In what ways are postfeminist ideas about women's health and fitness communicated on social media? 'Do this for you': A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of an Instagram fitness influencer's page.

Wumiaoxian Wang

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Supervisor: Dr Richard Jason Whitt

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INTRODUCTION

Within the last decade, media portrayals of women have depicted competence, success and autonomy, and these notions have become markers of the postfeminist sensibility within popular culture. In particular, health and fitness are presented as pervasive topics of interest saturated within the domain of social media, and which contribute to the influx of representations conveying feminine agency, and the promotion of practices aiming to enhance women's self-esteem. Postfeminists have identified that a woman's body may be viewed as her most valuable asset, and a gateway towards emancipation against the neoliberal landscape of consumerism. Media sources are permeated with various self-improvement messages targeting women to invest in resources provided by the fitness industry for body maintenance. The convenient, online access of influential fitness trainers has exposed more female consumers to a growing culture characterised by a resilient and empowered attitude. However, this may be at the expense of inadvertently amplifying the performance of self-presentation appropriate to dominant cultural trends, thereby potentially constraining the view of fitness as a form of liberation for women. Although previous studies have investigated online health communities through content and thematic analyses, lesser research has been conducted on the growing impact of fitness empowerment discourses on social media. It is therefore of great interest to adopt a multimodal framework by focusing on one particular public fitness personality, in order to examine the combined linguistic and visual communicative strategies which impact the way women negotiate postfeminist identities in contemporary individualistic societies.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND
1.1. Controlling the unruly female body

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The contemporary sociocultural climate sees body shape as a corporeal metaphor for health and morality (Kirk and Colqhoun, 1989: 430). This maintains a hegemonically-influenced dichotomy, which indicates that whilst the lean, thin and toned body is a palpable sign of moral virtue and discipline (Crawford 2006; Guthman 2009), fat bodies are stigmatised because they exemplify negligent citizenship, a laxity in decision-making, and poor self-restraint (LeBesco, 2011; Lupton, 2012). For women, this means that 'the bad body is fat, slack and uncared for; it demonstrates a lazy and undisciplined 'self' [...] The good body is sleek, thin and toned' (Benson, 1997: 123). It has been recognised that within representations of women's health and fitness, 'one is much more likely to find the enemy constructed as bulge, fat or flab' (Bordo, 1993: 189). Such discourses signify that the controlled body is both a 'metonymy and mask for the controlled life' (Brabazon, 2006: 7). To illustrate this, the media's 'depiction of thin, conventionally attractive women who do not engage with food is an implicit call for weight control' (Drake and Radford, 2019: 10). Wolf (1990) suggests that such practices of body management depict the thin woman as a sign of weakness; thinness is hence not about feminine beauty, but an 'obsession about female obedience' (187). Consequentially, it is pertinent to acknowledge that women's choices over their bodies are limited due to feminine beauty standards being concurrent with patriarchal values (Budgeon, 2015; Gill, 2017).

1.2. The changing nature of women in fitness

Today, the involvement of women in health and fitness is considered a feminist topic. It has been highlighted that 'for (some) women, challenging traditional gender norms of inferiority through sports and fitness has marked the new millennium' (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009: 2). Many perceive the contemporary 'fit' woman as an embodiment of power and agency, working to challenge definitions of women as weak, passive and docile (Guthrie and Catelnuovo, 1998, Heywood and Dworkin, 2003, Evans et al., 2010).

As women are increasingly entering the realm of sports and fitness, there is greater emphasis on the physical and athletic capabilities of the female body, as opposed to how it appears (Heywood, 1998; Harrison and Fredrickson, 2003). In addition, women that perform strength training and other fitness exercises have progressively become a common feature at the gym (Craig and Liberti, 2007), and we have seen a normalisation of women adopting traditionally male-dominated physical activities such as weight lifting (Heywood, 1998; Dworkin, 2001). The number of internationally accredited female personal trainers has also increased (Andreasson and Johansson, 2013), indicating that more women are involved in not only empowering themselves, but also helping others with advancing their own wellbeing.

However, it is not only a shifting perspective towards women in sport which has given women a newfound sense of freedom, but also the proliferation of digital forms of communication. Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) have observed how social media enables female athletes to adopt novel tactics for marketing their postfeminist identities, capitalising on notions of self-love, self-empowerment, and self-disclosure (11). Moreover, women's participation on social media is perceived as a collective venture into forging alliances with like-minded women. By assembling a shared sense of athletic identity online, women exhibit the power to interrogate conceptions of sport as a male territory (Heinecken, 2015). Further analyses of young women's use of social networking sites identify various approaches to displaying feminine entrepreneurship and individual aptitude against the turbulent landscape of late modernity and advanced capitalism (Dobson, 2014).

1.3. Postfeminism, individual choice and empowerment

In the arena of women's bodily norms and with the multiplicity of choice in contemporary society, it is essential to place postfeminism within the centre of this investigation. As feminist movements in the 1970s and 80s are decidedly aged and made redundant,

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postfeminism pertains that there is now greater focus placed on expanding tropes of freedom, empowerment and individualism within contemporary discourses (McRobbie, 2004, Gill, 2007; Gill, 2017). However, even in an age of seemingly heightened emancipatory opportunities, this does not refute the existence of restraints which work to limit women in their ability to dictate their own body-related choices.

Postfeminist critique of media culture recognises an obsessive preoccupation with the female body, as it is painted to be 'women's key (if not sole) source of identity' (Gill, 2007: 149). Numerous scholars have identified the constant urge for women to undertake self-surveillance, monitoring and frequent spending in order to meet relentless standards of attractiveness (Bordo, 1997; Gill, 2007; Winch, 2013). In this regard, women's bodies are depicted as always being at risk of failing (Gill, 2007), and by implication 'beauty disciplines have intensified and become normative, although arguably remain hidden within discourses that highlight choice, autonomy, agency, and empowerment' (Camacho-Miñano et al., 2019: 653). Moreover, Hinnant (2009) conducted a study sampling numerous women's health and fitness-related magazines, and discovered a recurring tendency to essentialise the state of femininity by postulating 'one-size-fits-all' advice as a mechanism for social control. By endowing women with an artificial visage of postfeminist agency, such magazines impart beliefs of normalcy and deviation pertaining to the female body (ibid.). In this vein, postfeminists identify a relationship between conformity and social capital, which compels women to transform themselves into the socially constructed ideal through a type of 'aesthetic labour' (Elias et al., 2017; Elias and Gill, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2017).

Scholarship on women's body image has found that discourses with health aspirations can be used to conceal calls for exercise and diet practices that are striving towards a desire for the thin ideal (Prichard and Tiggemann, 2005). It further renders them confined to an inescapable 'panoptic gaze', which enforces women to conduct self-surveillance in order to uphold a publicly praised ideal through private exercise and diet

(Duncan, 1994). Thus, postfeminists assert that both progress and misogyny can coexist within the neoliberal milieu (Gill, 2017).

1.4. Neoliberalism and the selling of health and fitness

Some academics have contended that postfeminism is a cultural movement that is almost entirely informed by neoliberal thought (Genz 2006; Gill and Scharff, 2011). It is common for scholarship to contextualise postfeminist culture as either a part of neoliberalism, or a concept that exists in tandem with neoliberalism. While this is a pervasive view, we must consider the two areas of ideology as two coinciding yet distinctive sensibilities. One way to recognise this difference is to acknowledge that postfeminism might best be considered as a kind of gendered neoliberalism, which specifically focuses on the ways in which latent calls for conformity are imposed upon women (Gill, 2017).

Normalised values of responsibility and agency are ingrained within neoliberal policies and institutions (England and Ward, 2007). At its core, neoliberal ideology ascertains 'the market as the central agent in human society, and thus [the shift in government focus is] from public welfare to market creation and protection' (Lave et al., 2010: 660). Fundamental to this paradigm is that the individual is made responsible to rationally act on self-interest within the climate of an exponentially consumerist society, where 'through goods, services and rituals of display, each body is part of an endless process of marketplace definition' (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009: 10). Consumer culture is therefore vitally preserved by defining gendered appearance standards, shaped by gym memberships, health and fitness regimes, and advertisements (ibid.). The commodification of fitness is a recent phenomenon (Smith Maguire, 2008), and as the next section will explore, this has been spurred on by the communicative possibilities made available through social media.

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1.5. Health and fitness on social media

Social media can be defined as 'internet-based sites and services that promote social interaction between participants' (Page et al., 2014: 6). Today, we are seeing the accessibility of communication offered by social media superseding traditional medical institutions as sources of information about health (Mocarski and Bissell, 2016). At the same time, 'the surveillance of people's lives, bodies and health has been accentuated by [...] the development of internet-based technologies' (Rich and Miah, 2014: 296). The plurality of choice in contemporary society has been augmented by the expansion of social media, which comprises an ever-widening range of digital services and tools that are being employed to facilitate the education of health (Goodyear et al., 2018; Lupton, 2018). As online platforms possesses features for adaptable methods of advertising and communication, this has assisted business and professional profiles to reach a wider audience at an unparalleled rate. Following on from this, the marketing potential of social media for health and fitness can be examined by investigating the role of the 'influencer'.

1.6. Fitness influencers and community building on social media

It has been observed that social media users who are actively involved in the fitness genre gain popularity as they are 'able to satisfy the expectations of large groups of consumers who are intent on enhancing their health and wellness' (Duplaga, 2020: 1). Seen to be models of inspiration, the internet has dubbed these individuals as fitness 'influencers'. Influencers are referred to as 'people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them [...] they are seen as a regard for being a trusted tastemaker in one or several niches.' (DeVeirman et al., 2017: 798). Typically, influencers communicate through 'electronic word of mouth' (eWOM), which comprises

the 'promotion of brands, products, businesses, etc. seamlessly woven into the daily narratives influencers post on their Instagram accounts' (DeVeirman et al., 2017). This strategy connotes a highly authentic textual and visual narration of influencers' lifestyles, as it suggests posts are based on their unbiased opinions, indicating that influencers are seen to possess a strong degree of persuasive power (de Vries et al., 2012). Influencers 'promote not only brands and products on their channels but also their values and lifestyles' (Sokolova and Perez, 2021: 1). Therefore, many achieve a 'parasocial' interaction; this gives the illusion of a face-to-face relationship between the internet personality and their audience, thereby making the latter more impressionable by the influencers' opinions and behaviour (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011).

CHAPTER 2: DATA AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sample

N.B. Although all of the data was publicly accessible, the influencer for analysis and any other names mentioned are referred to by pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

Having accumulated 2.4 million Instagram followers, Emma is an acclaimed fitness influencer and personal trainer from the UK who has garnered recognition for her various endeavours to promote health and wellbeing by sharing her own experience of using fitness to relieve her from demanding periods of study as a law student. What initially started as regular postings of workout clips and transformation pictures on a personal account has since led to several business ventures after committing to social media full-time, such as launching her own activewear brand, becoming a co-founder of a fitness app, and most recently, authoring a women's health and fitness-related book. Emma's efforts have enabled her predominantly female followers, including those on other social

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platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, to establish a community based on an empowering and inclusive approach to promoting health and fitness.

The Instagram posts for analysis include a transformation picture of a community member from Emma's app, and a video advertising her new book (both can be found in the appendices, including a transcription for the video). These posts offer insight into the seemingly postfeminist ethos of Emma's page, yet they do so from different perspectives: one being in the form of one of her supporters, and another, based on her own personal undertakings within fitness. Although the small sample size could potentially limit the generalisability of this research, Emma has amassed a substantial enough following to suggest that her content will most likely be representative of the habitually adopted communication strategies used by numerous fitness influencers. The small sample will also ensure the findings are rich, precise and extensive enough to provide the greatest insight into how multimodal analysis can be used advantageously to examine more intricate details which otherwise would be ignored in content or thematic analyses.

2.2. Instagram

With over 1 billion active monthly users, Instagram is amongst the most popular social networking apps to date (Statista, 2021). The app's innovative multifunctionalities illustrate its suitability for conducting an MDA in representations of health and the female body. Its practicality in delivering short-form content also enables it to be a prime resource for online fitness influencers to compile conveniently accessible exercise regimes and diet plans for their followers in a database format, thereby replacing extensive health and fitness narratives conventionally embedded within magazines or fitness blogs. Notably, Instagram's 'self-branding' and entrepreneurial properties are located aptly against the backdrop of neoliberalism (Liu and Suh, 2017), and thus serve

to accentuate the dissemination of the fitness genre within contemporary consumer culture.

2.3. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

The proliferation of social media indicates that data sharing online is now ubiquitously multimodal by an expansive spectrum of text, images, animations, video, and audio. Multimodal Discourse Analysis is concerned with the study of forms including and beyond linguistic communication, those of which include 'materially diverse' semiotic modes, whereby meaning is realised through 'gesture, speech, image (still or moving), writing, music (on a website or in a film)' (Kress, 2011: 36). By implementing this as a central investigative method, this magnifies the prospects of dissecting a source by examining features that Critical Discourse Analysis does not ordinarily regard, these being visual communication strategies. Taking this into consideration, a prominent advantage of MDA is its multidimensionality in offering a comprehensive view into the construction of social beliefs and values.

With a versatile framework which is expressly appropriate for the pictorially-dominant arena of social media and body surveillance, the analysis will focus predominantly on Instagram as a semiotic resource, which is a method of communication grounded on a 'social exchange of meanings' (Halliday, 1985: 11). Social semiotics was originally developed based on Michael Halliday's theories in *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978), and later, *Systemic Functional Grammar* (*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). After increased scholarship in multimodal frameworks, these ideas were applied to the visual domain of images and other non-linguistic forms in Kress and van Leeuwen's *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006). For the analysis to grasp a thorough level of accuracy and detail, the rationale will be to apply both *Systemic Functional Grammar* and

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Visual Design in an investigation of how postfeminist rhetorical objectives are achieved by textual, spoken and visual communication strategies.

2.4. Systemic Functional Grammar

Halliday proposed that language can be realised by three types of social meaning, or *metafunctions* (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004):

1. The *ideational metafunction* encodes our experience of the world in two ways: experientially (what is going on, including who is doing what to whom, where, when, why and how) and logically (drawing connections between these experiences). By investigating the representation of this, we can acknowledge how language construes Emma's individual account of health and fitness, and ways in which this shapes her online presence.

2. The *interpersonal metafunction* involves the exchange of feelings, opinions and judgements by means of mood and modality. Modality indicates the ground of meaning between 'yes' and 'no', and can hence denote meanings of probability/usuality, or obligation/inclination (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 176). This will be significant to infer ways in which Emma conveys declarative, interrogative and imperative moods in her communicative aims regarding the 'selling of fitness'.

3. The *textual metafunction* is concerned with how language is used to organise a cohesive text by way of thematic and information structure. It is important to consider how Emma will manipulate this to convey coherence and rationality in the act of persuasion.

2.5. The Grammar of Visual Design

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) (henceforth 'KvL') subsequently adapted *SFG,* and applied their own framework to image-based semiotic sources. They recognised the following as visual correspondences with Halliday's linguistic metafunctions:

1. The *representational meaning* is analogous with the ideational metafunction, and is represented by various aspects of the world as it is experienced by different individuals. Within this label, objects or elements including people, places and things existing in visual images are referred to as 'participants'.

2. The *interactional meaning*, like the interpersonal metafunction, is comprised of aspects of an image which enact social relationships.

3. The *compositional meaning* deals with the way an image-based source presents a coherent whole, which involves examining the collaborative relationship between individual arrangements of a picture or video.

It should be mentioned that the system of mood and modality can also be applied to analyses of image-based sources, and will therefore be pertinent to examine in regards to how Emma manipulates pictorial representations of health, strength and empowerment. Modality is expressed visually through resources indicating increases or decreases in the construction of 'realness' in the image. Examples of modality markers include: differences in colour saturation, diversity of colour, the absence or detail of background, abstract or detailed representations of pictorial detail (KvL, 2006: 160-63).

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

3.1. Fitness for self-transformation

Like many fitness trainers on Instagram, the most pervasive aspects of Emma's page are the regular posts of her app members' transformation pictures. Instead of simply posting

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records to trophy her own accomplishments, she uses images of her clients as the *represented participants*; as the subject matter of her communicative aims. It is likely that this approach to displaying not only her own body, but the bodily achievements of her supporters, presents herself as a trainer who prioritises the interests and goals of her followers.

Figure 1a: A transformation post of a client with accompanying caption.

Figure 1b: Continuation of 1a (where caption was no longer visible).

In the post, the viewer is asked to regard two contrasting representations of the female body. Here, the concept of *information value* based on the visual divide of 'left and right' should be considered (KvL, 2006: 179-185). The composition is structured according to a vertical axis in a centre placement: the left side is related to existing given information, assumed to be a departing point for the message, while the right side is reserved to new information; something novel that requires special attention. As a result, the image denotes the comparison between a display of the participant's 'old' body, and the 'new and improved' one; the latter resonating more closely with the thin and toned ideal. Thus, compositional meaning is realised by the explicit divide in the centre of the frame as a signifier of this stark transformation. This invites us to consider Jong and Drummond's (2016) conception that there are implicit dichotomies created in 'before and after' transformation pictures; those that feed into the existing binary oppositions of fat/thin, fit/unfit, and lazy/disciplined.

Furthermore, the picture on the right displays the client's phone partially masking her face, a typically symbolic marker of identity. In this respect, the post draws greater

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attention to the participant's newly developed slim and athletic build, suggesting that the self with which she identifies is largely defined by her bodily achievements. The fact that this segment of the picture is of a mirror 'selfie' is pertinent to the themes which arise in the discussion of self-surveillance. The selfie is a visual symbol reflecting the performance of the self, it is not natural to the body, but a learned act (Frosh, 2015). As such, the act of taking a selfie could epitomise the act of self-surveillance. A photograph that presents itself as 'naturalistic, unmediated, uncoded representation' (KvL, 2006: 161) highlights content rather than calling attention to its production, and is thus more likely to be interpreted as realistic. In the right frame, the client has full manipulation of her mobile device, inferring the rather premeditated nature of this picture; this is also reflected in a much more confident stance as she poses to deliberately showcase her fitness accomplishments. Contrastingly, the 'before' photo displays the client in a much more leisurely, unstaged setting. Thus, the left-hand image can be regarded as being more naturalistic than the one on the right. Modality is realised by the contrast in colour saturation and differentiation, where the left is bright and vibrant, while the right has a neutral colour palette. The left frame depicts the participant smiling modestly while her left arm is clutching onto her handbag in a manner that denotes a sense of concealment from her body. She is turned facing away from the frontal angle of the camera, and is partially obstructed by being positioned behind another figure. The representational meaning on the left likely symbolises the client being in a state of lower self-esteem and lacking the assertiveness of the picture on the right, which shifts the viewer's interest towards her newfound confidence and drive for attaining a 'fit' lifestyle.

The emphasis on transformation is further reflected in the accompanying caption of the post, whereby Emma states that the client has 'absolutely smashed her goals' (figure 1b). Here, the modal adverb 'absolutely' is indicative of a high degree of certainty, invoking a sense of assertiveness and vigour in the statement. Likewise, the verb 'smashed' is used in a colloquial context, wherein Emma highlights the triumph of her client, as a result of attaining the rewards of sheer determination and strong will.

Conversely, it might also be seen as a reflection of the recurring language of aggression in many female fitness narratives, in which 'women are repeatedly told to defeat their own bodies violently as a practice of health and self-care' (Parrinello-Cason, 2016: 155). The ideological implications of using the term 'smashed' reinforces a sense of obligation in having to vanquish the 'old' body, as a means to bring about a bettered version of the self. Thus, it raises questions as to whether Emma genuinely aims to highlight the enjoyment and health benefits of fitness, or whether she merely reinforces restrictive bodily ideologies.

Yet, it is evident that Emma is an advocate for the philosophy of *fitness as a journey*, which is perhaps one of the most prevalent metaphors used within the domain of health and fitness discourses overall. By stating that such a transformation is 'a journey, not a race' (figure 1b) insinuates that fitness is an ongoing and arduous process. While a race connotes a rushed course of action, a journey alludes to the affirmation that achievements such as the one highlighted in the example post do not occur instantaneously, but require commitment, patience and the right navigation. This rhetorically highlights the necessity to avoid comparison, and to instead focus on our own individual pursuit of a fitness goal.

The first bullet point outlines the prevailing individualistic connotations within Emma's linguistic choices, stating that 'you have always been in control' (figure 1a). Here, we are given a reminder that the pursuit of a healthy and fit lifestyle is ultimately defined by one's own rational decision-making. Responsibility is emphasised in the caption by numerous sentences formed on 'you/your' pronouns, and this can be seen as a method of synthetic personalisation, or 'the manipulation of interpersonal meaning for strategic, instrumental effect' (Fairclough, 1993: 141). These constructions shape the conviction that the text is apparently tailored to the personal desires of the user, hence serving as a persuasive device to convince them of their own accountability. Despite the post being a celebratory documentation of one particular client's transformation, Emma employs

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'you/your' pronouns to suggest that what has happened to this community member is possible for all of us, which relays her adaptable outlook on health and fitness. At the same time, it also fulfils the text's interpersonal metafunction by creating an impression of the media figure attempting to establish a connection with their recipients. This is manifest through Emma referring to herself as '*your* trainer' and the colloquial 'bestie', inferring that she humbles herself with her followers on an endearing and informal level beyond her didactic role.

Despite this, it is evident that Emma employs various methods to enhance the mood of imperativeness. We can observe the negated sentence urging readers to understand that they 'CANNOT rely on motivation' (figure 1a). Here, the capitalised 'cannot' does not imply having an inability to do something, but rather, it adds gravity to the strength of the proposition by emphasising that the reader is prohibited from carrying out an action, and is thus high in modality to invoke necessity. Emma's use of 'cannot' has a coercive effect, and affirms her authoritative position as a trainer. This reiterates the instructive purpose of Emma's page and reminds us of her pedagogical role, and as such, her followers are led to believe that her claims are the objective truth based on her reputation and years of expertise in fitness.

The act of giving direction is also reflected in the above bullet point stating that 'you need to start SCHEDULING in your workouts like an appointment' (figure 1a). Once again, there is an imperative tone through the semi-modal verb 'need', which supplants 'must', but softens the command to prevent Emma from sounding imposing or overbearing, and to ensure her interpersonal communicative aims remain in place. Another detail of interest is the comparison of exercise to an 'appointment', which has medical connotations. This could insinuate the obligatory nature of fitness by reaffirming the conjecture that the dominant perception of 'healthy' may be inextricably linked to the perception of the fit ideal.

By this point, our duty to uphold moral citizenship is summarised in the concluding statement which calls for us to 'come and do something instead of nothing with us by your side' (figure 1b). In this context, 'something' and 'nothing' function as binary oppositions to indicate the polarities between being productive and slack. Consequently, it once again endorses the reductive dichotomy being reflected in the picture, with the imperative commanding us to 'come and do' being an urge to avoid moral reproof as a result of idleness and irresponsibility.

3.2. Fitness for the right reasons

Emma's promotion of health and fitness is echoed within regular posts which advertise her own commercial endeavours. This part of the analysis will focus on one 'IGTV' (abbreviation of 'Instagram TV') short video advertisement in particular, which is ostensibly a call for women to invest themselves in fitness, however its underlying motive is at the end, revealed to be a marketing tool in promotion of her new fitness book.

In this video, Emma outlines her empowerment agenda at the beginning by illustrating her own reasons for taking fitness up as a past time. She immediately mentions that 'if you had told me five to six years ago that fitness would be my form of therapy, I would have probably laughed in your face and thought you was lying to me' (line 1). Here, Emma adopts a conditional 'if' clause combined with the modal verb 'would', and the past tense (albeit in Emma's nonstandard speech) to create an exposition illustrating her previous mentality. By laying out this context, it aligns Emma's changed outlook with the postfeminist conceptualisation of fitness as a method of self-discovery, and thus reaffirms the *fitness as a journey* metaphor. Her desire to present a realistic, objective account of her view is followed by the idiomatic expression 'truth be told' (line 2), which functions to sustain the validity of the proposition. This is potentially in an effort to

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establish a degree of authenticity with her audience, by conveying a sense of identification and likeness in attitudes. Indeed, at this point she is shown to be making direct eye-contact with the viewer:
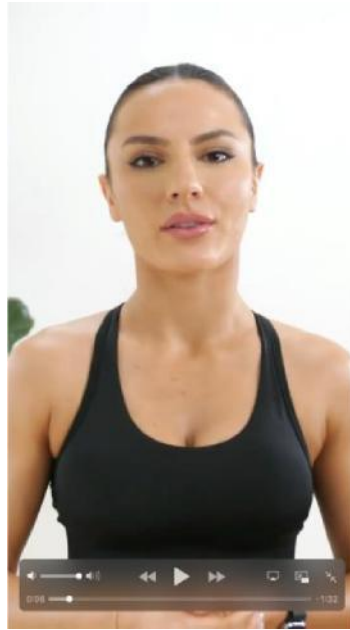

Figure 2a: Emma making direct eye-contact with the viewer.

Her gaze is fixed directly in line with the camera, thereby indicating that this is a 'demand' shot; Emma is *demanding* to enter into an imaginary relationship with the individual viewer behind their mobile screen (KvL, 2006: 118). Her facial expression is somewhat placid as she is not smiling in this frame, but it remains composed to convey sincerity in asking her audience to relate to her initial scepticism of fitness. Likewise, the close-up shot, limited colour palette, and plain white background enable the participant, Emma alone, to be the sole focus of the video. Thus, she is engaging in transactional communication; a type of interaction where the viewer is being invited to reciprocate mutuality (64), thereby fulfilling the interactive function of the visual source.

The interactional communicative aims are then contrasted by montages of her performing various exercises, many of which involve weight lifting:
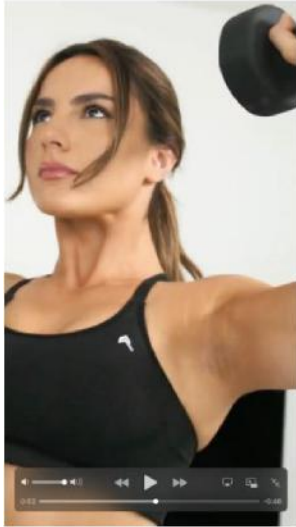

Figure 2b: Emma lifting weights.

Figure 2c: Emma lifting a barbell.

The example figures above are two frames from a series of clips which depict Emma carrying out various strength training exercises – to the viewer, she is shown to be exerting force in lifting weights, and thus becomes the epitome of the modern-day strong woman. Postfeminist tropes of agency are highly evident in these shots, which function to impinge on people's sense of normality, as weightlifting is a stereotypically considered a male-dominated activity. The angle of the camera is of particular interest in many shots such as the example in figure 2b, as it pans from being lower down to rising along with Emma as she performs the lifting exercises. In the semiotics of film and cinematography, 'low angles generally give an impression of superiority, exaltation and triumph' (Martin, 1968: 37-8). As such, this symbolically provides the actor with a greater degree of power, and this is emphasised in Emma's video with the upward movement of the camera. Moreover, it is evident that her gaze is not met with the camera in either examples, and so this exemplifies a type of 'offer' image, which depicts the represented participants 'as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case' (KvL, 2006: 119). In

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figure 2b, she assertively demonstrates an upward, non-transactional gaze as she lifts the dumbbells without looking directly towards the camera, which compositionally is located in close proximity towards her, as if invading a private space. It could hence replicate the performance of self-surveillance, yet she represents the subversively strong postfeminist woman, resistant to distraction. This action is fixed on what she can do rather than the kind of relationship she has with her audience; thus, she displaces the initial interpersonal connection by expressing her individual goal.

This is also exhibited in figure 2c, where Emma's face is excluded from the shot, and the viewer is restricted to a view of her back bearing the weight of a barbell. The representational meaning of this image can be comprehended by the notion of the 'Vector', a term used to illustrate connections between participants and objects, often representing action processes within an image. Vectors refer to aspects of images which are formed by an 'oblique line, often a quite strong, diagonal line', and can be reflected in various ways, such as human bodies, or tools in use (KvL, 2006: 59). Here, Emma's arms represent the Vector, the unifying component between the Actor; the participant from whom the Vector departs, and the Goal; the participant at whom the Vector is directed. Correspondingly, Emma is the Actor, while the barbell is the Goal. Thus, the action of Emma lifting the weight can be considered transactional, as it only moves by Emma's exertion of her strength. This action process may create a strong sense of empathy and wishful identification amongst viewers, encouraging them to become this same embodiment of power and agency. Subsequently, this is reflected within the concluding statements asking the viewer to 'push those excuses aside' (line 12). The transactional displays of Emma weight lifting in the montage are comparable with the use of the transitive verb 'push', where the 'excuses' become the direct object. It linguistically captures a type of transference dynamic, thereby resonating with Emma's physical displays of strength. These illustrations of empowerment remind the viewer 'how much control [they] truly have' (line 11), with 'control' being at the pinnacle of the individualistic philosophy of postfeminism. From a broader perspective, these linguistic

strategies reinforce the ideational metafunction within her narrative, as she communicates the view that strength is situated at the level of individual, and so achieving our fitness goals is merely a matter of acquiring self-discipline.

Notably, Emma's sense of personal accomplishment is highlighted by repeating sentences constructed around 'I'! 'me'! 'my' pronouns. For instance, the claim that 'the only time, and the only place I felt safe, and I felt like I could block the entire world out and all my problems out was when I was training. When I was working out, for me and only me' (lines 4-5). These clauses demonstrate a hyper-individualised narrative, employed to achieve a representation of the world according to Emma's own
perspective. This is then accentuated by manipulating the personal pronouns syntactically within anaphoric sentences, including phrases such as '*I* felt', '*I* was', 'for *me*...only *me'*. In other sentences, anaphora is present in repeated expressions like 'I deserve to be happy, I deserve to be healthy, and I deserve to be confident,' (line 10). The verb 'deserve' is used in a context alluding to the modal verb 'should', but 'deserve' specifically illuminates the recognition of one's own worth and merit, emphasising high modality and imperativeness in framing fitness as a personal duty to the self. As such, these linguistic techniques amplify the ideational function of Emma's language use, in that she construes reality based on her own experiences of fitness. She uses a personal narrative to further her rhetoric in suggesting that the driving force behind anyone's fitness journey begins within the individual.

Subsequently, the self-centric syntactic constructions are replaced with increasing instances of synthetically personalised 'you' sentences, as well as occurrences of the plural 'us'!we', giving the impression of Emma substituting her personal narrative with one that addresses viewers independently and collectively. She demonstrates this in her concluding statement: 'let's remember how important we are, and to remember one vital thing: to always, always do this for you' (line 12). Initially, she applies collective pronouns 'we' and 'us' (in 'let's'). This

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indicates a union between Emma and the viewer, which substantiates her goal of creating an interpersonal relationship; a community of like-minded, empowered women. Yet, the modulated 'let's' clause infers that the statement is framed as a suggestion impelled by obligation. This is then indicated by the final clause insisting to 'always, always, do this for you', which connotes a strongly imperative mood that targets the individual viewer. She repeats the modal adverb 'always', which cements the weight of her urge to 'do this', an explicit command. Here, 'this' also acts as a deictic demonstrative associated with proximity; in the context of Emma's communicative aims, she is inferring that fitness is located closely within our reach, and is therefore achievable by anyone. As her use of pronouns change, her pattern of using the past tense is also disrupted by switching to the present tense towards the end of the clip. This highlights the dynamics within the textual metafunction of her narration, as it indicates the organisation of her narrative is based on a chronological progression in time, yet the adverb 'always' insinuates a necessity to perpetuate a positive mental outlook associated with fitness.

This optimistic and assertive tone of speech is reflected in the following frame from the video, wherein Emma is confidently running through a crowd of her community members, as if she has just finished a marathon. Her arms are spread out in reach of her supporters to 'high-five' them:

Figure 2c: Emma running through a crowd of her supporters

In the foreground, Emma is an interactive participant and Actor of this action process, while her arms are the Vectors connecting her to the Goal: her crowd of supporters, who reciprocate the action of reaching their arms out towards her. As such, this is a highly transactional process, becoming a symbol of unification between Emma and her fans, who together, create a sense of oneness in their quest for empowerment. This is reflected in the background, which is, in contrast with previous frames, high in modality as it is filled with a diverse array of bodies; women of all body shapes and sizes. This demonstrates the inclusive aspects of fitness that celebrate diversity, but at the same time, the coming together of women. It encapsulates the wholesomeness and fulfilment fitness has brought into Emma's life, rhetorically emphasising the way in which she feels complete by having found the community of women surrounding her, and by implication, her individual purpose.

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CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The analysis has indicated that social media manifests as a profoundly effective tool in exercising the postfeminist ethos of choice and autonomy, yet it operates as part of a digital culture which facilitates the policing of one's own body. The analysed post in 3.1 exemplifies the postfeminist sensibility which calls for women to continually work on, self-fashion and reinvent the body (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). Outwardly, the contrast serves to capture the inspirational motivations behind Emma's page, however, it can be argued that the post works adversely to suggest that adopting healthy lifestyle habits are merely endorsed for people to obtain appearance-oriented pursuits. For instance, before and after pictures are somewhat reductive of an individual's fitness endeavours; they often do not showcase the client demonstrating what he or she has done to achieve a newly toned look, but generally only illustrate the product of morally obliged 'hard work'. Thus, transformations as illustrated by the exhibition of dramatic bodily change on social media may have the potential to 'create a restricted view of what it means to be healthy, potentially limiting the possibilities for certain body shapes and weights' (Jong and Drummond, 2016; 6). It propels the postfeminist view that the female body is a continual project of self-improvement, although these habits are implied to be choices made in the pursuit of health and happiness (McRobbie, 2015). The likelihood to achieve such fitness goals are consequently heightened by discourses which encourage women to foster the 'right' kind of disposition, comprised of 'aspiration, confidence, resilience and so on'; suggesting that an optimistic mental attitude can 'systematically [outlaw] other emotional states, including anger and insecurity' (Gill, 2017: 610).

Emma's overall authority and credibility as a fitness trainer is established by a high degree of modality in her propositions. Through a consistently imperative mood and her intricate use of personal pronouns, she successfully achieves the persuasive framing of fitness as an obligation to the self. Indeed, 'a positive relationship emerges between a

particular content creator and his or her followers if the creator is perceived as reliable and authentic' (Stollfuß, 2020: 6). Followers of an influencer who may perceive them to possess qualities such as being proficient, confident and successful could be an indication of wishful identification (Lim et al., 2020), demonstrating that Emma's own rewarding results in fitness could be seen as inspirational and attainable to her supporters. Textually and visually, she demonstrates examples of creating an interpersonal and interactive relationship with her followers, but it is never made explicit that these linguistic techniques cumulatively represent underlying marketing strategies to advertise two products: her app, and her newly written book. These are indications that Emma is amongst the numerous influencers who implicitly exercise a profit-driven approach to health and fitness. Ultimately, it substantiates the view that discourses of liberation have become overly conflated with consuming and bodily self-surveillance (Bordo, 1997).

CONCLUSION

Contrary to traditional media representations, postfeminism and fitness have intersected in challenging deeply rooted sociocultural concepts, by prompting the view that women can be portrayed as empowered, independent, and athletically competent. The analysis has demonstrated that postfeminist discourses of individual choice have become substantiated by the dynamic and innovative advances within social media, yet simultaneously, they signify the proliferation of a heightened culture of digital surveillance amongst women. Self-improvement practices and rational decision making to achieve conformity are incentivised by being made to appear as privileges in neoliberal society because they are framed as actions grounded on individualism. With this said, it can also be argued that the participation in consumer culture through health and fitness practices is, today, recognised as a marker of women's liberation. However, this does not dispel the view that many endorsements of the 'fit' and empowered

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lifestyle may be aesthetically-driven, and merely reinforce dominant ideologies that supplement existing gendered appearance norms.

While this essay has considered the influence that postfeminist discourses of empowerment have had on women who are driven by a 'fit' lifestyle, future research could investigate the way language and visual rhetoric are employed to promote 'fat activist' movements, which can often be read as oppositions towards an antagonistic environment in which fitness is presented as an obligation, whereby priorities lie within the defeat and bettering of the 'old' self.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

https://www.instagram.com/p/CMhQSM7l1e /?utm source=ig web copy link

(Figure 1a)

(Figure 1b)

Appendix B:

'IGTV' video:

https://www.instagram.com/tv/CI3n4EfHWav/?utm source=ig web copy link

Line

1   If you had told me five to six years ago that fitness would be my form of therapy,

       I would have probably laughed in your face and thought you was lying to me.

2   Truth be told, five to six years ago, I was at University trying to get my law

       degree.

3   I was working 30 hours a week as a waitress trying to make any type of money I

       could, and I didn't have anywhere to call my home.

4   The only time, and the only place I felt safe and I felt like I could block the entire

       world out and all my problems out was when I was training.

5   When I was working out, for me and only me.

6   I realized every single time I spent time to train myself, work on myself, it wasn't

       just improving my physical health.

7   Mentally, I was becoming more resilient, more disciplined, more consistent.

8   And it shone in every other aspect of my life.

9   I remembered my why, why I needed to train, why I needed to do this for me.

10   And I remembered that I deserve to be happy, I deserve to be healthy, and I

       deserve to be confident, and so do you.

11   Today, and every single other day of your life, I want you to remember how

       much you're worth it, how much you deserve to be happy, and how much control you

       truly have.

12   So let's push those excuses aside, let's remember how important we are, and to

       remember one vital thing: to always, always do this for you.