where the line is crossed.

Cara: Yeah, so it's like, well, typically people don't work out in the equivalent of lingerie, that's not comfortable.

Ana: Yeah!

Cara: So, what would be a red flag for you like, oh this image seems sexualized?

Ana: I would say like the pose that a person's in, what they're wearing, definitely. Um, you know, I think just how revealing it is and that's about that, yeah. (Ana transcript, p. 13)

Ana has repeatedly looked at fitspo images and come to the conclusion that the women depicted in fitspo are not really honoured as multifaceted people, but rather treated as objects to be looked at and consumed. Whether it is an objectification of a certain body part that adheres to the societal ideal, or the unnecessary sexualization of a woman in an

image that is supposed to display athletics, Ana has critically reflected and continuously reminds herself of the ways in which the messages are twisted and imbued with further implicit messages about what is considered valuable in women and girls.

Not only has Ana considered her viewing of fitspiration and the manner by which it affects her personally, she has pondered the motivating factors catalyzing the behaviour of those who post fitspiration. Ana has connected the furious pace of online validation and the posting of fitspo as related. Ana has felt as though those who post fitspo are motivated to do so because the societal rhetoric is that, 'strong is the new skinny,' and adhering to this publicly via social media tends to garner a lot of 'likes' as validation. Additionally, Ana sees other consumers of fitspo as engaging in consumption due to their motivations to look like the women depicted.

I think there's the two kind of sides to it. There's the people who are posting it and contributing to that sort of content and then there's the people who are actually viewing it, and the consumer side I guess. So I think from the poster's kind of perspective it's that kind of validation and sort of putting themselves out there so that they can see how they feel back and the public's response. And then I think from the viewing side of things, for some I think maybe it is more like, 'oh I do want to look like that' and it gives a sense of direction to try to work towards. But then I think that that can also be dangerous in the sense that, especially for girls that are quite a bit younger than me, even, it becomes very toxic when it is very sexualized and they feel a need to maybe be more mature or grown up than they are at that point of their lives or that they should be expected to be. (Ana transcript, p. 12)

Although Ana has seen some benefit to the posting and consumption of fitspo, that is, if the motivation behind it is truly a balanced sense of engaging in healthy eating and a moderate amount of exercise, she believes that the majority of the images contain potentially harmful elements such as objectification and unnecessary sexualization. This is reflected in the fact that Ana often compares herself to these images regardless of her ability to critically reflect on them and it tends to result in her feeling badly about herself and like she does not meet the current ideal standard of female attractiveness. Regardless, Ana is often able to navigate through negative effects the viewing of these images might have on her due to her strong foundation of critical thinking skills and self-confidence engendered from her nuclear family. Ana recognizes that not all adolescent girls and women are privileged in having this type of base and she is an advocate for things like increasing the diversity and realistic nature of the images and disseminating a counter message of body positivity or acceptance.

Moving Towards a Body Positive Philosophy

Ana has become, through her personal experiences a proponent of more comprehensive and diverse representation of women's bodies in social media, as well as the dissemination of messages of accepting one's body and focusing on other aspects of the self rather than solely appearance. Ana continues to be cognizant that there is a chance that fitspo images are more significantly affecting adolescent girls who are younger than her as she feels there is a developmental process that occurs in adolescence for girls that results in the establishment of a more solid sense of self and an ability to assert one's way of being in the world.

Ana: I think that's what's helped me, too. Being at this age now, I've kind of reached a more developed sense of self-esteem, I guess, and confidence. So I don't think it influences me as much. I think you're more easily influenced at a younger age, obviously...

Cara: You said you have a better ability – you used the word 'assertion' – to sort of assert those values?

Ana: Yeah! I think to draw the line between who you are and maybe what society thinks you should be and that you can kind of separate those worlds. (Ana transcript, p. 16, 17)

Even though Ana believes that many adolescent girls eventually learn through experience and develop and mature to the degree that they are able to gain a more solid sense of self and confidence to assert themselves in the world, there is still preventative work that could be done in order to lessen the impact of fitspo and other idealized images of women's bodies on girls. Ana emphasizes the importance of advocates working together to implement change in terms of what types of bodies are primarily represented in both traditional and social media. Additionally, she believes that a more pervasive dissemination of the message that thinness does not always equal health is integral.

I just think a greater sense of diversity and showing that being healthy, like, just a core message of healthy doesn't always mean being skinny. And just showing different body types that are healthy and I think, really, if people on social media could find more ways in which the personality and integrity of a person is preserved and represented and their spirit comes across rather than just superficial sort of exterior components. (Ana transcript, p. 21)

In concert with a more societal change in terms of what the images of womens' bodies in media look like and how diverse they are, Ana purports that younger girls could benefit from learning more about critical media consumption, separation of personal value and appearance, and appreciating one's body regardless of what it looks like, at a younger age. Ana feels as though these messages need to come from multiple channels in order to be able to successfully combat the female body ideal messaging that is so pervasive.

And I think just for teens, developing the ability to really just differentiate between social media and who they are as a person and to try to connect the two in a way that is just most reflective of who they are. (Ana transcript, p. 21)

Moving forward, Ana asserts that these learning opportunities need to come about for adolescent girls in a manner that feels rounded and natural rather than academic and like a lecture. An organic learning experience through multiple outlets and channels is something that Ana suggests would be ideal for adolescent girls to absorb messages of critical social media literacy and body positivity.

Well, I think if more outlets tried to take on that initiative, that would help, because then I think the more that you're surrounded by those messages, the more they'll start to play into your life. So, yeah I think if it sort of comes into young girls' lives in a way that approached them from multiple perspectives and aspects, it would maybe sort of be instilled more, I suppose...I think if it's kind of forced at people, they're less likely to want to embrace the ideas and consider them. Yeah I think if it comes from a more, kind of, rounded sense instead of just specific kind of ways to target younger girls. I think there's too many clichés that get thrown out and girls just start to sort of disregard them. (Ana transcript, p. 22)

Gaining adolescent girls' attention and buy-in in regards to alternative messages to the societal body and appearance ideal may not reasonably be approached through traditional channels. Ana recommends methods that are natural, comprehensive, and without cliché as potentially effective for assisting younger girls in learning more about critical media consumption, and separating their value from their appearance, while proceeding through their personal development towards a solidified sense of self. These actions, Ana has suggested, can be undertaken in concert with advocacy for a greater shift in societal messaging and expectations.

Miriam's Story

A Struggle that is Both Personal and Universal

Miriam did not always possess the strong sense of confidence and assertion of self that effortlessly emanates from her in the present day. It took a great deal of struggle to transverse the varied obstacles to being okay with herself that the experience of female adolescence provided. Living in a culture where there is a minimum expectation of beauty, body, and appearance routine that girls and women must subscribe to, to be basically acceptable in the world, Miriam found herself being drawn into this way of being as early as her pre-teen years.

I think with girls and especially with teenage girls – there's a really, really high standard of expectation in terms of what you have to look like and do, and dress like and be, just to exist in the world. There's all this stuff you have to do like shave your legs and put on make-up and do your hair and etc., etc. (Miriam transcript, p. 14)

In early adolescence Miriam observed that compared to those who present as male, girls and women in the world are influenced into completing many beauty routine activities in order to just be able to confidently walk out the door. She realized that beauty routines such as body hair removal from legs, armpits, and elsewhere, the wearing of make-up, the styling of hair, and many other time consuming activities were all viewed as required by those around her. Miriam also began to notice that her female peers who developed earlier than her tended to garner more attention from boys and had greater appearance expectations placed on them at an earlier age.

Miriam: ... everyone says high school is bad but middle school is the worst for girls. Honest to God -- it's gross, it's so gross. Middle school boys are so horrible Like, it's disgusting. And, I mean, maybe this sounds really insensitive but I hit puberty late, I was not an attractive kid and part of me is kind of grateful because I didn't start attracting any sort of like, attention I guess, until maybe I was in grade 9 or 10. And by then I was kind of equipped to deal with it. But I know a lot of girls who I went to middle school with who were gorgeous and hit puberty early and they were so beautiful and they were really popular and they were exposed to all of this gross attention and expectation and once again this really high – all these high standards.

Cara: Right. At an earlier age.

Marie: Yeah! When they were like 11! I got used to shaving my legs on a regular basis like last year. Right? And I feel like it must have been so hard to suddenly have this burden of expectation of your body and who you are and the things that you do when you're like in grade 6 and grade 7. (Miriam transcript, p. 15-16)

As Miriam began to develop and mature, this world of expectation that she witnessed others experiencing became her own personal reality, too. Without a way of making sense of the expectations pressed upon her, and encountering a sense of pressure and influence from both her friend group and greater society, Miriam was engulfed in a culture of shame. This proved to influence Miriam negatively in that she viewed herself and her appearance with disdain and regularly compared herself to various female ideals.

Miriam: I think definitely, yeah. Pre-social media, pre-high school I was like – I did actually have a lot of confidence issues because I just thought I was friends

with everybody because I wasn't really aware of the fact that I wasn't. I was like, 'I have so many friends!' It was super weird, but I had a good time. But then I hit grade 8 and grade 9 which are obviously, well I feel like they're always the challenge areas because you're sort of hitting puberty, you're kind of like entering high school. I know a lot of people, a lot of girls -- most girls I know really struggled in grade 8 or grade 9 or both. And it was kind of like, I was friends with these people and there was kind of this culture of shame. And this culture of girls who don't like girls. I don't trust girls who don't like girls! Girls who are like, 'I *hate* teenage girls, like they're *so* annoying.'

Cara: The, 'I'm not like other girls,' thing?

Miriam: Yeah! And like I don't trust it, but I did at the time. I was like ... it was like ...

Cara: You said the word 'shame.'

Miriam: Yeah! You know, it gets you feeling down about your body and down about who you are and there's so much self-doubt. And the thing that you said about realizing that you didn't have to buy into this, buy into the expectations that are set upon you, I hadn't really arrived at that place yet. (Miriam transcript, p. 18)

Miriam became immersed in the culture of shame that was pervasive throughout her group of school friends. Miriam had not yet come to the realization -- through personal development and learning -- that she could opt out of this type of thinking and behaviour. In a culture of ridicule of qualities that are traditionally likened to be feminine and internalized dislike at perceived girly behaviour, Miriam struggled with herself. It

was not okay for Miriam to act in certain ways within her group of friends because although they considered themselves alternative to the mainstream fashion, beauty, and culture trends, internalized misogyny and adherence to certain appearance and behaviour ideals for girls and women was blatantly present.

I was totally buying in. Even though I was buying into a counter-culture of like, grunge, it's like the same culture with different colour palettes. It's still skinny girls, it's still an ideal -- it's just a slightly different make-up. I thought that I was buying into something different, but I really wasn't. You know? Like it's just American Apparel rather than like, American Eagle, right? So you know, it gets you feeling down, it gets you feeling insecure about the fact that, 'I don't look good in those little tennis skirts that they sell at American Apparel. Like, I don't -- I just don't.' And that's okay. But at the time I didn't really know that so it was like I couldn't really conceptualize not having to buy in. I would find myself -- I was in this group of people where you would have to, you would constantly have to apologize for being a girl and doing girly stuff like talking about your feelings. (Miriam transcript, p. 19)

Miriam did not feel comfortable expressing herself fully within her group of friends for fear of not fitting in with what the group standards were. Miriam's emotions were in tumult and she had difficulty both expressing and managing them and this subsequently influenced her behaviour. She found herself acting in ways that she retrospectively does not deem to be nice or productive. A lot of conflict sprung up within her friend group, and Marie was often finding herself at the epicentre of the social storm.

I was also struggling with a whole bunch of other stuff that was happening, I wasn't in a very good place emotionally. And then I was kind of able to get away from that and I feel really lucky because I was not a very nice person in grade 9 and 10. I was not a nice person to people who really genuinely wanted to spend time with me. Like, my friends who I'm still friends with now, who I love, and I'm really lucky that when I kind of got away from all of that, because of drama and because I was basically ostracized. But I was really lucky that I kind of fell out of the circle and I was like, 'oh my God, you guys are still here for me? You guys still want to hang out with me?' (Miriam transcript, p. 19)

This conflict and struggle consumed Miriam's thoughts and as she was in a group of people that held to appearance and behaviour ideals for women, even if they differed slightly from the mainstream, she began to regularly spiral into negative thought patterns. Miriam would both consciously and unconsciously compare herself to others in her group, or images she saw from media sources. As Miriam compared herself to her friends, she noted that she had a more athletic build and tended to be taller than others in her social circle. If her thoughts began to turn towards the negative, Miriam found it difficult to stop them from building on each other and sending her into turmoil of negative thoughts and feelings about herself. These would then often cause her to act out or catalyze complete emotional exhaustion.

Honestly, I never used to notice how much it would affect me. You know like I said, I haven't always been so confident in myself, right? So, I never used to be able to notice how talking negatively about yourself would compile on your psyche and it would start you on a ... you know you have like, one bad thought

when you look in the mirror and you go to school feeling like shit and then it goes to, 'I'm so stupid,' and it just compiles, and compiles, and compiles. Then, at the end of the day, you're just exhausted and destroyed...It's so quick just to fall down the rabbit hole because it's so much extra effort to not do that. (Miriam transcript, p. 12)

Miriam slowly began to realize, with the help of her family, and through learning she engaged in on the topics of feminism and body ideals that not having the advantage of being woken from the default state of subscribing to these standards was contributing to her sadness, dislike of herself, and dissatisfaction with the way her life was. Miriam also realized that these comparisons and resultant negative thoughts about herself as well as the pressure to engage in beauty and self-care routines was tiresome. These realizations contributed to Miriam's desire to shift from subscribing blindly to these ideals, navigate through the universal struggle in her own way, and figure out a new way to be a girl in the world. She engaged in a back and forth process of learning how to better assert herself in the world the way she wanted to be rather than the way she was 'supposed' to be.

And like, it's sort of a rollercoaster of learning how to literally force yourself to look in the mirror and if you think something negative to then be like, 'no!' Like, 'you can't think stuff like that.' And I still have days where I say one thing and then I'll notice that 2 hours later when I'm being a bitch to everyone and everyone's like, 'Miriam, why are you so sad?' (Miriam transcript, p. 12)

The jolt into awareness of the existence of unwritten female appearance and behaviour standards shook Miriam's world as she hit adolescence. Her family, and mother

specifically, had enveloped her in an environment of validation and modeled self-love. While this layer of social protection did shield Miriam from the appearance and behaviour expectations placed on her in adolescence, it was not impermeable. The struggle of moving from girlhood to womanhood was made all the more complex by these factors, and while many who identify as girls go through this, each person is unique in their experience and navigation of it, “so I think part of it is a universal struggle and part of it is really personal as well” (Marie transcript, p. 10).

Fitspiration: The Same Ideal, Repackaged

As Miriam traversed the challenges of adolescent maturation, social media networks have grown and developed alongside her. From playing a supporting role in her life during her pre-teen and early teen years, to becoming a major player in her day-to-day musings, media-viewing, and interactions with others, social media influenced Miriam’s adolescence immensely. As an outlet for self-expression, social interaction, and connection to the mainline of youth culture, social media networks were appealing to Miriam. As appealing as joining social media was to Miriam, she had to wait to get her first social media account so as to cooperate with her mother’s regulations, “well, I got Facebook when I was 13 because my mom was very, very strict about me not going on Facebook before the age limit. So, all my friends had Facebook in like, grade 5, right?” (Marie transcript, p. 3).

As Miriam grew older, novel varieties of social media networks sprung into existence. These novel networks allowed for such functionality as blogging, creating and sharing visual content, hash tagging, and interacting with other users through aspects such as ‘likes.’ Miriam tried out several different social media networks over the years,

being drawn to different networks as they appealed to how she wanted to use social media at the time.

Miriam: I had Tumblr. But I stopped using Tumblr; a) because I started when I was in not a good place – and it was sort of cool be to like, sad and edgy and like, whatever. So I guess my Tumblr died when I kind of got out of that phase and I was like, ‘this isn’t cool!’ I like Tumblr for the art and I like it for the aesthetics and I think that I got a lot of my art inspiration from Tumblr, but then I feel like Instagram is a more positive place, as well.

Cara: Yeah. Tumblr was sort of reminiscent of that not so good time in your life?

Miriam: Yeah! So, I kind of wanted to move on. And I just feel like the culture on Instagram is very different than the culture on Tumblr. It’s like, at times not as good, but at times better because I feel like it’s a lot less personal than Tumblr, for sure. And I also feel like maybe that’s a good thing because, like, broadcasting all the worst parts about yourself and all your fears and everything on the Internet maybe isn’t a good idea. (Miriam transcript, p. 4)

Miriam was engrossed in this online world, shifting from use of Tumblr for more emotionally intimate journaling purposes, to use of Instagram as her primary network on which she could curate an online aesthetic and refrain from revealing too much of her introspections and personal life in such a public arena. It is through use of Instagram that Miriam first began to notice the images of attractive women in fitness gear becoming more and more prevalent.

But then, I’m also really interested in fitness and I do play rugby, I do run and ...
So, I follow, like, sports people. So, when I go on my little ‘spotlight’, I don’t

know what that's called, I get a lot of pictures of exercise progress, fitspo, etc. I call it 'gym-porn.' You know what I mean? (Miriam transcript, p. 5)

Miriam was engaged in viewing of fitspiration via the Instagram algorithm that provides users with suggestions on what to view based on what a user's greater online network tends to post, like, and view. Miriam noticed a lot of fitspiration images coming up and it seemed almost unavoidable to view them. But, things were not always this way. Miriam is old enough to remember when the female body ideal was one of extreme thinness and low body fat. Popular culture had begun to shift in the narrative it told regarding what types of female bodies are attractive and what shape is to be strived for. This shift was not lost on Miriam and she connects it to a surge in popularity of celebrities who demonstrated the new ideal look.

Probably um ... okay this is really weird but with the rise of Nicki Minaj. But, like around that time so, God like ... 2010? There was that shift and it was like, part of me feels really lucky because I grew up in the 2000's, right? And there was that period in the 2000's where it was like, really, really, attractive to be super thin and no curves and nothing and I just do not have that body! Like, at all...It was interesting because I actually did notice it. I was like, 'this is different.' Maybe a year or two into it happening I was like, 'this is different.' And yeah, like I said, part of me – it was kind of nice because suddenly I was like, *a lot* closer to the ideal body type than I had been. (Miriam transcript, p. 6, 8)

Miriam initially appreciated this shift in female body ideal as the extreme thinness previously held up as ideal was drastically different from her own body. The fit and more strategically curvaceous bodies portrayed in fitspo were a bit closer to her own body.

So, part of me feels really lucky that beauty standards changed because it was closer to my body shape. Like, still not, I'm still not like the pinnacle of beauty but like, big butts became attractive, and big hips became attractive, big thighs became attractive. So, suddenly it was closer to me than it had been before.

(Miriam transcript, p. 6)

Even though female body ideal standards had shifted and Miriam was partially appreciative of this, she began to become privy to the fact that regardless of the shift, these were still standards and expectations placed on girls and women that were extremely difficult to meet. The women depicted in fitspiration and other images that adhered to the new ideal that strong is sexier than skinny, were still part of a narrow range of womens' bodies.

Well, I think there's aspects of the ideal that are unattainable. Because, like ... and it's weird for me, because I know that I am healthy – I mean you just saw me eat an apple fritter but ... But, I know that I am fairly healthy, I know that I exercise enough, but there's a certain natural body shape, there's a certain natural fat amount that is just like, part of your body. It just exists on you, so it's really hard sometimes to be like, 'I know I exercise, I know I do this', but it's still not attainable. And it probably would be attainable if I like, obsessed over it and that's where it gets dangerous because it's, like, almost attainable. You know what I mean? (Miriam transcript, p. 7)

When Miriam would look at fitspo, regardless of the 'healthier' message of this type of image, she would often compare her own body to the bodies displayed in the pictures. If it was a particularly good day for her during which she did not spiral down

into a negative thought trap, Miriam might be able to scroll past these images without stopping. If it was a more difficult day for her in terms of how she was feeling about herself, putting up her blinders and actively stopping the process of comparison might not have happened.

I think part of it depends on where I'm at that day. Because sometimes I can just scroll past it, sometimes it doesn't even register as something interesting to me and I just sort of scroll past. And then sometimes it's kind of a bummer because I'm like, 'oh yeah, that's right.' And especially because it's sometimes really different than my other feed. I think there's a lot of comparison that goes on, like in your head. You know, you see something and you always search for the similarity between you and the person in the photo, right? So for me a lot of that time that's my hips and my waist. Because I have really big hips and a really small waist. They look nothing like the person's in the photo other than the fact that like the proportion is probably the same. (Miriam transcript, p. 20)

It was with the realization that the bodies of women portrayed in fitspo are still part of a very narrow spectrum of the diversity bodies and were still very thin, yet curvaceous in certain, more desired areas, that shifted Miriam's mindset from pure appreciation to a more balanced viewing that incorporated some critique. Miriam tapped into her ability to reason critically that had been fostered by her parents and specifically her mother in order to dissect her fitspo experiences.

I don't know, I just feel like, to me a lot of – well some fitspo I think is actually really cool. I've come across stuff that is interesting or like, I follow other girls who play rugby that post work out videos and stuff and I think that's cool because

it's sort of like you can share your experience. But I feel like, to me, a lot of fitspo came from when thinspo was no longer socially acceptable so they had to like, find another way to subvert womens' body expectations, almost. Like they had to find another way to control body image, so they were like, 'let's just do fitness instead'. Because it's still skinny, it's just skinny in different places, you know? (Miriam transcript, p. 6)

The disillusionment Miriam experienced as a result of her realizations regarding fitspo was influential in her ability to remove herself from being fully immersed in the social media world and more critically analyzing why this trend seemed to be so expansive. Miriam began to formulate her own ideas about fitspiration, catalyzed by her previous experiences navigating her place in the world as a girl, and informed by both the parenting she received and her growing interest in feminism.

It's very sneaky. It's really sneaky because it's like, 'health!' But, like – is it really? Because -- it's not. I mean everyone has a natural shape and a natural fat amount and like, is it really health? ...I guess so much of it is not really, truly a celebration of girls and of their bodies and of women. So much of it is from either an industry standpoint, like a consumerist standpoint or from a ... almost like it's for men. Like, it's sexualized. It's this tying together of being healthy, and being thin, and being sexual. You know? And like beautiful and sexy. So I don't think – I just don't feel like a lot of it is *for* girls. I mean, it's targeted at girls but it's not really celebrating them. (Miriam transcript, p. 21)

The images of womens' bodies in fitspiration that were slightly more diverse but still part of a narrow ideal were continuously provided as evidence to Miriam that body

ideals were changing to a healthier, more balanced standard. Miriam, now more solidified in her ideas about how fitspo is essentially the old ideal repackaged, viewed and continues to view attempts to draw her back into feeling placated by an almost adequately diverse ideal as offensive.

Like the other day my friend – because one of my friends is really, really into social media and the fitspo, exercise kind of whatever, right – so she sends me this photo of this girl on a beach in a bathing suit and whatever. And she's like, 'you know what I like about this is that she doesn't have a 6-pack, she's still curvy, she's not super skinny but everyone still thinks she's beautiful.' And I was like, 'that girl is like 4 sizes smaller than me. What are you doing sending this to me?' Like ... so it was interesting. I don't know where I'm going with that but it was interesting that there was a change and it was kind of cool that there was a change but I don't think it was as awesome as everybody thought it was. That they're focusing on fitness instead of skinniness because I think it's just a different way to focus on skinniness. A different way to control rather than accept womens' bodies, you know? (Miriam transcript, p. 8)

This method of holding up women whose bodies differ slightly from the previous ideal of thinness as the pinnacle of diversity and body acceptance frustrated Miriam and made her feel as though everyone around her who was subscribing to this notion did not really understand how that could make her feel, being different even still from the new ideal. Miriam's outlook on body and appearance diversity had diversified and she was no longer accepting of this insincere notion of celebration of different types of bodies. She began to feel justifiably angry and she was not buying it.

But it's like part of me was really kind of pissed off. I was like, what are you doing trying to prove that this girl who is *not* my body type ... because no one ever actually takes someone with my body type and is like, 'even though she isn't super skinny, she's still beautiful.' It's all in this really controlled spectrum of like, kind of chubby, to like, really fit. You know? It's like this illusion of diversity, almost. (Miriam transcript, p. 9)

In concert with Miriam's own critiques and moments of realization in regards to the fitspiration uptick and societal schilling of a 'new' body ideal, Miriam received guidance and support from her family, and specifically her mother. This support was integral to Miriam's resilience in the face of the appearance and behaviour demands placed on her and aided her in navigating the relatively unregulated world of social media.

No Fat-Talk and Other Motherly Wisdom

From early in Miriam's life, her mom had conversations with her that focused on the topic of body positivity without being labeled as such. Miriam's mom, a self-identified feminist, took it upon herself to share with Miriam messages of body acceptance in the face of an onslaught of external messaging regarding how girls and women should be and look. Miriam, even at the time, recognized that these conversations she had with her mom were special in that a lot of her peers were not having the same ones with their families.

Yeah so, my mom's always been really cool because my mom's a bigger woman, not like huge but she's always been really cool. When I was little she always made sure to really push body positivity and so I'm really grateful for that. I know

that a lot of people don't have that...She's also a feminist and I was like a really chubby kid so the conversations started early. Because I was just like a little butterball. And for some reason all my friends in middle school were like super, super skinny. (Miriam transcript, p. 10, 11)

When Miriam would enter into negative thought spirals about how her body looked, or how different her body was in comparison to peers or media images, she would often perseverate on various aspects of her body that she did not like. Miriam would feel trapped in her body and would pull at herself, pinching her body fat in an anxious dislike of her own embodiment. If Miriam's mother became aware of her body hating episode she would swiftly redirect Miriam's thoughts and actions.

So she would catch myself looking in the mirror, pinching myself, or whatever. She would be like, 'that's supposed to be there!' Or whenever I would be like, 'oh, I'm feeling really fat today!' Or, 'Ugh, I eat a lot and I'm so bloated!' She would be like, 'that's just your body.' ... she doesn't tolerate negative self-talk in our house. Which is kind of cool. But, like she just won't tolerate it. If I'm walking around and I'm like, 'I'm so fat!' She'll just be like, 'stop it! That's just your body, that's who you are. You have to live in this body for the rest of your life.' (Miriam transcript, p. 11, 12)

Miriam's mother was both practical and educational in her approach to discussing the female body ideal and the ways in which not measuring up to the unattainable ideal was presenting Miriam with dissatisfaction with her own body. Miriam's mother would point out to her that fatness in any degree was simply a bodily characteristic and not a determination of character or worth.

Well I would be like, 'I'm so fat,' and she would be like, 'there is fat *on* you.'
Like, '*you* are not fat.' Like, that's not who you are, that's just on your body. Or
she would be like, 'yeah, I'm fat,' and I'd be like, 'oh mom, come on,' and she'd
be like, 'no, I am. But why do you think that's an insult to me?' (Miriam
transcript, p. 13)

Miriam's mother also prioritized a focus on discussing the separation between personal characteristics and what you look like. There was a major emphasis on who you are as a person versus how you appear on the outside.

She wouldn't be like, 'no you're so smart,' because I think the idea was that I should know that stuff already and I think to a certain extent I did know that stuff already. But if you're just focused only on your body then you forget, right? So there was never a reminder of, 'these are all of your great qualities,' because like, you should know them. Because you live them. But you're just forgetting about them. (Miriam transcript, p. 13)

Miriam's mother would also invoke the capitalist aspect of businesses that stand to earn a lot from girls and women making purchases based on their dissatisfaction with their appearance. She would share with Miriam that there is a reason behind all this messaging and it's not a set in stone ideal that has always remained the same. Rather, it shifts and changes as society evolves but one fact remains the same, there are those who stand to earn a lot of money from purporting the need to meet the female ideal.

And (she would say), 'a whole lot of people have a lot invested in you not loving your body and not being comfortable in your body.' And like also, we have a similar body type I think and she's not as active as I am, but she brings a lot of

that logic and a lot of that critical analysis to it. I think she's been always really, really clear to me about the definition between your body and who you are...

So I think she was always really clear – like how much money is made off of, like ad revenue a year, how much money is made off of like waist-trainers, and Instagram plugs, and Instagram models, and this culture of maybe trying to look more beautiful. Like, how much money is really made? How much of it is actually just business? Like a lot of it is just business. And it's really, really lucrative. (Marie transcript, p. 11, 13)

Miriam and her mother had many conversations surrounding body image, the separation of personal characteristics and appearance, and the existence of the well-oiled machine that keeps churning out new renditions of the female body ideal. These conversations cultivated in Miriam an ability to employ critical thinking in response to viewing content that encouraged any sort of female ideal. She found some comfort in reasoning through and knowing what might be behind her feelings in response to such imaging.

Miriam: So, I think for some people it's the not being able to logic yourself out of it as much as you can. If you don't have the resources to step back and go, 'this is why I am feeling this way,' then you have no explanation so then you're just stuck feeling insecure and feeling not good enough.

Cara: Right. You don't have that ability to sort of reason critically through the experience you're having. You just have the experience and that's it.

Miriam: Yeah! And I mean, even if you can reason critically through it, it's still challenging. But at least there's some comfort in that knowing it's for a reason. Or

that there's something behind it. Whereas if you can't put your finger on why you feel like this then it's all the more scary and all the more powerful. (Miriam transcript, p. 11)

While the proactive conversations Miriam's mother initiated aided in creating a protective shield that could dull the impact of such messaging and assertion of the ideal, there was another area in which Miriam's mother and father were less well-versed; social media.

Social media was an unexplored world for Miriam's parents. Although Miriam's parents were media literate in the traditional forms such as news media and television, they were not adept in the world of social media. In fact, Miriam's parents were often not even aware of the newest and most popular social media networks. It is through this generation gap in social media awareness that Marie came to networks like Instagram in the first place.

Well, my Facebook security settings are really high. Which is good, because Internet safety is important. But like, when I got Tumblr and Instagram, I was 14/15 and I had kind of realized that you don't actually have to ask your parents before you do everything. So, they can't control it if they don't know that it's there. And also it just came down to the fact that both my parents aren't really super media literate. Like, they're media literate in the important parts like politics and whatever. My mom doesn't have Instagram or Snapchat, my dad has Twitter. And like, Tumblr and Instagram, they're completely separate cultures. And not so much anymore, which I don't know if it's a good thing or not. I think it's kind of a good thing. But like, for when I was on it, *especially* with Tumblr,

but with Instagram too, it was really a youth culture. It was a culture of people who were my age and within like, 10 years of being my age. (Miriam transcript, p. 15)

Miriam was using social media networks that she perceived to have a higher proportion of youth on them than networks like Facebook did. Because these networks were more youth-centred, Miriam found it easy to slip under the radar of her parents' social media knowledge and gain access to these accounts. Miriam's parents, and specifically her mother, did not engage in rule setting or regulation of her Instagram use because they were simply unaware that she had an account. Immersion in this online youth culture led to exploration of groups that purported concepts, philosophies, and ways of being in the world that Miriam had been familiar with but had never been outright named to her. The exploration and learning as a participant in these newfound groups such as body positivity allowed Miriam to solidify her personal identity. It was not until she found body positivity groups on the very same social media networks that fitspo was circulating with rapidity that Miriam was able to put a label on and make complete sense of everything she had ever learned about loving herself.

Gaining a New Identity, Discovering a Sense of Belonging

Miriam stumbled upon body positivity groups on social media much in the same way she had initially come across fitspiration; the suggestions page. Miriam did not initially seek out body positivity groups purposefully it was actually much the opposite. Body positivity groups seemed to make themselves known to Miriam via social media when she broke away from her old group of friends that held fast to a culture of girl

shame, and moved into a new group of people that had more diverse interests and hobbies.

So then I found body positivity and this other political stuff that happens on Instagram that is really cool. It's sort of this pop culture conversation that happens. And I was so, so, so, I was really ... it was just a really interesting conversation that was being had. . . it introduced me to a lot of cool concepts and ideas that I had never really kind of stumbled on. Like my mom had taught me body positivity but she had never called it that. (Miriam transcript, p. 15)

Miriam saw these groups of people undertaking the task of making the acceptance and love of one's body, however it looks, appealing to young girls and women. Body positivity groups were doing this through posting images of individual users that were unedited and showed skin imperfections, cellulite, and body hair on women's bodies of all sizes, shapes, and colours. The message that healthy and skinny are not always correlated was also prevalent on these newfound groups' pages.

And I feel like that's where social media is really valuable! Because, for me, it was all these women broadcasting all these choices that they made about their bodies, about their lives, like not shaving your legs, or that trend of taking a picture with your armpit hair...And it was people carving whole identities out of concepts that I had always thought were cool but never really got to talk about. . . There's so much choice! No one said the words 'body positivity' in middle school. No one even had a concept of it. No one could even conceptualize that. (Miriam transcript, p. 15-16, 17)

Miriam observed these body positivity messages and accounts to be running parallel to the perhaps more mainstream world of fitspiration, Instagram models who schill dieting tea, and celebrity. Miriam saw body positivity as an antidote to the viral nature of fitspo and the dissatisfaction with her own body she had felt as a result of viewing it. She had always been exposed to body positivity from her mother, but to see that there was a greater community out there, assembling and pushing back against the ideal that was being hammered down on them, bolstered Miriam's resolve and strengthened her shield.

And there is, I think, alongside the cultures of expectation on Instagram, there's also these cultures of intense positivity. Especially, yeah, I think among millennials and, I don't know, post-millennials. This intense, almost aggressive, support for one another and empathy for one another that I think rides counter to the fitspo culture and the Instagram model culture. There's like anti-Instagram models like running parallel. I don't want to say 'anti' because they are Instagram models but kind of ...Running parallel to this one culture there's a completely different culture that is kind of, I don't know, in response?...And I feel like a lot of the fitspo content, to me, feels like it doesn't come from people my age. But a lot of this empathy and a lot of this positivity seems to. (Miriam transcript, p. 17)

Miriam began to put all of the valuable pieces of critical thinking, resiliency, and knowledge that she had obtained from various sources into a coherent worldview from which she could remove herself from the cultures of expectation, reflect on them, and just be. Where once she was constantly pushing down her thoughts, feelings, and monitoring her behaviour due to shame as well as fighting her natural body in order to fit herself into

a mold that just was not built for her, Miriam was now celebrating herself alongside others who modeled self-love. Instead of picking her body apart for the aspects of it that were not comparable to bodies in fitspo and other idealized images she had consumed, she was now shirking a focus on appearance and looking to what she could physically do with her body athletically.

I think what appeals to me about body positivity is that it's girls supporting each other when they look beautiful and supporting each other when they don't look beautiful and being able to laugh about it and being able to connect through it, right?...So it's like a connection that girls can have and I feel like even girls I know who do post work-out progress, like rugby girls, that's more a celebration of what you can *do* with your body. Whereas so much of fitspo is just a celebration of what you've done *to* your body. It's a celebration of what you look like whereas some girl on team Canada is like, 'look I can bench 500 pounds.' Like, that's awesome. (Miriam transcript, p. 21, 22)

Empowerment was a feeling that Miriam had to get used to. Living mired in cultures of expectation and shame for many years was oppressive. Although Miriam did have a protective shield bolstered by her parents' discussions with her, it was not a linear process to emerge from said cultures free of residual self-doubt. Miriam, in the present day, is aware that learning to love oneself in the current cultures of expectation and shame that girls and women face is an ever-evolving process. With a sense of community, purpose, and empowerment fueling her and shifting her focus from appearance to performance, Miriam feels more confident about herself and the abilities of both her and other girls in combating the body ideal.

Don't underestimate girls because I think there's a lot more power and a lot more competency than people think. (Miriam transcript, p. 22)

Elaine's Story

Keeping Up With Yourself on Social Media

Elaine, a married mother of one young adult male and one adolescent female (17), does not recall exactly when anyone in her family got social media accounts. Social media seeped into their family life slowly and surely, with each member gradually becoming engaged in some form of social media or another. Being interested in social media herself, Elaine signed up for Facebook and soon figured out that not only was it an effective way to stay in touch with others, but that she could also easily access some content and blogs that catered to her interests.

Oh, social media. Well, I do ...I use, what do I use? Actually I do try and limit the social media because I find it's just crazy, right, I mean what's out there is just ... I mean, so much of it is nonsense and I've just learned that I really don't have a lot of, you know, time and so I need to start to, you know, where do I want to put my time? (Elaine transcript, p. 1)

Simultaneously, Elaine observed that other users on social media networks were interacting in ways that she did not feel was necessary and so she tried to limit her use to what was helpful and essential to her. The exhibitionism Elaine noted by other users on social media was off putting to her and made her more cautious in her use. Elaine had minimal time to devote to social media in the first place, being a busy working mother. Because of these factors, Elaine chose to carefully allocate her time and manage her own social media use.

So I've kind of tried to decide ... So I use Facebook a little bit, but I limit that to mostly ... I'm just trying to think, how do I put it? Just mostly healthy blog sites or what's healthy. I try not to follow a lot of people or have myself followed or anything like that because, you know, you hear from a lot of people that it's just, I don't know, how many friends you have, and this and that. The competition and then I just think, you know, it's kind of ridiculous that it seems like nothing is private. (Elaine transcript, p. 1)

Elaine could see people in her social media networks performing an overblown social media persona in order to try to gain a lot of followers or friends online. The persona performance seemed fake and unnatural to Elaine. Elaine also felt that other users equated the amount of friends and followers that they had with higher level online status. It was this perceived competition as well as the nature of detailed sharing that was occurring on social media that made Elaine more cautious in her use.

I just don't care. You know, it's not that I don't care about the person or ... but a lot of what can be posted is just irrelevant. And so I feel should just be a little more private. It is so ... I think with younger people, the prevalence of the social media is like everybody's gotta know about everything and when and how and, I don't know, I guess as an older person, I just don't see the relevance in that. You know, you'll follow what's important and the rest is kind of a waste, right?

(Elaine transcript, p. 1-2)

Elaine continued to carefully take note of how others, especially younger people, were using social media as she had two adolescent children that were becoming more and more

interested in it. She wanted to ensure that she was making informed decisions when setting limits on her own children's use. The nature of being able to send content online to social media networks on which it can be widely shared and circulated proved concerning to Elaine. She reminisced about her own adolescence and likened a lot of what youth were putting out on social media to something that may have in previous generations been kept in a private diary.

So, I don't know, I think I just try to keep it to the important information that I need and everybody else's business isn't my business, for the most part. So, I think I've kind of been, I think over the last couple of years, as my kids have kind of gotten more into the social media I'm like, hmmm, I don't know. And I mean, I guess if that's something you're okay with then, you're okay with it. But I mean with the kids and the fact that once it's out there ... You never get it back and how do you know, even in that instance that it's something that you didn't want out there. (Elaine transcript, p. 2)

Not only did Elaine feel concern about the permanence of youth's posts on social media, and the drive to gain followers and attention, but she also came to a conclusion that on social media your number one competitor is yourself. She perceived other users as constantly trying to outdo their last post in order to get a better reception in terms of 'likes' and validation from other users. Elaine realized that social media was an arena for competition with others, but also determined through observation that keeping yourself and your life as represented online interesting is prioritized by a lot of users.

Elaine: Well, yeah, I do think it's nonsense! I mean, I think what that public presentation does is it just makes your life difficult. Because then you're always trying to keep up with the Joneses', right? You always just involve yourself in this cycle where you're always having to keep up with others and keep up with yourself.

Cara: Keep up with yourself.

Elaine: You know, yeah, because I think you kind of have to keep yourself interesting, you know. You have to keep it interesting, you want friends and you want likes and you want whatever it is, right, and you follow things. Like, are you following things because you truly care and are passionate about those things or is it just part of that nonsense? (Elaine transcript, p. 2)

The need to keep oneself interesting in order to compete for likes, followers, and online validation is an aspect of social media use that Elaine raised an eyebrow to. Through Elaine's eyes, social media networks could be an unnecessary venue for social competition that bordered on exhibitionism. Elaine was also cognizant of the potential for users to abuse the relative anonymity that is afforded to them on certain social media networks in order to interact with others in a manner that they might not if face-to-face.

Elaine: I think it is mentally unhealthy. I think we're over connected and everything is done on the social media. Nothing is, or very little is done face to face.

Cara: Face to face.

Elaine: Yeah, face to face. Or, people say things that they would never say.

Cara: Right, hidden behind the computer screen or phone screen.

Elaine: Yeah, exactly. That bit of anonymity, whether you're really actually anonymous or not, um, you know, that may not be. More often you hear that it's an attack, attacked by people, or bullying or, I just don't think it's a supportive environment. I think either it's just too much information that should be private, or it's attacking and I don't know that there are nearly as many supportive transactions that go on. (Elaine transcript, p. 3)

Elaine was able to see the usefulness of social media in that through her own personal use she was able to access healthy living blogs and other online content that she was interested in. In addition to Elaine's appreciation of the useful features of social media, she was skeptical of some of the content and interactions that she both directly witnessed taking place and heard of secondhand. These interactions that were troublesome to her included the display of too much personal information, a drive to gain lots of online validation, and the potential for bullying or non-supportive interactions due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. It was these observations that informed Elaine and her husband's considerations in developing their way of making rules around and guiding their children through technology and social media use.

Letting the Children Grow into Using Their Technology

Elaine kept a watchful eye on the development and increase in popularity of social media networks. Through this observation she carefully constructed her own views and opinions on social media, weighing both the benefits and the potential risks. When

her children reached the age whereby their peers began signing up for various social media accounts, Elaine and her husband were hesitant to give in to pressure.

Elaine: Yeah, for a long time they weren't actually allowed to have any social media. I mean, they could text their friends, or call their friends or whatever, take pictures. I still don't think my daughter has a Facebook account. She's seventeen, but she uses Snapchat and Instagram. My son has a Facebook account. I can't remember now when they got them but definitely, we held out. We were like 'you have to be eighteen!'

Cara: Yeah! What was your hesitation with allowing them to have social media accounts at a younger age?

Elaine: I just didn't think it was necessary. (Elaine transcript, p. 7)

Elaine's hesitation resided in her worry that if her children put something on social media that was reflective of their still developing adolescent emotional and cognitive capacities, they might later come to regret it. Elaine likened it to looking back at her teenage diary, often cringing with embarrassment at what she thought was important at the time, and imagined what it might be like to have similar content circulating cyberspace indefinitely.

Elaine: Right. Just for the potential of stuff that gets out there on their side, because of their lack of maturity.

Cara: Right, like what we were talking about before.

Elaine: Exactly, like you have no idea. And telling them – once it's out there, it's out there. You know, I think that maybe just giving them experience to use the

phone and kind of grow into it. Because I think right away they don't have the experience to know ... (Elaine transcript, p. 7)

Elaine felt that until her children were experienced and mature enough that they could navigate their way through potential obstacles on social media completely independently, that it would be prudent to set some ground rules in regards to technology and social media use. Elaine attempted to walk a fine balance between letting her kids gain their independence with their phones and other technology and monitoring their activity to the extent that she could step in if anything were to go awry.

Elaine: There was a set time where the phones would have to be on the counter downstairs, right. And they would have to be getting ready for bed. So, yeah, they would be kind of, turned off and done for the evening.

Cara: What was your children's response to that rule?

Elaine: Yeah, they were okay in the beginning. And then, of course, we needed to know the passwords and we were allowed to look at them any time and look at the content.

Cara: Okay, yeah. Just kind of monitor?

Elaine: Yeah, exactly. Just a monitoring of things that have gone on and they actually seem to have done well. And then there were contracts and it was like, 'okay this is how much data you have.' You know, they were always pretty good at staying within their limits. (Elaine transcript, p. 6)

Elaine's children seemed to respond fairly well to the regulations their family put forth in regards to technology and social media use. There were some minor complaints on behalf of Elaine's children whereby they explained what social media networks their peers were on and how they were allowed to use technology and social media differently. These arguments were not influential on Elaine, and she stood firm in their families' decided upon regulations.

Elaine: And you know they didn't really seem to abuse it, there didn't seem to be a lot of push back, like 'well I'm going to do it anyway.'

Cara: They were pretty accepting of your standards?

Elaine: Yeah, I mean, we would get the general, 'well so and so has it' or whatever. And I'm like, well, so what? You know, not everybody has the same things and I think, too, even with money. I think they realize that we're alright but that there's people with lots of money too and that doesn't mean you can just go spend money like that because there's consequences to that. (Elaine transcript, p. 8)

In addition to engaging in some monitoring and rule setting in regards to her children's technology and social media use, Elaine also consciously initiated proactive conversations with her children, particularly her daughter, about what she was seeing in the media and how that differed from real life. Elaine felt it was important to address the fantastical and unrealistic nature of a lot of what is presented in various types of media, including social media that is specifically targeted at young girls. Elaine would watch shows targeted at young women alongside her daughter such as 'The Bachelor,' and use

it as a jumping off point for discussing the difference between media representation and reality.

Just, you know, what you're putting out there and then the difference between reality and what's presented in media. Like reality and media and how things kind of really go. And just making sure that she ... We're trying to help her think about what's safe for her and safe as a young woman... You know, you just need to be careful what your messages are, I guess. I'm just trying to help her with her messaging and the things that really go on. (Elaine transcript, p. 16)

As her children grew and matured, Elaine and her husband gradually eased up on the regulations and boundaries they had set around technology and social media use and instead primarily engaged in these guiding discussions. Elaine conceded that now in their mid-to-late adolescence, her children were more technology savvy than her. With the realization that a large part of parenting an adolescent is encouraging them to gain their independence and allowing them to make decisions on their own, Elaine concluded that she had to trust in the foundation she had laid through her mothering and turn to general guidance rather than firm rule setting.

Yeah, well, like I said, in the beginning it was the parenting. But, I guess eventually we've had to be like, well we've talked about this for awhile now and at some point you have to let them ... trust them. A lot of that stuff, it gets to the point where it kind of outgrows your technical expertise and they can be doing stuff and you don't even have a clue. And so, you know, you just have to trust them. (Elaine transcript, p. 8)

The Cookie-Cutter World of Fitspiration

Elaine noticed that as they continued into their adolescence, both her son and daughter, although primed with proactive family conversations, were still quite susceptible to ideal appearance messaging they were receiving from multiple venues but particularly social media. They were seeing various images on social media that contained celebrities, models, and bloggers, and subscribing to the images being sold. The societally endorsed movement away from extreme thinness being a female body ideal to the idealization of very fit women's bodies became evident to Elaine. Her children's buy-in to fitness messaging became tangible for Elaine in that her children, and particularly her daughter, would ask Elaine to purchase items for them that they had seen in fitness and fitspo images on social media. Elaine's daughter, even after pulling back in her athletic involvement, continued to want to emulate these images and this became evident to Elaine through conversations had about shopping and budgeting.

Elaine: Because I totally think that, yeah both my kids, they take what they see and then they're very much into the Lulu Lemon and the Nike fitness gear and the this and the that. For her, you know, she's kind of pulled back on being athletically involved...But, yet that's how she dresses, like when she goes shopping. That's a lot of what she's looking at, right. And I'm like, why do you need that? Because, unless you're going to go workout, what's the purpose of that particular item?

Cara: So, it's kind of like portraying the athletic persona with her clothes?

Elaine: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I don't know. It's just even the shopping itself.

There just seems to be a real desire to, you know. (Elaine transcript, p. 17)

The media message purported by fitspo that athletic bodies are in and very thin bodies are out as well as the ways in which the athletic bodies are represented or posed and what types of clothing they wear influenced Elaine's children. Both children, and particularly Elaine's daughter, wished to copy the looks they viewing in fitness images. Elaine doubted that this desire to mimic fitness images was a direct pressure so much as just what everyone in the youth culture was automatically inclined towards emulating based on the breadth and insidiousness of fitness messaging.

But I think there's, I don't know if it's a pressure, but it's just out there, right.

And I think, you know, shop and shop and shop, and you need this, and you need that, and 'more is better'. You know, it's the fitness stuff that she sees and I mean, like I said, both my children seem to be quite susceptible to that, those images.

But I guess in some ways I can say, well, more of it is for my son. You know, he's actually, it would be more of a necessity because he's actually *doing* the physical activity. So there's a need for that. Whereas her desire seems to be just to dress that way or have that image. Because it's like, well okay, why don't you go buy yourself a nice blouse? (Elaine transcript, p. 17)

Elaine began to become cognizant of her daughter's social media use and her desire to emulate an athletic image around the time that her daughter did not make the cut for a sports team she had been playing on for years previously. It was with this loss of

camaraderie, team support, and a consistent athletic outlet that her daughter started to spend more time alone as well as keep a tighter grip on her phone.

You know, tight lipped on the phone. My son's phone is oftentimes, you know, it will be laying out or you'll see stuff popping up. I have noticed in the last couple of years she tends to be more in her room. Just, you know, quietly away. You know, studying. I think there's more than studying. I think there's more social media going on than I think she'd like to admit to. I think she's a pretty heavy user of the media. Yeah, so I've noticed in the last few years, she used to be very feminine, you know, she liked to dress up. So I've noticed with the sports and that, it's become less, and less, and less. (Elaine transcript, p. 10)

In addition to keeping her phone and social media activities assuredly private, Elaine's daughter slowly started to spend more time engaging online rather than with her family and friends. While Elaine was not concerned that her daughter was participating in any harmful online activity, she did see the draw towards using social media more as both influential on her daughter's self-image as well as being socially isolating.

And she's less social. So, sometimes I kind of watch and I'm like, hmmm, you know? Are you kind of getting depressed? And I don't think so, but it's just certainly something that I keep an eye on. I try to draw her out and I don't think that's the case, you know, an eating disorder. I don't know. It's hard to say at this point... Well, she's up there. I think she watches a lot of Netflix, do you know what I mean? I don't think it's just all her ... but you know she's definitely

always attached to the phone. I'm not sure that the phone is necessarily a sinister thing. (Elaine transcript, p. 14, 15)

Elaine's daughter's loss of her sports team and the athletic and social benefits that accompanied it, affected her greatly. Her daughter's ambition to participate in athletics decreased dramatically, and Elaine felt as though losing her team was a real blow to her daughter's self-image. Elaine kept watch over how her daughter moved through this challenge and saw that her daughter began to lose her athletic ambitions, become more inactive, and eat more than she would previously.

Elaine: Yeah. So since then, you know, the motivation for sports has been decreasing. Even just her enthusiasm for the sport and her desire to excel.

Cara: Her ambition.

Elaine: Yeah, her ambition has definitely decreased. And then I think in conjunction with that, you know being in high school. So yeah, she has pretty much refused to try any high school sports...I think it really affected things and I think she probably does have some self-esteem issues based around that. And possibly even the body image, right? I think that is all sort of a tied thing. Or it's just developed into that. You know feeling bad about not being on that team and losing that base of friendships. (Elaine transcript, p. 11-12)

Although Elaine's daughter was no longer participating in athletics to the degree that she did previously, her enthusiasm for exercise was waning, and she was becoming less confident in herself and her body, she still wished to present herself as an athletically inclined individual. Even though athletics is no longer ingrained in Elaine's daughter's

daily routine, Elaine perceived the message of the fit body ideal to still pervasively surround her daughter. Elaine saw this message coming at her daughter from multiple outlets, including purported by Elaine's husband and son who remained engaged in a great deal of athletic activity.

Elaine: Yeah. So, I think when she looks at the fitness stuff on social media, you know, her brother and her dad, they're very athletically inclined. There's always those images. Even just television, right. You know, my husband watches a lot of, well we all watch the Olympics and all the football, we watch the soccer. We watch the hockey and track. The odd basketball game, I don't know.

Cara: So these images are surrounding her?

Elaine: Exactly, yeah. (Elaine transcript, p. 12)

Elaine's daughter was immersed in fitspiration and other fitness images both on social media and in her daily life. This immersion paired with a significant slow down in her daughter's participation in athletic activity is something that Elaine identified as possibly strenuous on her daughter. Due to this observation, Elaine attempted to counterbalance any expectation or image-oriented messages with her own messages of a focus on health and wellness.

I don't think she's really made me aware of it, but I think I just pick up on it a little. I think there's just, well there's always the growing pains right, and the kids change as they age and mature...But, like I've said, I've noticed that there's definitely pressure. Even with my husband, right, my daughter she's playing less of her sport, but you know, he's like, 'you need to be active! You have to be

active!’ So, he got her a Yoga membership and then it’s like, ‘when are you going to Yoga?’ (Elaine transcript, p. 12-13)

Elaine felt that this perfect storm of losing her sports team and athletic ambition, increasingly using social media while relatively isolated from family, and both media messaging and pressure from within their family caused her daughter to undertake some behaviour that Elaine saw as reflective of a lack of self-esteem and poor body image. This behaviour primarily consisted of Elaine’s daughter dressing more conservatively and not wearing any clothes that might outline or show certain body parts as she may have when she was younger. In addition, Elaine’s daughter became more private and less interactive with others, often eating her meals and snacks in isolation.

... she’s just more covering. She’s tall, she’s tall and she’s relatively lean. But, yeah, she definitely covers more. Like I said, she does tend to stay in her room more often. Kind of a bit isolating. And, she will eat up there. (Elaine transcript, p. 13)

Elaine would and continues to encourage her daughter to engage in health maintaining behaviours such as a balanced diet and exercise for health-based purposes. Elaine also recognizes that there is a limit to what she can effectively communicate as a mother because of the ubiquitous nature and cogent content of fitspiration images her daughter consumes. Elaine has seen fitspiration images herself and she perceives the images to be blatantly unrealistic in what they depict fit bodies to be like. Being an astute observer of the idealization of female bodies in these images and having the experience to know what more realistically fit bodies look like, the notion that her daughter has been

and continues to subscribe to the carbon copy style of fitspo images is something that Elaine carefully considers.

Yeah, it's always cookie cutter. The images are always this cookie cutter. But, you know it is possible for some people but they don't really take all those other people and make them in images, like 'this is attainable for you.' They're like, 'look at this one little skinny, with the abs and the muscles and the zero percent body fat.' Right? When the reality is that real people can't do this. (Elaine transcript, p. 24)

In her perpetual resistance against media messaging that puts forth a female body ideal, even under the guise of fitness rather than thinness, Elaine acknowledges that it is not easy to simply ignore the messaging, no matter how many proactive conversations she may have with her daughter. Elaine, in the midst of a busy career and other obligations, has and continues to try and draw her daughter out of her shell in order to make attempts to guide her through navigating the mire of idealized body messages. Elaine knows she has worked hard to assist her daughter in creating a frame from which she can process and critique messages she receives regarding her appearance. With reflection both on her role as mother and her own personal susceptibility to these messages regardless of her years of experience and developed critical media philosophies, Elaine worries that she has not done enough. When cookie-cutter images are constantly being churned out and sold as the epitome of female value, Elaine is not invulnerable either.

Recognizing the Ideal and Then Letting it Go

Elaine is a woman in the world and as such she has been intimately familiar with the expectations and value that are placed on a woman's appearance. In light of her daughter's struggles with body image and self-esteem, she reflected upon her own development and the trials she faced in attempting to fit in to the notion of the female body ideal. Adhering to the female body ideal was a pursuit she participated in in her youth that, for Elaine, proved fruitless. Elaine has also witnessed her husband, who is an elite athlete, training to the degree required by his sport. This level of training on her husband's part created for him a similarly athletic body as depicted in fitspo imaging. Elaine is cognizant of this and realizes the exorbitant amount of exercise it takes for many people to gain a body like that.

Or to be like I've been trying to kill myself trying to look like that and it just never ever happened. You know what I mean? You've got that experience to be like ugh, my God, it's not worth it! I mean, if you spent all your time doing that ... I know the type of training that my husband has to do to compete at the levels that he does. (Elaine transcript, p. 23)

Although Elaine could see via the example of her husband, that the new ideal of an extremely fit body is ostensibly possible, it was obvious to her that the amount of time and the trade offs in terms of diet were a consequent high cost. For Elaine, her acceptance of this way of life was and is dependent on what she deems an individual's motivations are for pursuing an extremely fitness oriented lifestyle. Whether the fitness orientation is occurring in pursuit of a tangible athletic goal or whether it is more aligned with producing a more desired or ideal body. Elaine feels similarly about fitspiration on social

media and other forms of media, as she sees it as one of the primary vehicles through which the fit body ideal is being disseminated.

Because I think to a certain group it (fitspo) is motivating. And I think to that group that are kind of into the media perceptions and they're focused in that way. I think for normal people, right, I don't think they probably are. I think they probably are just like, 'ah I can't achieve that.' I think, for me, I typically just cast them aside. So if it was me looking at that, I'd be like it's a non-issue because that's so far from So it's like, I don't know. What am I trying to say? For me, it's irrelevant. I would probably even just walk on by and it wouldn't grab a hold of me and I wouldn't really notice. If anything, if it did get my attention at all it would be, it would just make me feel bad, right? (Elaine transcript, p. 21)

Elaine's own body image fluctuates in response to the messaging she receives as a woman regarding the female ideal and value contingent on appearance. Elaine is sometimes able to erect a wall around herself that is impervious, and sometimes the notion of the ideal slips through the cracks. Elaine, depending on the day, vacillates between being able to acknowledge the images and then let them go and being unable to refrain from comparing herself to the images. On the days that counteracting comparison is a challenge, Elaine tends to feel more poorly about herself.

Because it's like, you know, I'm not ever going to be near that perfect. Or, you know, that image. So maybe that is wrong. It probably does say to me or reminds me of where I'm at and where I think many, many people are at. And it makes

you feel bad so of course you don't really recognize it. You just kind of keep going. (Elaine transcript, p. 21)

Elaine's daughter is not the only one who has viewed fitspiration on social media. Elaine comes across it both through her greater network posting or liking images and through the algorithmic assignment of images to home pages of various social media networks that she uses such as Pinterest. When Elaine comes across these images, she tends to have an automatic reaction whereby she wonders why the women in the images are not of average size or shape, questions the intention behind the images, and occasionally compares herself to the images and their oft-edited perfection. Elaine sees the images of women in fitspiration as being a part of the greater societal narrative of emphasis on female beauty. Elaine has difficulty seeing what aspects of these types of photos are meant to encourage athleticism and fitness. The stylized nature of the cookie-cutter women depicted in the images indicates to Elaine that there is a lack of depiction of bodies of the average woman who is not a white model. Elaine also feels a bit envious of the bodies depicted. Elaine is a self-identified heavier person who has also struggled with chronic pain that prevents her from participating fully in some activities. It is a feeling of wanting to look more like the women in the images paired with a cognizance of the relative unattainability of the size and shape of the bodies that is a source of frustration for Elaine.

The lack of bodily diversity in the fitspiration images runs counter to what Elaine experiences in her own life. Through attending her husband's athletic events, she has witnessed people with a variety of body types completing intense athletic activity. Elaine has witnessed diversity in terms of body shape, size, height, and adiposity at these

athletic events. Elaine is well aware that diverse bodies can complete the same types of physical activity comparably, so it does not make sense to her that fitspiration images would only show one type of body and stake a hegemonic claim on fitness.

Elaine: Yeah. It's funny we watch triathlon and iron man, right? And they're amazing and they're very motivating and it's like, this is so cool, and exactly that, right? You see so many different body types.

Cara: Yeah! And they can all do the same thing.

Elaine: And that is amazing, you know, because it's like, look how heavy that person is, do you know what I mean? Or just, I'm not saying like a big overweight person but there's tall, and stocky, and just very ... (Elaine transcript, p. 23)

Elaine wishes for more diverse bodies to be depicted in images touting fitness, going forward. Although Elaine occasionally feels the twinge of realization that her body does not, and realistically will not, look the same as women's bodies depicted in fitspiration, she has the life experience and willingness to critique these images that acts as an essential protective factor in being able to acknowledge the images and then simply let them go. Where Elaine continues to feel uneasy is in regards to how these images are affecting youth who often do not end up achieving the replication of the media images they come across. She knows that younger people often do not have the same ability to shirk the pressure to emulate the ideal that an older person might. Elaine wonders about how this will affect susceptible youth in the long run.

And so when you don't achieve that, how do you feel? Are you disappointed, are you ... do you know what I mean? Where does that come into play with yourself?

Your self-esteem right?... You saw that image and you couldn't make it because of these factors... As a young person, you don't know that though, right? And then eventually, like you say, you know, and it's just little bits like in the book. It's just small things that happen year after year which expands that gap. But you know that's what the image is based on, right? Being this person, being this fitness person. (Elaine transcript, p. 26)

Elaine knows what it is like to struggle with body image and how challenging it can be to learn to not hold on to the automatic reaction one has when comparing oneself to an idealized body displayed in media images. Through refocusing her personal goals to be about adding more healthy options to her and her families' lifestyle rather than engaging in punitive measures when they do not completely adhere to the rigorous health routine espoused in fitspiration, Elaine aims to keep on in her endeavor to remain unsubscribed to the narrative of the societal ideal. She hopes that this style of engagement in healthy living paired with open discussions about media versus reality will aid in the maintenance of her daughter's body image and self-esteem and mitigate any potential negative effects of fitness media.

Dana's Story

The Girls Don't Know How to Be Happy

Dana and her daughter, Alexis (15), have had an occasionally torrid relationship with social media networks, technology, and each other surrounding the use of these networks. In their family, both Dana and her husband both work outside of the home full-time. The balancing act of mothering a teenage girl and maintaining her obligations outside of the home is not a simple one, and Dana is continually conscious of being there for her daughter and guiding her in regards to the challenges she experiences while managing her available time effectively.

Dana was juggling these same responsibilities when her daughter, Alexis, first entered adolescence. Smart phones, computers, and the social media networks that often accompany them have thus far been a significant part of Alexis' adolescence as she matures as part of a generation that has easy and immediate access to technology. It was just prior to entering adolescence that Alexis began to repeatedly ask Dana about getting a smart phone in order to connect with her friends. Dana was taken aback by these requests. It seemed to Dana that Alexis was much too young to be given a smart phone when she was first asking for one.

I mean she would kind of bug us for a cell phone when she was around 10, I think it was. Hmmm. 10 or 11, maybe. And we were like, 'no, there's no way!' And of course she says, 'every kid in the class has a cell phone.' Well, I doubt that, but anyway. So, we ended up ... we did get her a cell phone because she was walking home. From school by herself. So it was like – well, okay but it's just going to be

mostly for that. And then of course it just expands from there. So, yeah that's how it kind of started. (Dana transcript, p. 1-2)

Dana and her husband held out for a few years before allowing Alexis to have a smart phone just as she entered adolescence. They had originally intended for Alexis to use the smart phone to stay in contact with them and to ensure her safety when she was walking to and from school alone. As Alexis began to use her smart phone for more purposes besides staying in contact with her parents, Dana and her husband conceded that it might not be realistic to restrict her use.

I don't know – it just kind of happened, I guess. And then ... I mean, I don't mind it now so much because then we can always text her. If she's at the mall – 'well, okay. What are you doing now?' Like, 'what time are you coming home?' So, that part I would say, yeah, 100% better than when I grew up where – being a parent now. Yeah, I like that. And we told her that, 'if you don't answer us back, then that's it.' Her cell phone is her life. (Dana transcript, p. 3)

Whereas at first Dana was not pleased with how Alexis' smart phone use ballooned from what the phone was originally intended for, she gradually came to see the benefits of the phone. Dana felt as though the phone was a good way to monitor Alexis' whereabouts and this made her feel reassured as to her daughter's safety. Additionally, because the phone was such a reinforcing item to Alexis, the threat of it being taken away by Dana and her husband if Alexis did not follow their rules was an effective motivator.

So it's like, guess what, if you misbehave or you don't answer us back then your cell phone is gone. Oh yeah, it's like her life. Which is terrible, but I mean it is to

her I guess, right now. But, it's a good tool keep her in line a little bit, too. (Dana transcript, p. 3)

Dana was initially bewildered with Alexis' connection to her smart phone. It seemed to Dana that parting with the smart phone was overly difficult for Alexis and Dana even began to feel that the phone was becoming Alexis' life. Dana noted that Alexis had her phone on her person almost all of the time. There were even times when Alexis was supposed to be in class that Dana would receive a text message from her daughter. It was this high frequency of use by Alexis that started to concern Dana and her husband. It seemed to them that Alexis was constantly bent over her phone, peering into the screen and they felt that this was not necessarily healthy or adding to her wellbeing. These concerns led Dana and her husband to attempting to put some restrictions on Alexis' use in order to limit her screen time.

Like, she might text us during the day and it's like, well it's not lunch, it's not ... but it happens! I don't know if they allow them to, really, but she does once in awhile. We did put some limits on her social media. That she had to use it less. She didn't like it or understand why so we explained to her that it's bad for your eyes to be staring at a screen for a long time and we want her to be hanging out more with her friends. (Dana transcript, p. 4)

Dana and her husband emphasized real life interaction with friends over the seemingly near constant digital interactions that Alexis was engaging in. Their explanation as to why they were restricting Alexis' use of social media and her smart phone centred on the physical harm too much screen time could do to her eyes and their concern at her

lessened real time social interaction. Alexis combated these regulations a little bit, but Dana did not experience any significant negative reaction.

Dana had a lot of things to balance in her daily life, and determining to what degree she wanted to place restrictions on Alexis' smart phone and social media use was one more thing. Dana harkened back to her own youth and recalled her tendency towards rebelliousness. In light of this remembrance, Dana determined that she wanted to pick her battles when it came to limits on her daughter's social media use as she did not want her daughter to feel claustrophobic and also rebel.

And I don't want to be one of those parents where all of the sudden the kid is now totally rebellious because it's like where do you draw the line with the strictness and the rules and it's like ... ugh. Yeah it's definitely tough. I think it's harder with a girl than it was with my boy – the teenage years. (Dana transcript, p. 14)

As Dana and her husband gave Alexis space to explore use of her smart phone and social media networks more independently, Dana noted that Alexis joined networks such as Instagram and Snapchat. It seemed to Dana that many students at Alexis' junior high school were using these same social media networks as well. Dana also saw how the various networks that the young people were interested in were constantly changing and noted that the adolescents she interacted with would often abandon a formerly popular network for the next best thing. Dana was casually watchful of what Alexis and her peers were engaging in on social media, in part due to the ban at school, and she noted that Alexis primarily used social media for things like checking out new make-up trends, band and music group pages, as well as fitness content and fitspiration.

I guess right now because they're always changing their whatever excites them, or whatever they're interested in – a lot of make-up right now, um, some of the bands ... like Twenty-One Pilots is a big one, what else is does she look at? She was into the fitness stuff. You know Fabletics or whatever the heck it's called? And Nike, and all that. Lulu Lemon. She's still into it but it goes in waves, sort of thing. (Dana transcript, p. 4)

In addition to engaging with media that demonstrates appearance trends, Dana's daughter would use her social media accounts to keep tabs on her friends and what they were doing. Dana perceived Alexis to be talking with friends through social media, as well as engaging with them by 'liking' their pictures or other shared content. Dana was also aware that Alexis and her friends were at times actively trying to recruit as many followers on their accounts as they could. Dana saw this as an attempt to gain online popularity.

What else has she been looking at ... that's pretty much it. I think she's using her social media mostly to see what her friends are up to, checks out make-up ideas, and I know they have all tried to get more followers. (Dana transcript, p. 4)

Alexis made it known to Dana what she was looking at on social media by pleading with Dana to buy her many of the items or clothes that she saw in various social media images. Dana felt exhausted by Alexis' seemingly continuous quest to garner new make-up, fitness wear, or other items. Dana felt baffled by Alexis' drive to emulate the girls and women she saw depicted on social media. It was expensive to keep up with the latest trends and to always supply Alexis with the newest products. Dana's exasperation

with being repeatedly cajoled to purchase more items and clothing for Alexis created some friction between mother and daughter.

She wears a little bit of make-up but she doesn't really wear a lot so – why do you need all that? And yeah – it's expensive. We get into arguments a little bit over all of it because of it – actually because of what she sees on the computer, or the Internet. (Dana transcript, p. 5)

It was these appearance related purchase requests by Alexis that really started to eat at Dana. Dana saw this as an unrelenting quest to continuously get the newest and most trendy items that would contribute to the fitness image her daughter wished to portray. Dana saw both Alexis and her friends attempting to emulate these images, yet still not seeming to be satisfied with themselves or their own appearance.

She's seeing what her friends have, or, I don't know why. I feel like they're just not – they don't know how to be happy, kind of thing, on their own. That's how I see it. Why do you think getting that colour of lipstick is going to make you feel better? Or, go to any one of those retail stores for a pair of leggings. What's the difference between that and the \$100 ones at Lulu Lemon or ... Sportchek and stuff, so... (Dana transcript, p. 5)

Dana noticed both Alexis and her friends attempting to portray an image of fitness more than they were previously. Dana also kept watch on her daughter's dieting and exercise behaviours in relation to this as Dana felt that Alexis would cycle through periods of intense diet and exercise related to her consumption of fitspo and other fitness media. It

was this cyclical drive towards trying to become thinner on Alexis' part that made Dana wonder how best to monitor her daughter and broach discussion with her.

A Daughter's Pursuit of the Image

Dana's drive in implementing guidance and limitation setting around social media, diet, and exercise practices was just as cyclical as Alexis' periodic engagement in fitspo inspired body shape management. Dana saw that Alexis was developing throughout puberty and that Alexis' course of development progressed differently than those in her friend group. The difference in body type between Alexis and her friends was something that Dana perceived to be concerning to Alexis and Dana consequently noticed that Alexis was both concerned by her weight and motivated to lose weight.

I think it's when ... she always ... she is concerned about her weight. And I mean she's not ... well, her friends are like sticks, kind of thing, right? So they're small. They don't have the hips and stuff whereas she has, like, a little bit of a booty and unfortunately she got her boobs from me like when I was young and in junior high. Because I guess I was skinny everywhere else – they really look bigger. So she does have a bigger chest for a young girl. And her friends don't. She just has a different body shape than they do, sort of thing. So, a lot of them are like really long legs and just, you know, really no butt or anything so ... (Dana transcript, p. 10)

Dana observed her daughter's newfound body dissatisfaction and desire to make herself smaller to occur simultaneously with the body changes her daughter experienced as a result of normal adolescent development. The dissatisfaction Alexis began to experience

became evident to Dana in Alexis' outward expression of dislike of her body and anxiety surrounding making her body visible to others.

Yeah, they're different. So, that's what she sees and I don't even know why, how it even started, but her body image maybe ... at least a year ago, for sure, that she was concerned about it. And it's like, 'well, what? What do you mean?' She didn't want to get a new bathing suit and I'm like, 'what are you talking about?!' ... 'You're skinny! You're tiny!' But she doesn't see it that way. She doesn't see herself as being tiny because the friends are shaped differently, I guess? But it's like, 'no, you are! You should be happy with what you've got!' (Dana transcript, p. 10)

Dana watched over her daughter carefully as she saw Alexis developing her own ideas about exercise and healthy eating. Alexis employed these ideas with the end goal of losing weight. Dana noticed her daughter looking at fitspo and other fitness and healthy eating content on social media every time she felt the need to lose weight. The confusion Dana felt regarding her daughter's behaviour warranted further investigation. Dana knew that Alexis was not getting these diet and exercise ideas from her. She believed that it was primarily through viewing this content that Alexis would cyclically implement strategies derived from social media and online information in order to lose weight.

So then she'll go through a wave where she'll want to, like, 'okay, I'm going to do however many sit-ups,' or a little work out routine that she sees. She does that, but then she is very active already – she was playing a club level of a sport, and then was on another sports team at school, and then a third sport three days a

week...Or she'll try to kind of watch what she's eating. But her perception is – if I don't eat as much then I am going to be better off than even eating healthy. And I'm like, 'no, Alexis, you have to! Especially at your age – you're growing and stuff. You need food!' And to me – like milk, I think milk is important, like you need your little bit of protein, you need everything. You can't not ... you can't cut it out because that's not going to help and that's not going to last long anyway, you're not going to sustain ... (Dana transcript, p. 10)

Dana also sensed that Alexis was feeling pressure to lose weight in unhealthy ways because of the messages she received from certain peers in her social circle. Dana perceived that Alexis' interactions with her peers regarding weight loss occurred both on social media and in person. There was a trickle down effect by which other girls' mothers' expressed a need for fitness and slimness to them. This message, in turn, affected Alexis and her conception of healthy eating and desire to lose weight.

I know she had talked, like this was a while ago, about – some of the girls were talking about another girl, I guess, or commenting online maybe that she was a little bigger or something. So right away my daughter got paranoid. She does have another friend that – her mom is like a fitness buff, you know? And, you know, good for her, but then she forces the daughter to be that way. When, I mean, I don't think it's 100% you've got to be in that. I think a child or a teenager should be allowed to have, whatever, a bag of chips every once in awhile ... some sort of treat or snack or um ... I know she has restricted and she always portrays that on my daughter, almost. (Dana transcript, p. 12)

Frustration built for Dana as she saw all the various avenues through which Alexis was being influenced by fitspo and fitness messaging. It seemed to Dana that despite her best efforts to mitigate this influence, it was still occurring with cyclical regularity. In response to this behaviour, Dana had and continues to increase her efforts to have discussions with Alexis and to fend off and replace messaging that directly or indirectly encourages unhealthy behaviour.

Oh, well the weight stuff – it's got to be from social media. She gets her dieting and work out ideas mostly from online, but through her friends, and sometimes us, too. She's tried a few different ideas she has found online. I always have to correct her on this though and explain that she needs food from all the food groups because she's growing and developing still. (Dana transcript, p. 12)

Dana sees guiding her daughter toward healthy attitudes and behaviours in regards to her body, fitness, and healthy eating as a battle she is constantly engaging in. Dana's attempts to redirect her daughter to what she feels is a healthier lifestyle, freed from the influence of fitspo and other influences are ongoing.

Teaching is a Constant Battle

Dana has always felt that guiding her daughter and teaching her about topics related to self-esteem, body image, and healthy living is of the utmost importance. Since Alexis was young, Dana has made every effort to instill in her a sense of what's healthy versus not healthy. Dana looked for opportunities to speak with her daughter about these topics and readily grabbed them when they made themselves available. These conversations would be engaged in by Dana particularly surrounding Alexis' penchant

for wanting to purchase fitness wear and other items she saw in fitspo and on social media.

And I get, yeah teenage girls, they're dealing with hormones and stuff, but I really want her to think about – why do I need this, why do I want this? I don't want her to not want anything or to not look forward to anything but that's where I am kind of like ... how much do I say? How much do I try to steer her away from that stuff? (Dana transcript, p. 8)

It was and is difficult for Dana to ascertain when she should step in, how much she should say, and whether it was the right time to do so in regards to these conversations. Regardless, Dana was assured of the importance of having these conversations and teaching her daughter to the extent possible.

Dana had been keeping track of her daughter's social media use and her seemingly cyclical movements through stages of wanting to lose weight through diet and exercise. It was because of these observations that Dana felt it necessary to engage in discussions with Alexis surrounding the difference between social media and reality and the edited or enhanced nature of many online images.

We've talked about how most of the images on social media and other media aren't realistic and that everyone has different body types and shapes. That that's okay and the world would be boring if everyone were the same. They're like brainwashed for some reason and I don't know why. I mean, I know why. They want to feel confident, but that's not always the way to feel confident. I don't know. (Dana transcript, p. 6)

The conversations about the nature of idealized images on social media were something that Dana felt like she was doing a thorough job of, yet she understood that she could not independently change Alexis' mind. Alexis seemed to listen to her and take in the information that Dana was attempting to teach her, but Dana still witnessed Alexis engaging in dieting and exercise behaviours that she deemed unhealthy. Dana was worried by this and when Alexis would demonstrate behaviours intended to help her lose weight that Dana thought were unhealthy, she would quickly engage Alexis in conversation.

Like, Alexis came home one day, I don't know what we gave her for lunch, but now she's trying to get off of bread, one time. And it's like, 'it's a sandwich, okay? Just eat the sandwich for crying out loud. Put tuna on it or whatever. Eat the sandwich -- you need that. What are you going to eat? Some fruit and celery sticks for lunch? No! You need more than that.' (Dana transcript, p. 12)

Alexis' reactions to Dana's efforts to have conversations and teach her ranged from neutral to negative. Dana felt that a lot of times Alexis responded to the conversations well, but there were other times where her adolescence bled through and Alexis criticized Dana or rejected her teachings.

So it's a constant battle, I would say, trying to teach her. And, of course, you're trying to teach her what's good and then she gets mad because she thinks you're trying to – you're being bossy or something, right? Yeah, because she knows everything, right? At her age. Do you remember? (Dana transcript, p. 11)

Dana could see that sometimes her teachings would ring true to Alexis and that she would listen and take them in more readily. Other times Alexis would get mad and push Dana's teachings away in an attempt to assert herself as independent. Dana could understand this desire to reject parental guidance because she remembered the turbulence than can occur as adolescents learn to individuate. Despite this, Dana maintained her commitment to figuring out the best ways and how much to teach Alexis about body image, healthy living, and media awareness.

A commitment to teaching has not always been easy for Dana. Alexis' reaction to these types of conversations was variable. Due to the uncertainty she felt, Dana would often walk a fine line in her own mind in an attempt to determine what the right amount of teaching and guidance was.

I don't know....it's not always easy. Because then she doesn't make the right decision or it's like, 'oh shoot, I knew I should have said something to her,' or ... Right? But, you want them to feel confident in whatever decisions they're making or if they're making the right decision or not. And you see everything. You're like, 'oh my God, what do I say now, do I say something? Do I just let it go? Maybe I'll just ask her this way or maybe ... it's a constant, I don't know, game.
(Dana transcript, p. 14)

Allowing her daughter to make her own decisions and to give her the space to make mistakes and see them through has sometimes been challenging for Dana. Dana believes that through experience Alexis will develop an ability to move beyond the desire to emulate fitspo and other idealized imagery. In the meantime, Dana is doing the amount of

teaching she determines is necessary on a case by case basis and waiting for Alexis to mature emotionally and cognitively. As a woman who has gone through a similar process in order to end up in the space of resolute confidence she is in today, Dana is certain that Alexis will pass through the maturation process similarly.

Learning to Feel Okay with Who You Are

Dana understood where Alexis was coming from in terms of wanting to emulate images and adopt the appearance of women in the images she saw on social media. Dana has, like every woman, been through her own years of struggle with learning to be confident and okay with her appearance. Although Dana has experienced this universal struggle, she also has always embodied a sense of rebellion against the culturally sanctioned ideal.

I mean, I guess for me I was never really a follow the crowd kind of person...Maybe it's because I'm a little bit rebellious, too. That it's like, 'you can't tell me that I need to wear or look like that, so I look the same as you, so we all are the same together' ... maybe? I don't know. But yeah, so I never – I mean rarely – maybe the odd thing of course I'm sure I did as a teenager. You know, maybe a certain hair colour or a certain ... you know something like leather jackets were big when we were in junior high and stuff. But not everybody had a leather jacket so ... I don't know. It's just ... maybe more the rebellious side of me really doesn't want to or, 'you can't tell me what to wear or look like.' (Dana transcript, p. 7)

It was this rebelliousness and disdain towards fitting in with everyone else that allowed Dana to carve out her own path throughout adolescence. Dana established a unique look and identity and while in some small ways she attempted to emulate certain aspects of the ideal, for the most part she touted individuality.

Dana looks at her daughter's experience of wishing to fit in with her peer group as they work to present themselves similarly to images of the idealized female body and has a hard time fully understanding it. As Dana did not subscribe to the ideal of the female ideal to the same degree that she perceives her daughter to have, Dana feels that the pack mentality of the girls in their pursuit of the image is at times baffling to her. A unique identity and way of being in the world has always been important to Dana and she believes that asserting yourself in the world uniquely is more empowering than adhering to a standard.

They kind of want to stick together in this group. I'm sure there's other kids or other girls in the same grade that maybe don't follow that, of course, but I don't know. It's like – what group do you want to be with? I guess...That's what I don't like. I don't know. I like the more individuality. To me – that stands out more and it gives you more credit because you're braver for kind of believing in something else, I guess. (Dana transcript, p. 8)

Blindly following group trends is something that Dana sees as a safe choice. If you follow the trends, and present yourself according to the ideal, you are obedient to societal standards. Dana believes that breaking away from adherence to the ideal female appearance standards sends a message. According to Dana, presenting oneself in a unique

manner and spurning the perceived need to attain a certain size and shape of body not only shows that you believe in something else, but also that you have an inner sense of confidence.

Cara: Braver. Yeah. And in terms of image – presenting yourself differently.

That is pretty brave because ...

Dana: It makes you more confident. To me – you look more confident because you're going to stand alone. (Dana transcript, p. 8)

Dana purports standards of individuality and critical thinking in her own dealings with media images and the ever-present messages about how women should look like and be. It is through personal experience with trying to adhere to the ideal, and her subsequent break away from that as well as employing critique towards messages of the female ideal that has assisted Dana in taking an assured stance against any perceived pressure she may feel. Dana likens her growth and movement away from any shred of adherence to the ideal to her realization that purchasing and wearing uncomfortable clothing items like lingerie was not really something she was doing for herself in order to feel good.

You know what, it was probably from ... in my teenage years or just after that where I had bought some lingerie, I still have it – trust me I don't wear it anymore, and I just was never ever comfortable in it. And, I mean, that could be me. I mean some people could be totally comfortable in it and that's their prerogative. I just was never comfortable and I thought, you know what? This is stupid. Because I am doing it for someone else, and it's not for me... Why do I

have to do that for that person? Why do I have to do something that makes me feel uncomfortable to make that person happy? Right? And so it's like, nope, sorry – I can't do it anymore, I don't want to do it anymore. It comes with age, or something, you finally realize. (Dana transcript, p. 16)

It is this growth through experience and maturation that fuels Dana's hopefulness that Alexis will eventually come to similar conclusions and, in turn, learn to be okay with herself.

Dana is so resolute in her ability to remain relatively unaffected by messaging regarding the female body and appearance ideal that, while she remembers her own trajectory towards being okay with who she is, she sometimes feels frustrated when Alexis is not able to see what Dana perceives to be the fakeness of social media images. To Dana's experience eye, the falseness of some of the content on social media is blatantly obvious.

Well, social media stuff – I think it's okay. I think it has its benefits as well. I mean, it's great for these stores and business to get their product out there. Okay, great, that's smart, but as far as social media goes I think there's also a lot of false things out there. There's always this false advertising where it's like – how do they get away with this? I think it's giving you false hope or false ... whatever. I don't know how to describe that. (Dana transcript, p. 17)

The disconnect from reality that Dana sees in the images being circulated amongst social media networks that adolescent girls use is troublesome to her. Without the experience of maturity and through critical thinking outgrowing the need to strive to fit an idealized

image, Dana fears that adolescent girls, including her daughter, are at a major disadvantage.

It's not all truthful. It just depends on like – the wording. They can word it however they want to word it. With teenage girls and stuff they don't have the experience or knowledge to decide – they just believe it. (Dana transcript, p. 17)

Dana is cognizant of her concerns regarding her daughter's lack of experience in this arena due to her youth and so she persists in finding good opportunities to teach and guide her daughter.

Dana sometimes feels like she's on the outside looking in at a world where there are multitudes of people who blindly subscribe to the ideals that are funneled down to them. Dana's toolkit is full of tactics she can access in order to shield herself from messages about how her body is supposed to look, or how she's supposed to be. But, not everyone has that ability. While Dana recognizes this, she also feels exasperated that it seems it is so simple for many people to fall prey to ideas of what they need to look like.

I think of ... I don't know. Who made these commercials and images up? I always try to think of the marketing of it and I know that it does sell, but why does it sell? That's what I don't ... I feel like everybody is just, you know, followers. They're not thinking for themselves. I don't know, I just ... yeah I do, I think that. I always think of the marketing and who would have thought that was good? (Dana transcript, p. 15)

Dana's critiques centre on her belief in the capitalist foundation of the dissemination of the female body and appearance ideal. She sees the perceived need to try to imitate this

ideal as grounded in a money-making endeavor by corporations. Dana sees the products, clothing, and exercise accoutrements necessary to fit into the fitness inspired image ringing up a lot of dollars for those that the female pursuit of this image benefits.

So, yeah, I don't know. I always just think that this world is kind of – nobody's truthful, everybody's out for a buck, this is how you should be – everybody is just out to make money, they don't care what they tell you. They just want to make the money. And it's like – well what do you want to make all that money for? Who needs to have all those billions of dollars? Can't we all just be happy? (Dana transcript, p. 17)

Dana knows that there are people out there that stand to make a lot of profit off of people, and in this case specifically girls and women who are clamoring to look like women in fitspo pictures. It is the possession of this ability to rationalize the whys behind the appearance ideal messages that allow Dana to frame what she sees accordingly and minimize the impact it has on her.

As Dana continues on her mission to teach her daughter about the forces at work behind fitspo messages and guide her to becoming okay with herself and her body she hopes that in the future this job will not just be up to her. Dana envisions a future in which adolescents are taught to question what is presented to them on social media both at home and at school.

I think if they taught it in school – to guide them in the right direction a little bit. And they know it's happening. Like I said my daughter's school kiboshed Instagram or Snapchat, one of those, and maybe... I don't know.... Instagram is

the big one. That maybe if they know that then they can maybe integrate that into their teachings and teach them more about life and what to watch out for and stuff. Real life issues. Sometimes history or social studies may not be as important nowadays – it is to know some, of course. But they need to teach some of this other stuff. And at home as well – it's not easy to be working full-time and policing every little thing. (Dana transcript, p. 18)

It has not been easy for Dana to engage in all of the parenting practices that she believes to be necessary surrounding her daughter's social media use, viewing of fitspo, and dieting and exercise related behaviours. Dana imagines a future support network that may include different venues or resources in the community that will assist parents in working on guidance surrounding social media. Dana sees social media as a relatively new complication to family life and based on her own limited use and knowledge of it, she realizes that support is needed for parents who are just learning about it themselves. Dana has worked hard in supporting her daughter thus far, and looks towards her daughter's maturation through adolescence and own experiential learning as an end-point to needing to so closely manage her daughter's social media use to look at fitspo and related behaviours. Until then Dana bolsters herself with the things in life that she deems to be more important, her family and friends.

Appendix D

December 06, 2016

Ms. Cara Hykawy
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology
Athabasca University

File No: 22401

Expiry Date: December 05, 2017

Dear Cara Hykawy,

The Faculty of Health Disciplines Departmental Ethics Review Committee, acting under authority of the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board to provide an expedited process of review for minimal risk student researcher projects, has reviewed your project, '#Fitspo: Adolescent Girls' and Mothers' Narratives on the Impact of Fispiration via Social Media'.

Your application has been **Approved on ethical grounds** and this memorandum constitutes a *Certification of Ethics Approval*. You may begin the proposed research.

AUREB approval, dated December 06, 2016, is valid for one year less a day.

As you progress with the research, all requests for changes or modifications, ethics approval renewals and serious adverse event reports must be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board via the Research Portal.

To continue your proposed research beyond December 05, 2017, you must apply for renewal by completing and submitting an Ethics Renewal Request form. Failure to apply for **annual renewal** before the expiry date of the current certification of ethics approval may result in the discontinuation of the ethics approval and formal closure of the REB ethics file. Reactivation of the project will normally require a new Application for Ethical Approval and internal and external funding administrators in the Office of Research Services will be advised that ethical approval has expired and the REB file closed.

When your research is concluded, you must submit a Project Completion (Final) Report to close out REB approval monitoring efforts. Failure to submit the required final report may mean that a future application for ethical approval will not be reviewed by the Research Ethics Board until such time as the outstanding reporting has been submitted.

At any time, you can login to the Research Portal to monitor the workflow status of your application.

If you encounter any issues when working in the Research Portal, please contact the system administrator at research_portal@athabascau.ca.

If you have any questions about the REB review & approval process, please contact the AUREB Office at [\(780\) 675-6718](tel:7806756718) or rebsec@athabascau.ca.

Sincerely,

Simon Nuttgens
Chair, Faculty of Health Disciplines Departmental Ethics Review Committee
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

