Self Presentation of Select Female Athletes on Instagram and Public Responses

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Abstract

Social media sites vastly have changed the ways in which athletes can interact with their fans. Positioned within the area of feminist cultural studies, this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach to examine how 8 selected female athletes display their bodies on Instagram via posted photos; how the public responds to this content via photo comments; and how these interactive postings fit with wider socio-cultural and historical contexts of women’s bodies in sport and physical activity. Using Erving Goffman’s theory on self-presentation and Jurgen Habermas’ theory on the public sphere, I conceive Instagram as both stage and space for public deliberation. Despite the autonomy over curating content that Instagram allows, images of women’s bodies were often perceived from a sexual lens regardless of the presence of sexualization in an image. Photo comments provide insight into public understanding of discourses on women’s bodies in sport, health and fitness, wherein sportswomen continued to be situated within traditional gender stereotypes. Four overarching themes were developed based on photo comments: 1) women as bodies first, and athletes second; 2) women as “women” first and athletes second; 3) the paradoxes between cultural constructions of femininity and athlete, with particular focus on the difference in treatment between black and white athletes and; 4) impression management and its role in reinforcing health and fitness as a consumable product.

Keywords: social media, self-presentation, public sphere, women’s bodies, sport, physical activity
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Glossary

Instagram

A social media app that enables users to upload photos from Apple or Android devices and share these photos with other Instagram users. Users have the option of editing and adding captions to photos. Instagram users can also have the option to share these photos on multiple social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

Like

Instagram users can let other users know when they like a photo by clicking on the photo or on a small heart icon in the lower left hand corner below the photo. A notification is sent to the user telling them when their photo was ‘liked’ and by who. Other Instagram users can also see which users have ‘liked’ particular photos.

Following

This function allows Instagram users to see other users’ photos on their Instagram feed. On Instagram, you can follow other users’ photo streams as they post them and you can be followed back by those users (or other users) as well. When you take photos using the Instagram app, they will always appear in the feeds of the users who are following you. Photos are arranged chronologically in the photo stream. “Following” does not have to be mutual between users; one user can follow another and have that user’s photos show up in their photo stream without it being reciprocated by the other user.

Hashtag

(on social media sites such as Twitter) a word or phrase preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic. Instagram users can search a particular hashtag and find all photos that use that particular hashtag.

Filter

An editing tool of Instagram. It allows the user to change the appearance of the photo before uploading it to the social networking site.

App

a self-contained program or piece of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose; an application, especially as downloaded by a user to a mobile device.
Chapter 1: Introduction, Literature Review and Methods/Methodology

Introduction

In 1997, Cathy Templeton became the first-ever American Motorcycle Association (AMA) professional hillclimb racer. Reflecting on her experience, she said, “I’m rather excited by all the attention I am getting because of this, but I’m also a little disappointed that it has taken so long for women to step into this position.” 1 Templeton’s experience is hardly unique, as the exclusion of women from sport has a long history dating back to ancient Greece, where women were both barred from participation and spectatorship of the Olympic games. 2 Feminist sport theorist Nancy Théberge characterizes sport as an institution that is “fundamentally sexist” and “male dominated and masculine in orientation.” 3 Historically, the lack of women involved in sport is unsurprising, given that in its earliest derivations, sport arose from the lived experiences of men. Sport stemmed from such activities as hunting and warfare, activities from which women were deliberately excluded. 4 In this male-dominated and exclusionary framework, the definition of “woman” and “athlete” are positioned as oppositional states wherein the “traditional” woman historically has been socially constructed as frail, passive and beautiful, and whose primary purpose is reproduction and household management. 5 Conversely, the athlete is strong, powerful and active – qualities that readily align with constructions of the “traditional” male and masculinity. Although they hearken back to ancient Greece, throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century in particular, these gendered social constructions became entangled with popular medical
and scientific thought, and negatively impacted women’s participation in sport. They also continue to influence how women in sport are portrayed in the media up until the present day.

In 2013, *Sportsnet* produced an online photo-shoot of 28 Canadian male and female athletes titled “The Beauty of Sport.” I became fascinated with the photo shoot. As a competitive female athlete, I have always had a vested interest in the ways in which the female body, in particular the bodies of female athletes, are portrayed in popular media. Here, in the online photo shoot, were some extremely skilled athletes, some of whom I had the opportunity to meet at competitions as an athlete myself and found them to be very personable individuals with a strong dedication and passion for their sport. Yet little indication was given in the images themselves that these were elite female Canadian athletes. Emily Zurrer, a member of the Canadian Women’s National soccer team and bronze medalist at London 2012, sits poolside, sporting a bikini while petting a dolphin. Her fellow London 2012 teammates Lauren Sesselman and Kaylyn Kyle are also part of the Beauty Issue, similarly lounging by the pool in bathing suits – a stark contrast from the male athletes in the issue, who are more often clothed, or in settings related to their sport. The control over how women are represented in the media lies with the contents’ producers – in this case, *Sportsnet*. However this begged me to ask, if women had control over their own content, such as the case with social media, in what way would women present their bodies?

In this chapter and in my thesis overall, I discuss how historically, the social construction of “woman” influenced women’s access to sport and physical activity. In the
same vein, in my literature review I examine how women are portrayed in traditional media sources to posit the social media site Instagram as a discursive space where female athletes have the ability to control the content they produce about their bodies. After this examination, I ask if women do have the ability to control their own content, what kind of content do they produce, how does the public react to this content, and how the content compares to representations of sportswomen in traditional media sources (i.e. print and television).

The Traditional Woman vs. The Traditional Athlete

Iris Marion Young and Angela Schneider explored ideologies around gender and sport, and how definitions of sport and the traditional woman set up in the context of social norms as oppositional to one another. As Young has argued, “insofar as our culture defines woman’s body as object, Western culture necessarily excludes women from its concept of sport.” Here, Young is referring to the idea that when women are defined as objects, or something to be ‘looked’ at, it invariably also casts them as passive. This passivity counters part of the construction of ‘sport’ where sport requires action and movement. These strict definitions of “woman” to which athletes must adhere influence how they are portrayed in traditional media. Revisiting the images from Sportsnet, the women in The Beauty Issue are depicted as passive, implying that they are something to be looked at, erasing their identity as athletes in order to better align with constructions of the “ideal woman”. Schneider similarly outlines how “the idea of sport, particularly at high levels of competition, is incompatible with what women ‘should be.’ The
traditional ideal woman is expected to be passive, frail, beautiful and emotional being whose ultimate purpose is reproduction, attributes that do not align with definitions of sport and physical activity. However, social constructions of the traditional ideal male readily align with the demands of sport. The traditional ideal male is powerful, strong, rational, and active. Similarly, traditionally male sports such as track and field and football often highlight the importance of strength, power, and speed. Subsequently, the social construction of the ideal woman has positioned women interested in athletics as abberent, and has historically affected women’s participation (or lack thereof) in sport and physical activity. Historically, women have a longstanding tradition of being defined by their ability to reproduce and the perceived need to protect their fertility. Reproduction has also been considered a source of female fragility. Londa Shiebinger discusses how the social constructions of ‘woman’ became heavily linked with 18th century Western medical and scientific thought. Thus, social construction of the ideal woman not only distanced women from inclusive definitions of sport, but also impacted the actual exclusion of women from sport based on the paternal attitudes of a male dominated medical community that dictated what women could be allowed to do with their bodies.

Motherhood, Frailty, Medical Practice and Access to Sport

Ideologies of female frailty and motherhood, are deeply intertwined with the emergence of sciences and medical practice. Western medical thought, from its beginnings in ancience Greece, conflated both the biological functions and social ideals
expected of women, and there has been little change ever since despite advances in understanding of how the body functions. “Though women were held to be victims of their reproductive apparatus in general, the onset of menstruation and its recurring cycle were believed to be the cause of particular handicap.”

In *Exercise, Physical Capability, and the Eternally Wounded Woman in Late Nineteenth Century North America*, Patricia Vertinsky discusses the widely held belief that women “were chronically weak, and they had only a finite amount of mental and physical energy due to the recurring fact of menstruation.” Medical and scientific thought reflected this widespread belief that women’s bodies were frail, and therefore required constant protection in the form of limited participation in sport and physical activity. The populace trusted in the study of science and medicine for its allegedly unbiased nature, thereby providing a credible and powerful vehicle for the reproduction and reinforcement of gender stereotypes embedded within it. The biological essentialism frequently espoused by medical professionals up to the present day has directly contributed to the lack of control women had over their own bodies, and what they were allowed to do with them, including sport. While Vertinsky’s work focuses on the late nineteenth century, she traces Aristotelian and Galenic notions of female frailty to show their influence on women’s participation in sport and physical activity well into the 20th century.

Aristotle (384BC -322BC) believed that women were inferior to men due to their biology and characterized women’s reproductive roles as passive and men’s as active. Galen too considered women handicapped by their bodies and reproductive roles. Galen
(130AD-210AD), a prominent Greek physician and philosopher during the Roman Empire, specialized in anatomical study.

Of particular interest for my research is Galen’s work on “vitalism,” which explicitly bound female reproduction to notions of female frailty. Vitalism purports that living things have a specific amount of ‘vital energy’ in their bodies, and once that is used up, people die. Women, Galen claimed, expended greater amounts of vital energy through menstruation and childbirth, and therefore should conserve their energies for this – given that reproduction was of utmost importance. Accordingly, women were not to expend or waste their finite energies on sport and physical activity – the exertion of sport was considered too great for women’s delicate bodies, and would compromise their ability to bear offspring. As chronicled by Vertinsky, medical guardianship of women’s frail bodies and subsequent limitation or exclusion from sport and physical activity persisted throughout the late nineteenth century and into the 20th century.

Following this assumption that women’s bodies were weaker than men’s, when women were allowed to participate in sport and physical activity, the sports were often modified for women, such as 18th century basketball, or volleyball in the 1920’s. In other instances, fitness and exercise was encouraged, but only insofar as to make women better at their traditional domestic duties as housewives and mothers. Associating reproduction with fragility subsequently reinforced notions of male superiority for centuries thereafter, including the present day.

Embedded into the long history of medical and scientific thought, these stereotypes continued to persist, and – more importantly for my purposes – continue to
govern the types of sports in which women can and cannot participate. For instance, female ski jumpers have petitioned the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to participate in every Winter Olympics since 1998, but were repeatedly denied up until the Sochi Games in Russia in 2014. Significantly, Lindsey Van is the current record holder for both women and men for the longest jump at Whistler Olympic Park, which undermines notions of female fragility. Van and nine other women ski jumpers sued the Vancouver Olympic Committee in April 2009 for “violating the ban on gender discrimination in Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms.” The British Columbia Supreme Court ruled that “although the IOC’s decision did qualify as gender discrimination, as an international organization, it was not required to obey Canada’s laws.” The IOC reported a number of reasons to justify the exclusion of female ski jumpers from the 2010 Olympics. From a managerial perspective, the committee argued that the addition of women’s ski jumping would crowd an already overwhelmed Olympic schedule, and that the sport did not have enough of a following to justify its inclusion. Hoffman, Jette and Vertinsky, however, have argued that “gender discrimination is precisely the reason women are not jumping at the Games.” As Hoffman, Jette and Vertinsky have noted, ski jumpers had been “barred from serious competition for decades because jumping was not deemed appropriate for females.” Moreover, Gian Franco Kasper, President of the International Ski Federation’s (FIS) and a member of the IOC, is on record having stated that – despite a total lack of evidence – he “didn’t think women should ski jump because the sport seems not to be appropriate for ladies from a medical point of view,” despite the fact that men and women assume the same physical risks in
the sport. Viewpoints such as Kasper’s which contributed to the exclusion of female ski jumpers from the Olympics demonstrate the power and lingering impact of historical notions on vitalism and female fragility.

Depictions of female fragility are also inextricably linked with female beauty. Despite recent campaigns that promote ‘beauty at every size’ such as Sport England’s “This Girl Can” and Dove’s Real Beauty Campaign, fashion designers and companies such as Miu Miu, Saint Laurent, and Urban Outfitters continue to fetishize frailty and conflate it with femininity and beauty. Fashion designer Stella McCartney claimed as recently as 2015 that “strength [isn’t] terribly attractive.” Her 2015 collection “welcomed the fragility of women” and “celebrated the gentle side” with airy loose fabrics in pale colours that allowed for soft movements. Similarly, sport-clothing brands are not exempt from this trend. While brands such as Nike, Adidas, and Lululemon celebrate strong, athletic women, the visual representation of ‘strength’ is narrow. For instance, Lululemon does not sell plus sizes; their largest size offered is size 12.

Women can only be visibly strong to a certain extent, but only in such a fashion that they can still be considered as conforming to feminine ideals, and thus remain ‘beautiful’. As Naomi Wolf argues, while the parameters for beauty change over time, what remains constant is the conception of beauty as not natural, but instead created. Moreover, beauty is a way of assigning value to women based on a culturally imposed physical standard. Further and by implication, women can only achieve this beauty (and value) through consumption.
Beauty Management and Sport

Naomi Wolf argues that the major remaining barrier to women fully participating in social and political life is not their role as mothers, but rather the requirement by society for women to be beautiful at all times. Wolf argues that while standards of ideal beauty are fluid across time and space, women are nonetheless tasked with achieving the set standard. Beauty standards also affect the sportswoman, who is not only concerned about her athletic performance but also how feminine or beautiful she appears while she performs. Headlines such as, “Olympians share make up tips,”[^41] and “Female Olympians are Turning to Permanent Makeup to Look Their Best During Games”[^42] exemplify how elite sportswomen are required to demonstrate concern for their appearances while competing. More oppressively, the motive for participation in sport may itself be purely aesthetic, with sportswomen attempting to mold their bodies to a societal ideal through exercise. Implicit in this achievement of socially-acceptable bodies is the idea that women need to consume products in order to achieve beauty. From hair and make up products, to “bikini body” workout plans that promise flat abs in four weeks, beauty is a commodity, and one in particularly high demand, given the pervasive societal pressures on athletic women in particular to be beautiful as well as skilled participants in their sport. In this respect, achieving ‘beauty’ is a particularly fraught endeavour, as sportswomen must negotiate being beautiful (or successfully embodying their conformation to ideals of femininity), while also exemplifying the masculine traits necessary to be successful in their chosen sport.
The Paradoxes of Femininity, Athleticism, and Hegemonic Femininity

Within the context of female athletes, there exists a paradox for women in sport, particularly female athletes who compete in traditionally masculine sports such as hockey, football, or basketball. These are sports that rely on so-called masculine attributes such as strength, power and speed. Coded-feminine sports, alternately are those that are considered “beautiful, graceful, nonaggressive, and aesthetically pleasing,” such as dance, swimming, skating, or gymnastics. Yet femininity remains “a socially constructed standard for women’s appearance, demeanor and values. There are multiple permutations of femininity; femininity is bound to historical context (i.e. it changes over time) and acceptable femininity may be perceived differently on the basis of, for example race and sexual orientation…although there are multiple femininities…there is also a privileged, or hegemonic form of femininity…This hegemonic femininity is constructed within a White, heterosexual and class-based structure and it has strong associations with heterosexual sex and romance.”

Thus women in traditionally masculine sports must negotiate a fine line between embodying the ‘masculine’ traits necessary for success in their sport while also maintaining femininity in the public eye. Those who are poor negotiators of femininity thus become subject to negative public scrutiny.

Further, the very embodiment of hegemonic femininity is in itself paradoxical. Justine Charlebois characterizes the problematic nature of practicing hegemonic femininity as a means by which women achieve “a socially legitimate gender identity, but they are disempowered in the process.” She has also argued that hegemonic femininity disempowers women because it reinforces the position of masculinity as both superior
and dominant. Disempowerment thus becomes the primary difference between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity, in which men are empowered by embodying hegemonic masculinity\textsuperscript{47} and continue to maintain hierarchical status over women. As such, women in sport and physical activity must negotiate between maintaining their femininity by adhering to beauty standards and being an athlete, two social constructions that, as I argue above, have long been considered to be oppositional, and more significantly, situated in the reproductive and social control of women.\textsuperscript{48}

**Mannish Women, Failed Heterosexuals, and Tall Athletic Beauties**

Throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, as women’s bodies entered the sport context, debates articulating appropriate images of women in sport soon followed. As Margaret Duncan and Michael Messner note, the entry of women and girls into the sporting world “has been regarded as an incursion into the sphere that is most properly men’s.”\textsuperscript{49} This incursion resulted in female athletes being either positioned as athletes who could still be beautiful in sport, or defined as subversive to femininity and thus in desperate need of correction in the form of narratives around “mannishness” as resulting in failed heterosexuality.

In one set of representations, sportswomen were seen as “mannish” and therefore poor marriage prospects for men, and in the other, as failed heterosexuals altogether.\textsuperscript{50} In *From the Muscle Moll to the Butch Ballplayer, Mannishness, Lesbianism and Homophobia in US Women’s Sport*, Susan K. Cahn discusses a *Literary Digest* article from 1934 that notes the masculinizing effect of sport. The article argued that “girls
trained in physical education today may find it more difficult to attract the most worthy fathers for their children”. Cahn continues to note that, at the time, “the image of women athletes as mannish, failed heterosexuals represents a thinly veiled reference to lesbianism in sport.” Characterizing sportswomen as mannish, lesbians, or otherwise deviant evokes longstanding assumptions that the primary function of women is reproduction within the confines of a heterosexual marriage. In response to fears around the figure of the ‘manly’ female athlete, others writing in favour of female athletes attempted to show how their participation in sport in fact aligned with traditionally feminine roles. Cahn also pointed out how in 1934, Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) official Taylor Sackett argued that the muscles of athletic women “resembled those of women who dance all night,” and that, “women in sport could no doubt still attract a worthy mate”. Sackett reassured the public that even though women participated in sport, they could still be beautiful, noting that female athletes have the lithe and lean muscles of dancers, who are seen as beautiful according to social norms.

Another example of socially acceptable female athleticism is Ethel Catherwood, who represented Canada at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam and was known more for her beauty than athletic skills. Although she won a gold medal for the high jump at the Games (an achievement that has not been matched by any Canadian woman since), Catherwood was nevertheless primarily known for being a “tall athletic beauty” in sport. Popular media of the time named her “the Saskatoon Lily,” a moniker which intentionally foregrounds Catherwood’s beauty over her athleticism in a socially acceptable way. Similarly in the United States, themes consistent with femininity, and
images that were appealing to (heterosexual) men, were used to encourage female involvement in sport. The United States Office of Defense Cooperation (USODC) chair, Thomas Hamilton, argued in the early 1960’s that “a look at our girl athletes readily disproves the misguided view that bulging muscles and a perspiring brow are the image of the girl athlete.” He continued to assert that women could still be “beautiful and ladylike” when competing in gymnastics or track and field. Thus, ‘acceptable’ women in sport were those who continued to align with popular feminine norms within their sports. This is not to say that women in sport today face the same challenges and gender-based exclusion found decades earlier, but rather that these challenges have assumed a new form. Media representations of the modern female athlete continue to confine women within traditional gender roles.

Women’s Bodies and Contemporary Media

Media plays a strong role in shaping Western culture and provides a powerful platform through which cultural norms are reinforced. Mass media is transactional, a product in a capitalist economic structure, which has many important implications for their cultural role as suppliers of ideas and emotional experiences. Traditional media sources are commodities, and as such, cater to their audiences in order to be economically successful. This means that the messages and ideas presented by media sources often reflect the social norms of the audience to which they cater. Economists suggest that catering to dominant viewership serves to increase advertising revenue. As John Vincent notes, “newspaper proprietors and editors try to attract the largest and most
affluent readership possible and, therefore, generally reinforce traditional cultural mainstream values rather than act as engines of social change.”

In the case of sports media, dominant viewership is considered to be the white, heterosexual male. To cater to this audience traditional sport media sources represent women’s bodies in sport that fit in with prescribed norms on femininity and beauty. Only narrow ranges of body types are deemed ‘beautiful’ or feminine enough to receive media attention. The white heterosexual woman who has “long legs, great hair, curves in all the right places, great skin and watches her weight” serves as a template for all female beauty. She is sexualized, commodified, and trivialized by the media. She is most often pictured as passive and scantily clad, and an object of the male heterosexual gaze. Her body is also coveted more for its aesthetic properties rather than its abilities as a skilled performer in sport. Rather than representing a diversity of different body types, races and sexualities, the media presents homogenous images to erase differing identities of women’s bodies in sport and physical activity. This erasure is borne out in research by Emma Wensing and Margaret MacNeill. They have argued that women who do not align with feminine norms receive less media coverage despite outstanding athletic performances. However, as I will argue, social media platforms such as Instagram have allowed athletes greater control over their self-presentation, and facilitated more direct engagement with their fans and followers. As an image-based platform, Instagram in particular can be considered a powerful new means to address and correct the limited forms of female representation in traditional print media.
Self-Presentation

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman has argued that when individuals encounter one another, they alter their behaviour and appearance to attempt to control the impression that others might make of them; this is referred to as “impression management.” Goffman employed a dramaturgical analogy, wherein self-presentation consists of a continual negotiation between ‘front stage’ and ‘backstage’ performances. In Goffman’s framework, front stage performances are typically more guarded, with self-representation being carefully curated. Conversely, backstage performances are considered to be less filtered and more authentic. Self-presentation is goal-directed; individuals tend to present a version of ‘self’ to satisfy an audience. As such, self-presentation is also dynamic and context dependent, as the version of ‘self’ presented is carefully managed to best fit a particular situation. For athletes, public image plays an important role “in his or her ability to obtain endorsements and in leveraging sports teams when seeking to re-negotiate contracts.” However, the ability to obtain such endorsements relies on popularity and media visibility. Typically, female athletes whose bodies align with current standards of beauty and femininity receive the most media coverage, leaving women who do not adhere to current beauty norms underrepresented or altogether ignored by traditional media. Social media, on the other hand, allows individuals to be producers and publishers of their own media content and control their own images. Indeed, exploring how athletes perform self-presentation on social media has become of growing interest to researchers in recent years.
Self-Presentation on Social Media and Social Media Research

According to Goffman, self-presentation is a process that occurs during face-to-face interaction. However, with social media individuals can engage in impression management virtually. Smith and Sanderson note that “without an audience being physically present to counteract self-presentation,” individuals have more control over their self-presentation via social media.\textsuperscript{74} Similarly, Kim and Papacharissi argue that “online sites allow people to emphasize salient identities that perhaps are not appropriate or desirable to display in face-to-face contexts.”\textsuperscript{75} Early research regarding online self-presentation focused on dating sites\textsuperscript{76} \textsuperscript{77} and online community groups.\textsuperscript{78} \textsuperscript{79} However, “with the growth of social media, self presentation capabilities have only been enhanced.”\textsuperscript{80} Previous research on social media and sport examines athlete self-presentation on Instagram in order to understand how it is used as a communication and marketing tool;\textsuperscript{81} to observe how different genders use social media for self presentation;\textsuperscript{82} \textsuperscript{83} to understand the acceptance of and motivation behind using social media as a marketing tool by sports organizations;\textsuperscript{84} to examine fan motivations in following particular athletes on Twitter;\textsuperscript{85} and finally, to provide a gendered analysis of professional tennis players’ self presentation on Twitter.\textsuperscript{86}

Instagram

In 2010, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger launched a new means by which people could interact with one another online. Inspired by their childhood love for taking photos with instant cameras such as Polaroid, Instagram was born.\textsuperscript{87} Instagram is a free
app that allows its users to upload and edit photos taken with Android or Apple smartphones. Users can edit photos using preset filters, add comments, and then share these photos with the Instagram community. By 2015, Instagram boasted over 400 million users sharing over 40 billion photos. It is one of the fastest growing social media sites, is used by 67% of the top brands in the world, and has an engagement rate 10-15 times greater than Facebook.

Instagram’s massive popularity suggests that the platform has extensive potential marketing and branding implications for its users. As part of the app’s settings, users can control who can see their photos. Users can create private accounts, accepting or rejecting other users’ requests to follow their account. However, any Instagram user can access public accounts. In April 2012, Facebook bought Instagram for 1 billion dollars in cash and stock. Soon after Facebook acquired the app, users were able to share their Instagram photos on multiple social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, simultaneously. While my own research aims to demonstrate how female athletes represent their bodies on Instagram, it is possible that the same content can be found across other social media sites that each athlete may also use. The popularity and wide-scale adoption of Instagram, coupled with the ability to create one’s own content, situates Instagram as a space where varying discourses on women’s bodies in sport can be presented and discussed publically by other users.


**Instagram as Public Sphere**

The kinds of content posted and the ways in which the public interacts with that content provides significant information on how ideas around health, fitness, nutrition, and women’s bodies are produced and consumed. Instagram is an arena in which individuals can come together around shared interests. Indeed, the site itself is designed to foster community. Instagram suggests material to its users based on the information it receives from previous usage of the app. Through the ‘search’ function, Instagram users are presented with similar suggested content. This content is also dynamic, and continually changes in conjunction with how one interacts with Instagram, as well as other online habits (for example, online searches using Google, or interacations on other social networking sites, such as Twitter or Facebook). The wide-scale adoption, growing popularity and functionality of Instagram have situated the app as a discursive space for analyzing how people come together and negotiate understandings in every aspect of life, including health, fitness and women’s bodies in sport. In this respect, Instagram can be understood as a public sphere.

Jurgen Habermas has defined the public sphere as comprised of “private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state.” For Habermas, the public sphere can also be a virtual or imaginary community that does not necessarily exist in an identifiable space. Instagram, however, is perhaps better understood by modern iterations of the public sphere that build on Habermas’ s original work to suggest that there are multiple public spheres, rather than *the* public sphere, as theorized by Habermas. Conceptualizing Instagram as a public sphere is instructive, in
that we can use it to understand how individuals make sense of health, fitness, nutrition, and women’s bodies in sport, which can in turn potentially be used to inform educational and political practices. In this vein, researchers at John Hopkin’s have developed an algorithm to search for language cues in Twitter, ones which are commonly linked to certain mental disorders such as depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorder.⁹⁴ Results from this research are then used to inform healthcare practitioners and government healthcare officials where demand of care may be and how the public discusses mental illness, for instance.⁹⁵ In this work I ask how select female athletes self-present their bodies on Instagram and how other Instagram users respond to the posted content, wherein Instagram is conceptualized as a public sphere forum.

**Research Questions**

As I have discussed, Instagram is a social media site designed primarily for online photo sharing, where users have the potential to express themselves and manage their images. Social media sites such as Instagram vastly have changed the ways in which athletes can interact with their fans. As Lebel and Danylchuk⁹⁶ have noted, photos on social media satisfy fans’ desire to have an allegedly “insider” look into lives of athletes. For those athletes who do not receive mainstream media coverage, social media often serves as their primary means of self-promotion to create and build their personal brand. Previous research on athlete self presentation in sport typically has focused on social media as a marketing and managerial tool⁹⁷, provided gender comparisons in self-presentation strategies⁹⁸ ⁹⁹, or focused on other social media platforms such as Facebook
and Twitter. Research on self-presentation of athletes specific to Instagram is an emergent topic, with research limited either to focusing on Instagram as a sport-marketing tool, or to determining how different genders self present on Instagram. However, little attention has been given to how female athletes from different sub-groups such as women from traditionally masculine sports or women involved in the ‘selling’ of fitness, present their own bodies on Instagram; how the public interacts with the presented content; how this information fits in with the wider social and historical contexts of women’s bodies in sport; and finally, how this adds to our understanding about how information on health, fitness, nutrition, and women’s bodies are consumed by the public.

Positioned within an understanding of the social and historical constructions of women’s bodies in sport and physical activity, I ask the following research questions. First, how do female athletes self-present their bodies on Instagram via posted photos. Is this consistent with how female athletes are presented by traditional media sources? Specifically in this research, I ask in what ways high-level competitive female athletes self-present their bodies on Instagram compared to the manner in which female fitness athletes self-present their bodies on Instagram. In order to provide meaning to public understandings on women in sport and physical activity, I also explore how the public has responded to this content via photo comments.
Method and Methodologies

As I outline in the previous section, research on self-presentation of athletes on Instagram is an emergent topic. As such, little research exists in this area, nor is there an established method to investigate the topic. I employ a mixed methods approach consistent with recent research on athlete self-presentation by Smith and Sanderson in order to investigate my research questions. To analyze athlete self-presentation, Smith and Sanderson analyzed both images and text produced by their sample of athletes. Smith and Sanderson’s mixed methods approach uses a form of content analysis to analyze images posted on Instagram, and the grounded theory approach to analyze written text in the form of photo captions. However, there are two important distinctions between my research and Smith and Sanderson’s: 1) where Smith and Sanderson’s content analysis coding scheme relied on pre-existing research by adapted from Goffman, Hatton and Trautner, and Kim and Sagas, I developed a coding protocol for my content analysis based on three additional pieces of research detailed below, and 2) I used grounded theory to analyze text produced by individuals interacting with the posted photos, rather than text produced by the athletes themselves.

Smith and Sanderson’s research examined 27 Instagram feeds of professional male and female athletes to determine how athletes are using social media for self-presentation. To analyze self-presentation via posted images they performed a content analysis using pre-existing photo schemes. To analyze self-presentation via written text (i.e. photo captions) they adopted Glaser and Strauss’ “grounded theory approach using constant comparative methodology”. Smith and Sanderson considered grounded theory
an appropriate approach given that “the descriptive nature of the captions would make them too fluid and diverse to rely on pre-existing schemes.”109 Each researcher performed an independent active reading of the written content, a process that previous research110 notes allows for patterns and themes to emerge and take shape. This interpretive process also involved making notations on interesting content and developing initial categories. Through active reading, Smith and Sanderson categorized photos captions into emergent categories, which were then used to create overarching thematic analysis on the differences in gender display. Further, the “development, clarification, and refinement of categories continued until new observations did not add substantively to existing categories.”111 Their approach was data driven and meant that categories emerged and continued to be shaped throughout rather than prior to data analysis.

Similarly, to examine how female athletes present their bodies on Instagram via posted photos and how the public interacts with the content via photo comments I used a mixed-methods approach involving content analysis and grounded theory. Content analysis is a series of techniques “for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.”112 Content analysis constitutes one of the major sociological methods most commonly used in the analysis of textual and visual media messages. In particular, I employ quantitative content analysis, or, “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods.”113

114 This type of content analysis is a method by which information on image content is gathered, and is often employed by researchers examining images of women from
traditional media sources. Content coding protocols are driven by the scope of research. Given that my research objective is to understand how female athletes self-present their bodies on social media via their posted photos, I employed a coding protocol that hybridized previous research by Guerin-Eagleman and Burch, Smith and Sanderson, Hatton and Trautner, Kim and Sagas, and Lumpkin and Williams involving visual representations of women in sports media combined with research on camera angles used to capture images of sportswomen’s bodies. My hybrid coding protocol also serves as a backdrop to situate my own work against the larger body of research on the representations of female athletes in traditional media sources.

My methodology also utilizes Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory approach to constant comparative methodology to categorize photo comments into emergent themes. Glaser and Strauss state that the goal of the Grounded Theory approach is to generate theories that explain how some aspect of the social world ‘works.’ The goal is to develop a theory that emerges from and is therefore connected to the reality the theory is developed to explain. The constant comparative method is a method for analyzing data in order to develop a grounded theory.

These researchers have suggested that “when used to generate theory, the comparative analytical method they describe can be applied to social units of any size.” Strauss and Corbin have noted that there are three coding procedures when employing a grounded theory approach: Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding. Open Coding refers to the process of “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data.” Axial coding constitutes a “set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making
connections between categories. This is done by utilizing a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences. Selective coding refers to the process of “selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.” For the purpose of my research, I employ an Open Coding approach, as it allows me to uncover meaning, ideas, and thoughts about the textual data source in order to build concepts from that data source. Smith and Sanderson’s approach that combines grounded theory with active reading serves as the basis for my analyses of photo comments.

My initial protocol for photo comment data collection involved an active reading of the comments. Active reading in this context refers to the researchers’ process of “searching for meanings and patterns rather than casually reading through the data,” and further involves making notes about what is interesting in the data in order to produce preliminary categories for analysis. Each comment served as one unit of analysis, and comment categorization was not mutually exclusive. I continued to refine my categories until new observations did not afford additional information. Categories were not determined in advance, but rather unfolded during data analysis. I detail these categories in Chapter 2.

In addition to my analysis of the content of the photo comments, I also collected information on fan engagement by recording the number of followers for each athlete and the average number of comments and likes across the photos considered for the sample. Brian Honigman suggests that the number of followers an Instagram account has
constitutes a “strong indication that your content is resonating with your existing audience and enticing new users to follow.” Yet Honigman also notes that, “it is really important not to look at this metric as the only determinant of success.” Analytics’ programming offered through social media management platforms such as Hootsuite, Zoho Social and Buffer (among others) can also provide insight into the popularity of an individual’s content on social media. Social media analytics platforms collect data from social media sites and blogs and evaluate that data to make business decisions through a series of proprietary algorithms. At the time of my data collection in the Fall of 2015, there were no platforms that allowed individuals to gain insight into other users social media analytics data, only access to information on one’s personal account to aid individuals in increasing engagement and popularity on Instagram. This meant that my own measurements and assessing popularity for each athlete was limited, by necessity, to the number of likes and comments they received from other Instagram users.

**Study Subject Categories**

To address an oversight in previous research that focuses on the difference in self-presentation on social media between genders, my research focuses on two different subgroups of female athletes – the competitive athlete and the fitness athlete. I chose to focus on two sub groups of women from personal interest, but mainly because previous research on female athletes rarely demarcates these two different sub groups of women in their research design. Further I selected these subgroups under the assumption that the kinds of images they would post would be different and wanted to gain an understanding
whether this content was perceived differently or not by Instagram users. Specifically, I anticipated that the fitness athletes would post images that highlighted their physique and competitive athletes would post more images that related to their sport. I used the distinctions described below to create the two groups.

**Competitive Athlete**

‘Competitive athlete’ refers to women who compete in high level competitive sport, such as the Olympics or professional sports, such as basketball, volleyball or downhill skiing. For the purpose of this research they must also be some of the best athletes in their respective sports and are widely recognized by the public and/or sports fans via traditional media. Wide recognition refers to athletes who most commonly appeared in online articles that resulted from keyword searches from the sample selection protocol detailed below.

**Fitness Athletes**

‘Fitness athlete’ refers to women who do not compete in a particular organized sport, but are engaged in and promote physical activity. These individuals are also required to have gained large fan followings on Instagram through their involvement in fitness and adherence to social beauty norms. For the purpose of my research fitness/physical activity refers to activities that exercise the body but do not have formal, widely recognized competitions.
Sample Size

For my case studies, I analysed the social media accounts of four fitness athletes and four competitive athletes, for a total of eight case studies. The sample size is consistent with previous research by Andrea N. Geurin-Eagleman and Lauren M. Burch on self-presentation and social media. The sample size is not intended to allow for broad generalizations, but rather to explore how these individuals self present on Instagram; and, more significantly, how their content is received by and interacted with and among other Instagram users. Finally, I sought to explore what themes might emerge between how Instagram users interact with the content posted by competitive athletes versus fitness athletes.

Sample Selection

Fitness Athletes

To select my four fitness athlete case studies, in the Fall of 2015, I first performed an Internet keyword search for “top female fitness athletes Instagram.” The first page of search results alone included similar articles with titles such as, “Workout Motivation from 20 Aspiring Fit Girls On Instagram”, “The 30 Best Fitness Instagrams to Follow – DailyBurn,” “25 Instagram Accounts That Will Actually Inspire You to Workout,” “Top 15 Hottest Female Fitness Instagram Accounts,” “2014’s Hottest Gym Girls on Instagram – Muscle & Fitness”“Fitstagram Vol. 16: Athletes You Should Be Following on Instagram,” “The Official Ranking of the 10 Hottest Female Fitness Models on Instagram”, and “Top 10 Fitness Accounts to Follow on Instagram”
These articles and their associated websites were representative of popular culture beliefs and as such, were positioned as a legitimate source for me to have created a list of popular fitness athletes. Of these articles I excluded those that made specific reference to physical appearance (most notably, for example, “hotness”) in the title. I then compiled a list of all the female fitness athletes from four out of the ten websites garnered from the keyword search. Significantly, 11 of the female fitness athletes listed appeared on multiple websites, such as Jen Selter, Massy Arias, Kayla Itsines, Emily Skye, Amanda Bisk, Kaisa Kernanen, and Anna Victoria. Their representation across multiple sites was suggestive of their popularity and the representations of women’s bodies presented are presumably more likely to reach wider audiences and have greater engagement with the content by the public.

Websites accessed and used in the Fall of 2015 included:

1) “Workout Motivation from 20 Aspiring Fit Girls On Instagram”
2) “The 30 Best Fitness Instagrams to Follow – DailyBurn”
3) “Fitstagram Vol. 16: Athletes You Should Be Following on Instagram”
4) “Top 10 Fitness Accounts to Follow on Instagram”

Further, and given that I wanted to look only at the most popular athletes of this group, I narrowed the list down from 22 to 11 athletes by including only those featured on multiple websites. From this derived list, I assigned each fitness athlete a number 1
through 11. Next, I used a random number generator to select arbitrarily the final four athletes to be analyzed:

1) Kayla Itsines
2) Massy Arias
3) Emily Skye
4) Jen Setler

**Competitive Athletes**

I followed the same process to determine the sample of competitive athletes, albeit with one exception. Two keyword searches were used to obtain a list of websites that featured competitive female athletes in the Fall of 2015.

Keyword search items include:

“top female athletes Instagram”
“best female athletes on Instagram”

I used multiple keyword searches for competitive athletes because initial searching yielded some of the same websites from the fitness athlete keyword search.

In a departure from the websites on which I found the fitness athletes, websites listing competitive athletes tended to feature both male and female competitive athletes. Only female athletes from these lists were considered for research. A total of twenty female competitive athletes were found across three websites, where eight out of twenty
were featured on multiple websites. Of these athletes, four were selected randomly using the same random number generator. The final four competitive athletes include:

1) Britney Griner (Women’s National Basketball Association basketball player)  
2) Danika Patrick (Professional Driver, National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing)  
3) Rhonda Rousey (Professional Ultimate Fighting Championship Fighter)  
4) Lindsey Vonn (American World Cup Alpine Ski Racer)

**Photo Selection**

Working in reverse chronological order, the most recent 100 photos from each athlete’s account posted as of October 25th, 2015 and earlier were coded for data collection. Only photos that contained the athlete in question were considered for data collection in order to get an accurate representation of how the athlete’s displayed their bodies. This sample size is consistent with previous content analytic research on social media. Given that Instagram content can be changed continually, the date in itself holds no specific value other than to provide a benchmark from which to work to make research feasible. This benchmark also ensured that only the most current content at the time of data collection was considered for analysis.
**Data Collection and Coding Procedures**

*Comments*

For the photo comments, a similar sampling method was used wherein the first five comments from each athlete’s photo set were considered for analysis. Five comments per photo allowed me to gain a snapshot of how Instagram users responded to the images, while also remaining feasible for research purposes. Only comments written in English were considered for data collection. In the case where the first five comments did not fit the above criteria, the next comment in line was considered. Given that comments can be added continually to photos, I limited the content to comments posted as of October 25th, 2015 for each photo. This provided sufficient and relatively current information on how Instagram users respond and relate to the posted content.

*Photo*

Images of the athletes were categorized in the following ways: full and upper body shots, head shots, active shots, passive shots, group photos, images focused on other body parts (e.g. hands, feet, limbs), and sexualized images. Categorization was not mutually exclusive, where images can fit into more than one category (i.e. an image could be simultaneously categorized as a full body shot that is active). Photos that did not include the athlete were disregarded from data collection. Categories were based on a hybridization of previous research performing content analysis on images of sportswomen in the media, detailed above. A combination of previous coding schemes
was used in order to select categories based on what would best represent my research goals.

**Additional Criteria**

Only athletes with active, public Instagram accounts were considered. Further use of Emojis and Hashtags were noted in order to provide additional meaning and context to the written content. Emojis serve as a pictorial form of communication, thus Emojis were read within the context of the comment text and were used only in conjunction with written text to provide a deeper understanding of the messages being presented. Similarly, hashtags are a words or phrases preceded by a hashtag or pound sign (#) used to identify messages of a particular topic. Hashtags were also understood as a part of the written text to develop overarching themes.

For example: brittanyhx comments, “Omg her bum 🍑🍑 #GOALSS @tysonkirsty”

In this case the ‘peach’ emoji is meant to represent the athlete’s buttocks and “#GOALSS”, read within context of the text, means that brittanyhx sees the athlete in question’s body, specifically her buttocks as a goal, implying brittanyhx would like to look like the athlete.

**Organization of Thesis Chapters**

In the following three chapters I present my results, interpretation of results, and provide a brief summary and discuss recommendations for future research. In chapter two I describe my results from both phases of my study. First I outline results from phase one,
image content analysis, which I used to answer the question of how female fitness and competitive athletes self-presented their bodies on Instagram. Next I outline results from phase two, where I employed the use of active reading and Glaser and Strauss’ constant comparative method and grounded theory to answer how other Instagram users interact with the images via posted comments. Constant comparative method allowed comment categorization to be developed throughout my active reading of the comments. Six categories were developed and the number of comments that were designated into each category was also outlined. In chapter three, I interpret results from phase one and two in order to develop four overarching themes to situate my results within wider social and historical contexts of women’s bodies in sport. In chapter four, I provide a summary of my main arguments, outline the limitations of my research, and discuss recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Results

Photo Content

The first component of my study was to determine how female competitive and fitness athletes presented their bodies on Instagram. Content analysis was used to determine how each athlete displayed her body, where any photos featuring the athlete were considered for data collection. Photos that featured the athlete were categorized into eight categories. As noted in the previous chapter, categories were created by modifying categorization protocols from previous research that involved content analyses of women’s bodies in visual media.

1) Head + Torso Shot: Images of the athlete from the waist up
2) Limb Shot: Images exclusive to the athlete’s limbs, hands, feet or combination thereof
3) Group Photo: Images where the athlete is posing with a minimum of one additional person. Often these photos were taken with friends, family, teammates, competitors, coaches, significant others, etc.
4) Passive: Images where the athlete is posed and/or there is no indication of movement by the athlete in the image
5) Active: Images where the athlete is performing an action and/or there is the indication of movement by the athlete.
6) Full Body Shot: Minimum of knees to head captured in image and head-to-toe images.
7) Head Shot: Images of the athlete from the chest up
8) Sexualized Image: Sexualized images were those that included attributes of a sexualized image, as determined by previous research by Erin Hatton and Mary Nell Trautner, who coded images for sexualization. In order to keep my research within a manageable scope, the degree to which the images were sexualized was not included as part of my data collection, only the presence of the following researcher-interpreted qualities in any combination:

- Images of the athlete wearing revealing clothing with the exception of clothing that serves a function (i.e. sports bras, shorts, spandex);
- Images with breast/chest/buttocks exposure;
- Images including some concealment of face combined with some level of body exposure;
- Open mouths, tongue exposure, sex acts or simulations, pouting, lips slightly pouted but not smiling, finger in mouth, mouth open wide but passive (i.e. not actively singing, yelling or yawning);
- Images with some form of touch – self touch, touching others or being touched;
- Body positioning – images found suggestive or inviting sexual activity lifting arms over head, lying down, leaning or sitting, legs spread open.

Categorization was not mutually exclusive. For example, a photo could be categorized as both passive and sexualized simultaneously. However, images of particular parts of the body were mutually exclusive (i.e. A Full Body Shot was not also considered as a Head Shot despite both being represented in the image with the exception of if two images including the athletes’ body were in the same Instagram post). These categories were
used to determine how select female athletes on Instagram presented their bodies and how these presentations compared to how women in sport are displayed in traditional media. Traditional media tends to display women in sport as passive and overtly sexualized.\textsuperscript{137} However, Instagram allows its users to post photos of their choosing. Did these women use their autonomy of self-presentation on Instagram to present themselves in ways counter to societal norms? This information would also serve as the basis for the second part of this research that looks at how the public interacted with the images. It is important to note that all of the content gathered from the athlete’s Instagram accounts is subject to constant change. The information represents a snapshot of the photos posted to the various athletes’ Instagram accounts in reverse chronological order from 25 October 2015, the day of data collection.

Tables 1.0 and 1.1 break down how many photographs were designated into each category. “Total/Photos Including Athlete” refers to how many photos fell into the aforementioned categories (i.e. full body shot, head shot, etc.) out of the total number of photos featuring the athlete. For example, for fitness athlete Kayla Istines, of the 100 photos posted on her Instagram account at the time of collection, she is featured in 35 of them. Of those 35, 16 photos were categorized as “Full Body Shot” images. “%/Athlete Photos” refers to the data presented in the “Total/Photos Including Athlete” translated into a percentage (i.e. 16/35 or 45.70% of Kayla Istines photos are ‘Full Body Shot’ images.”)
Table 1.0 Photo Content of Fitness Athlete Photos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total/Photos</th>
<th>%/Athlete Photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Including Athlete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla Itsines</td>
<td>Full Body Shot</td>
<td>16/35</td>
<td>45.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head Shot</td>
<td>0/35</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexualized Image</td>
<td>10/35</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head + Torso Shot</td>
<td>4/35</td>
<td>11.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limb Shot</td>
<td>0/35</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Photo</td>
<td>2/35</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>18/35</td>
<td>51.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>2/35</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massy Arias</td>
<td>Full Body Shot</td>
<td>26/38</td>
<td>68.42%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Head Shot</td>
<td>3/38</td>
<td>7.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexualized Image</td>
<td>3/38</td>
<td>7.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Head + Torso Shot</td>
<td>4/38</td>
<td>10.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limb Shot</td>
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<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Group Photo*</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Passive</td>
<td>23/38</td>
<td>60.53%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>12/38</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Emily Skye</td>
<td>Full Body Shot</td>
<td>43/65</td>
<td>66.15%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Shot</td>
<td>12/65</td>
<td>18.46%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>31/65</td>
<td>47.69%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head + Torso Shot</td>
<td>4/65</td>
<td>6.15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb Shot</td>
<td>0/65</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>56/65</td>
<td>86.15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
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<td>6.15%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
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<td>Head Shot</td>
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</tr>
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<td>67.39%</td>
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<td>1/92</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb Shot</td>
<td>1/92</td>
<td>1.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Photo*</td>
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<td>4.35%</td>
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<td>78/92</td>
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<td>13.04%</td>
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<td>Ronda Rousey</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Total/Photos Including</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Athlete</td>
<td>Photos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Body Shot</td>
<td>36/65</td>
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<td>Head Shot</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Sexualized Image</td>
<td>3/65</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head + Torso Shot</td>
<td>15/65</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb Shot</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>23/65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active</td>
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<td>47.70%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Danica Patrick</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Body Shot</td>
<td>14/40</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
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<td>42.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexualized Image</td>
<td>3/40</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head + Torso Shot</td>
<td>3/40</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb Shot</td>
<td>1/40</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Photo*</td>
<td>13/40</td>
<td>32.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>19/40</td>
<td>47.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>19/40</td>
<td>47.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Trends in Content Analysis Data

Table 1.2 provides a summarization and comparison between how fitness athletes and competitive athletes displayed their bodies on Instagram. Fitness athletes tend to post on average more photos that are passive, sexualized and include their whole bodies in the frame. On average, 70.99% of photos are passive, 37.88% sexualized, and 67.35% are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Body Shot</th>
<th>Head Shot</th>
<th>Sexualized Image</th>
<th>Head + Torso Shot</th>
<th>Limb Shot</th>
<th>Group Photo*</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54.80%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Vonn</td>
<td>31/80</td>
<td>35/80</td>
<td>13/80</td>
<td>11/80</td>
<td>1/80</td>
<td>19/80</td>
<td>24/80</td>
<td>34/80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38.75%</td>
<td>43.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.25%</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>23.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>42.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Group Photo* indicates photos of athletes in a group setting.
full body shots compared to the competitive athletes who post 41.92%, 7.99%, and 38.73% respectively, for the aforementioned categories. Competitive athletes tend to post on average more photos that are active (40.08%) compared to the fitness athletes (14.12%). Specifically, active shots posted by the competitive athletes were often of them competing in their respective sports or photos of training. Active photos of the fitness athletes usually entailed them performing a specific exercise (i.e. performing a push up). Few photos (less than 2%) are categorized as “Limb Shots” from both groups. “Group Photos” are more popular amongst the competitive athletes (38.01%) compared to the fitness athletes (9.76%). On average, competitive athletes post more photos of their faces (34.69%) and of their bodies from the waist up (16.74%) compared to fitness athletes (8.22%, 7.30% respectively). These categorized trends allowed me to gain insight into how the athletes displayed their bodies on Instagram, and how their self presentation fits into wider social contexts of women’s bodies in sport and sport media, which I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Fitness</th>
<th>Competitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Body Shot Average</td>
<td>67.35%</td>
<td>38.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Shot Average</td>
<td>8.22%</td>
<td>34.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualized Image Average</td>
<td>37.88%</td>
<td>7.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head + Torso Shot Average</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>16.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limb Shot Average</td>
<td>1.59%</td>
<td>0.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Photo Average</td>
<td>Passive Photo Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.76%</td>
<td>70.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.01%</td>
<td>41.92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Photo Comments Content**

After establishing the types of content the athletes were posting on their Instagram accounts, I then analysed how other Instagram users interacted with the athletes’ content. To gather the data on general Instagram users’ interactions, I assessed the comments for each athlete and culled the comments for emergent themes. Six main categories were identified for both competitive and fitness athletes. Comments were thematically categorized as: Inspirational/Congratulatory, Physical Appearance Related, Skill/Performance-Related, Information Seeking, Conversational and Miscellaneous, which are detailed below. These categories were then subdivided further in order to best represent the content being produced. The samples of comments provided in each category description were selected to serve as examples to clarify each category however the selected examples are not representative of every comment within that category. Moreover, each comment detailed below is in the public domain, as it is posted to an open and publicly accessible social media account. Therefore protecting the identity of the athletes is not an issue from a research protocol perspective. Note as well that the posted comments are rendered verbatim with no attempt to correct spelling, grammar, or punctuation.
Comment Category Descriptions for Data Collection

1) Inspirational/Congratulatory

a) Inspired by Athletes’ Skill: Herein, users would comment about how the athlete’s athletic ability inspires and motivates them.
Example: paapii.deshawn: “You’re my inspiration on and off the court. I really look up to you. I want to be just like you.”

b) Congratulate on a Performance
These comments often appeared on photos of a particular competition, event, and or game, such as a photo taken mid-game or a podium picture; typically, users would congratulate athletes on their performance.
Example: sandrahofer commented: “Congrats on your 2nd place linds it was a hard and very special year for you i’m so proud!! never give up linds #lv77.”

c) Inspired by Athlete’s Physique
These comments were those where users said that they were inspired by the athlete’s physique to ‘improve’ their own bodies, or that it was their goal to look like them.
Example: avanataliaa shared: “@andrea.smith body goals”

d) Offering Words of Support
Here users would comment that they supported the athlete in some way. Usually these comments would be to help encourage the athlete after another commenter said something negative or to offer words of encouragement if an event/performance did not go well (i.e. athlete overcoming an injury).
Example: mojo_magic88 commented: “Good for you Lindsey! Your [sic] on your way back to recovery and back to the top of the mountain! (The Champ never quits!).”

2) Physical Appearance Related

a) Positive

This included any comments that are appearance-related with a positive connotation (i.e. beautiful, strong, fit, bright eyes/smile).
Example: imabhishekdubey shared: “@real._.vaishali She is so fit!”

b) Negative

This included any comments that are appearance-related with a negative connotation (i.e. ugly, manly, gross, disgusting).
Example: gmc 199021 said: “U fukin [sic] ugly and look like Jordan hill for real.”

Sexual

Included photo comments that took on a sexual tone (i.e. sexy, hot, fap\textsuperscript{138}), or expressed sexual attraction/desire for the athlete. This also included emojis used to represent sexual feelings or acts.
Example: bangababyy commented: “Loving that smile and that juicy ass poking out sexy”

3) Skill/Performance Related

Where comments allotted to the “Inspirational/Congratulatory” category involved some reference to being inspired by a particular skill, performance or appearance,
Skill/Performance Related comments were those that mentioned the athlete’s abilities in some way, but with no reference to being motivated by that skill or performance. Comments in this category were characterized as either positive or negative.

a) Positive

Skill/Performance Related comments with a positive connotation (i.e. talented, skilled, masterful, elegant sport play).

Example: singeramp commented: “You are an Amazing skier! Athlete! Competitor! And champion!”

b) Negative

Skill/Performance Related comments with a negative connotation. Here users might describe the athlete as lazy, unmotivated, and unskilled.

Example: grayghost8179 said: “If she put as much effort into racing as she does posting selfies she might win a race.”

4) Information Seeking

Comments where the users posed questions to the athletes. These included users seeking information on health or exercise, fashion, diet/nutrition, information about the athlete’s body or the photograph’s context.

a) Health/Exercise Tips

This category includes comments where users asked for recommendations of workout routines, workout modifications for pre-existing conditions and/or injury prevention techniques.
Example: meganshrum asked: “Can you post an ab workout / what you regularly eat to keep/ get a flat and toned stomach??” Similarly, “figgyboys commented: “Hi @Kayla_itsines I just started your guides two days ago and now my legs are very sore. What is your suggestion? Should stop it for awhile [sic] or keep going? Please advise. Thank you.”

b) Fashion Tips

These comments were exclusive to users who asked questions about the athlete’s clothing (i.e. what brand, where to purchase).

Example: rookie_eternel asked: “What is the brand of this leggings plz ? :)

c) Diet/ Nutrition Tips

In these comments, users asked for nutrition advice (i.e. what they should eat, how many calories they should consume, recipe details).

Example: theplantritionist remarked: “Hi @kayla_itsines would love to see you do a post about how you no longer eat red meat. It's been almost a week. When will you share with your followers. Help! Looking for advice!”

d) Photo Context

Comments where users asked where the photo was taken.

Example: melli_ties queried: “Where are you here?”

e) Athlete’s Body

Comments where users asked for information about the athlete’s body (i.e. height, weight).

Example: _octoberrrbaaby asked: “How tall are you?”
5) Photos with Conversation

a) Conversation to gain information/answer questions

Noted when Instagram users asked questions and other Instagram users answered them.

Example: __octoberbaaby asked Brittney Griner, “How tall are you?” and another Instagram user bellacarpino responded, “6’8’’.”

Conversations that were argumentative

Refers to any instance where opposing views were made between two or more commenters.

Example: danica_patrick_fans commented: “You should wear the glasses more you look good in em.”

mark8601 replied, “@danica_patrick_fans She should wear them when she gets behind the wheel.”

danica_patrick_fans replied further, “@mark8601 she wears contacts and what insult you could not come up with any thin [sic] better and why make fun of her she is awesome.”

mark8601 continued with, “@danica_patrick_fans ho hum, no kidding? You mean glasses won't fit inside those monster helmets? Go figure. Insult, me no way! She does it herself, everytime she attempts to "race". Short timer... her last year, no sponsors next year. Focus on Miranda. Better luck with that!”

Conversation that responds to a ‘share’
Refers to any instance where one Instagram user shared the content by tagging one or more person using the @ symbol and one or more of those users replies and also tags the person who shared it with them originally.

Example: zurito_the_burrito shared, “@daileyobrien me”

dailyobrientru responded, “goals @zurito_the_burrito”

Conversation between athlete and Instagram user

Refers to any comment by an Instagram user that the athlete responded to. There are only two examples of this in the data set: One direct exchange between Danica Patrick and a fan, and another in which Kayla Itsines responded to multiple comments on a post claiming she has anorexia.

6) Miscellaneous

Photo comments that did not fit into any of the aforementioned categories

Example: “@thisisisla and I invite you and your dog to dinner in London.”

Categorization of comments into the aforementioned categories coupled with how many comments fell into each category revealed a number of trends in how the public comments on athlete’s Instagram photos. For example a majority of comments for both athletes related to physical appearance, skill-related comments were typically reserved for the competitive athletes, and comments seeking information on health, fitness and nutrition were typically reserved for the fitness athletes. From these trends, listed in greater detail below, I developed themes that situate these results within and compare
them to representations of the traditional women, representations of women in sport/sport media and discuss what this tells us about how the public forms its understandings about sportswomen’s bodies, health, nutrition and fitness, to which I detail further in the following chapter.

**Trends in Photo Comment Content**

Tables 2.0 and 2.1 provide a detailed set of examples of how Instagram users interact with the athlete’s photos via their comments. For individual athlete results see Raw Data in Appendix 1.0.

**Table 2.0: Breakdown of frequency of Comment Type**

**Fitness Athletes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Breakdown</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspirational/Congratulatory</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by athlete’s skill</td>
<td>1.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulate athlete on performance/competition</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>24.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>2.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Appearance</strong></td>
<td>66.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive (i.e. beautiful, strong, fit, healthy, feminine, attractive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative (i.e. ugly, nasty, looks like a man, unattractive)</td>
<td>3.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual (i.e. hot, sexy)</td>
<td>22.82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Skill/Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative (i.e. not focused, poor performer, not skilled, should quit activity in question, condescension)</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive (i.e. skilled, excellent, great competitor, entertaining)</td>
<td>2.99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Information Seeking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information on health</td>
<td>28.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>14.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
<td>20.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where photo was taken or at what event</td>
<td>1.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conversational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conversations for information</td>
<td>2.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentative Conversations</td>
<td>2.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations between users</td>
<td>9.71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Miscellaneous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments not represented in previous categories</td>
<td>16.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2.1 Breakdown of frequency of Comment Type

#### Competitive Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspirational/Congratulatory</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by athlete’s skill</td>
<td>26.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulate athlete on</td>
<td>13.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance/competition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Appearance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill/Performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information Seeking</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversational</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Miscellaneous</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes average number of different emojis used. For individual athlete results see Appendix 1.0.
The following trends were detailed for each of the 6 comment categories used for data collection:

**Skill and Physical Appearance Related Comments**

Fitness athletes more often received comments related to their appearance than did the competitive athletes. Where users were inspired by the athletic skill of the competitive athletes (26.35%), they were almost equally inspired by fitness athlete physique (24.93%) with little regard for skill (1.39% of comments were inspiring based on skill and only 2.99% mentioned anything about skill or performance). Photos related to appearance surpassed all others in number for the fitness athletes (96.68%), where a majority of comments were both positive (66.05%) and sexual (22.82%) in tone. Comments coded as sexual were also coded as ‘positive’ but not all positive comments took on a sexual tone. Despite having coded sexualized comments as positive does not mean that I viewed these comments as appropriate or even desirable, but rather to foreground how the author of the comments perceived the athlete as attractive and as having adhered to the social norms of feminity I discussed in Chapter 1. Interestingly enough, comments on physical appearance also comprised nearly half (52.94%) of the total comments for the competitive athletes with a similar proportion of comments with a sexual connotation (21.54%) as the fitness athletes (22.82%), despite posting less sexualized content. Competitive athletes had a higher proportion of negative physical appearance comments at 11.37% (compared to 3.89% fitness), with a disproportionate...
amount of negative appearance comments found on Brittney Griner and Ronda Rousey’s photos (29.03% and 11.69% found on Griner and Rousey’s photos compared to 3% and 1.5% for Patrick and Vonn respectively).

Health Advice

Instagram users more often sought advice on health, exercise, nutrition and fashion from the fitness (60.73%) than the competitive athletes (4.72%). This will be detailed further in the following chapter.

Conversational

Conversations between the athletes and Instagram users were rare. Danica Patrick and Kayla Itsines were the only two individuals in my sample to address anyone directly in photo comments – each with one instance recorded. Danica addresses a fan in the following conversation:

natashafieger wrote,

“Wanted to post and say that when I was a little girl my dad (a big car guy) got me your picture with your autograph on it. You stood for then everything I believe now. You represented a world of feminine power and that was a huge influence on my upbrining. So great to have had you as a role model then and now. #badass #tribeofwomen
danicapatrik responded,

“@natashafiger that’s super cool to hear. Gives me goosebumps! Thank You! 🙏

“

Itsines’s response is different, in that she responded to a number of comments on a single post claiming that she is anorexic:

“I posted a photo of myself yesterday, and there were so many comments saying things like "too skinny, eww gross, anorexic, way too far" 😢 I am actually the fittest, healthiest and the happiest I've EVER been. I've said it before and I'll say it again, ANOREXIA is a serious condition, I wish people would stop using it loosely to describe smaller women. Further, you cannot judge someone on a single photo from one angle. You don't know their story. You don't know what they have been through or are going through. All I ask is that you think before you speak (or type), because your words have more impact than you know. 💖 Empower each other, don't destroy one another.”

However comments among users were slightly more frequent at approximately 5% and 8% for fitness and competitive athletes respectively. Argumentative conversations between Instagram users were more common for the competitive athletes, with Britney Griner and Danica Patrick having the highest number of argumentative conversations in their photo comments.
Miscellaneous

Frequency of miscellaneous comments were similar across groups at 16.33% of total comments for fitness athletes and 15.45% for competitive.

Table 2.2 presents a summarized version of the information noted above.

Table 2.2 – Summary of Comment Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Fitness Athletes</th>
<th>Competitive Athletes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational/Congratulatory</td>
<td>31.72%</td>
<td>52.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance Related</td>
<td>96.60%</td>
<td>52.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill/Performance Related</td>
<td>3.09%</td>
<td>27.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares</td>
<td>55.45%</td>
<td>48.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Seeking</td>
<td>60.73%</td>
<td>4.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
<td>8.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>16.33%</td>
<td>15.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table details that, in general, commenters are concerned with the skill and appearance of competitive athletes. Comments for fitness athletes are centred around physical appearance and the information (notably health-related) they can glean from the athlete.
Measures of “Popularity”

Table 2.3 depicts the average number of likes and comments from each photo in the dataset in addition to the number of followers each athlete has.

Table 2.3

Average Number of Followers, Comments and Likes/Athlete*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of Followers</th>
<th>Average # Likes</th>
<th>Average # Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Athlete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla Itsines</td>
<td>5.7M</td>
<td>64,090</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massy Arias</td>
<td>2.1M</td>
<td>24,875</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Skye</td>
<td>1.8M</td>
<td>20,942</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen Selter</td>
<td>10M</td>
<td>219,360</td>
<td>3955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Athlete</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronda Rousey</td>
<td>8.5M</td>
<td>265,154</td>
<td>3341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danica Patrick</td>
<td>323K</td>
<td>5081</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brittney Griner</td>
<td>214K</td>
<td>4206</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Vonn</td>
<td>869K</td>
<td>29,380</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* At time of data collection
Generally, the number of followers coincides with the average number of likes and comments, where athletes with more followers have on average more likes and comments. Thus, the number of followers, likes and comments is indicative of popularity. Greater numbers of followers and likes is an indicator of greater popularity, given that more people were engaged with the content. It is important to note that these numbers do not necessarily reflect quality or intent behind engagement, which was beyond the scope of this research.

Sample Instagram Images of Competitive and Fitness Athletes

Figures 1.0 to 8.4 were selected as a sample of typical representations of each athlete on her Instagram pages. The images provided below are not intended to be interpreted specifically for discussion, but rather to be understood as a representative sample of the total image set used for data collection. Each image (with the exception of Images 1.0-1.3) is paired with how information on how it was coded in order to provide further insight into coding protocols. The majority of the photos posted by both fitness and competitive athletes featured an image of the athlete. However, fitness athlete Kayla Itsines is an exception, as she is only featured in 35% of the photos posted to her account. As such, photos 1.0 -1.2, taken from her account, were representative of stereotypical weight-loss clinic client’s before-and-after photos. These before-and-after client photos comprised the majority of the images on Itsine’s Instagram account. While photos that did not feature the athlete were not considered for data collection, Itsines’ is
featured in few of her posted photos, an anomaly in comparison to the other athletes considered for analysis and deserves mention here.

**Sample Images: Fitness Athletes**

**Figure 1.0: Kayla Itsines Sample Image 1**

Categorization: Image is not part of data set for content analysis, however represents a majority of photos posted by Kayla Itsines.
Figure 1.1: Kayla Itsines Sample Image 2

Categorization: Image is not part of data set for content analysis, however represents a majority of photos posted by Kayla Itsines.

Figure 1.2: Kayla Itsines Sample Image 3

Categorization: Image is not part of data set for content analysis, however represents a majority of photos posted by Kayla Itsines.
Figure 1.3: Kayla Itsines Sample Image 4

Categorization: full body shot, passive, sexualized

Figure 1.4: Kayla Itsines Sample Image 5

Categorization: Head and Torso Shot, Passive, Sexualized
Figure 2.0: Emily Skye Sample Image 1

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized

Figure 2.1: Emily Skye Sample Image 2

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized
Figure 2.2: Emily Skye Sample Image 3
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized

Figure 2.3: Emily Skye Sample Image 4
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Head and Torso Shot, Passive, Sexualized
Figure 2.4: Emily Skye Sample Image 5

Categorization: Head Shot, Passive, Sexualized

Figure 3.0: Massy Arias Sample Image 1

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 3.1: Massy Arias Sample Image 2
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active

Figure 3.2: Massy Arias Sample Image 3
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 3.3: Massy Arias Sample Image 4
Categorization: Head Shot, Passive,

Figure 3.4: Massy Arias Sample Image 5
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 4.0: Jen Selter Sample Image 1
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized

Figure 4.1: Jen Selter Sample Image 2
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized
Figure 4.2: Jen Selter Sample Image 3

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active

Figure 4.3: Jen Selter Sample Image 4

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Group Photo
Figure 4.4: Jen Selter Sample Image

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized

Sample Images: Competitive Athlete

Figure 5.0: Lindsey Vonn Sample Image 1

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 5.1: Lindsey Vonn Sample Image 2

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive

Figure 5.2: Lindsey Vonn Sample Image 3

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 5.3: Lindsey Vonn Sample Image 4

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive

Figure 5.4: Lindsey Vonn Sample Image 5

Categorization: Fully Body Shot, Active
Figure 6.0: Brittney Griner Sample Image 1
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active

![Image](image1.jpg)

Figure 6.1: Brittney Griner Sample Image 2
Categorization: Head and Torso Shot, Group Photo, Active

![Image](image2.jpg)
Figure 6.2: Brittney Griner Sample Image 3
Categorization: Head and Torso Shot, Active

Figure 6.3: Brittney Griner Sample Image 4
Categorization: Head Shot, Sexualized
Figure 6.4: Brittney Griner Sample Image 5
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive, Sexualized

Figure 7.0: Danica Patrick Sample Image 1
Categorization: Head Shot, Group Photo, Passive

Figure 7.1: Danica Patrick Sample Image 2
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active

Figure 7.2: Danica Patrick Sample Image 3

Categorization: Head Shot, Group Photo, Passive
Figure 7.3: Danica Patrick Sample Image 4
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active

Figure 7.4: Danica Patrick Sample Image 5
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 8.0: Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 1
Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive

![Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 1](image1)

Figure 8.1: Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 2
Categorization: Head and Torso Shot, Active, Group Photo

![Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 2](image2)
Figure 8.2: Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 3
Categorization: Head and Torso Shot, Active

Figure 8.3: Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 4
Categorization: Group Photo, Full Body Shot, Active
Figure 8.4: Rhonda Rousey Sample Image 5

Categorization: Full Body Shot, Passive
Chapter 3: Analysis

The first section of this thesis examined how female fitness and competitive athletes self presented their bodies on Instagram, and the nature of the responses to that content. In this section, I analyze the trends outlined in Chapter 2 (e.g., how often fitness or competitive athletes posted sexualized or passive images, and how often comments were coded as sexual, or positive, or appearance-related, etc.) in order to generate themes and situate this content within the wider social contexts of women’s bodies in sport and physical activity. Akin to traditional representations of sportswomen, I argue that the primary focus of the discourse is on the body as an object to be looked at and responded to sexually, rather than the body as a functional performer in the sport. In this framework, female athletes are women first and athletes second, with much of the social discourse on Instagram focused on their bodies, whether negatively or positively. I also discuss how public comments reveal the degree to which sport and physical activity narratives have been subsumed by the beauty discourse wherein health, beauty, and physical activity discourse are treated as interrelated. I argue that social media provides an ‘authentic feel’ that makes consumers perceive the content to be more relatable and certain physiques more attainable, despite the reality that achieving these physiques may not be. Further, I discuss that the comments on the posted photos are instructive in that they provide insight into how the public makes sense of women’s bodies in sport, health, nutrition and fitness as part of a wider discourse on the narrow confines of beauty culture, as mapped onto sports. To address the aforementioned arguments I will use several selected comments and images as examples indicative of these wider themes on women’s bodies in sport and physical activity.
Social media sites such as Instagram have changed the ways in which athletes can interact with their fans. Instagram provides a platform by which athletes can present themselves where they can curate the message they want to send to the public. As I discuss in my literature review, social media also gives a voice to those who once may have been underrepresented or altogether neglected by traditional media sources. As I ask in Chapter 1 and examine in more detail in this analysis, if women had more autonomy to shape their own media content, would we see narratives of women’s bodies that differ from traditional representations of sportswomen or more of the same? What kind of content would the athletes from my two sub-groups (fitness and competitive) produce, and how would the public engage with that content? As I discuss in this chapter, my results reiterate that Instagram is a space where varying discourses on women’s bodies in sport can coexist, albeit dominant discourses remained consistent with traditional representations of sportswomen in sports media.

**Perpetuating Traditional Representations of Sportswomen’s Bodies**

My content analysis revealed that fitness athletes more often posted photos on social media that remained congruent with the passive and sexualized representations of women found in traditional media, particularly when compared to the images posted by the competitive athletes. Posting passive imagery is congruent with narratives around beauty and conformity; for the fitness athletes, their bodies’ physical appearance is their brand and a promotional tool to encourage the public to subscribe to their fitness plans and advice. Jen Selter’s entire empire, for example, rests on public adoration for her derriere. As Selter herself has said, “when I first started posting photos I never thought
my butt would be this sensation or the most known butt on Instagram these days […] I didn’t expect to have this many followers being inspired and motivated, people all around the world so it’s all new to me.” The fanfare that Selter receives for her derriere reinforces the idea that the public’s primary focus is not on Selter as a woman in fitness, but a body to be looked at, aspired to, and consumed via the purchase of fitness plans and products. This fanfare Selter receives also reinforces compartmentalized views on women’s bodies, reducing Selter to breasts, buttocks and thighs which depersonalizes and objectifies Selter and coincides with traditional representations of women’s bodies in sport media.

Further, there was also a strong correlation between the number of likes, followers, shares, and other indicators of popularity, with the fitness athletes being generally more popular in that respect than the competitive athletes. Moreover, the athlete with the highest average of sexualized images (Jen Selter) was the most popular across both groups. Photos posted by athletes containing sexualized content garnered significantly more engagement with other Instagram users than content that was not sexualized. For example, a photo of Danica Patrick posed from behind with three friends in bikinis at the beach (Figure 9.0) received 10,800 likes and 564 comments. These numbers form a stark contrast to the average number of likes and comments she receives on other, less sexualized photos. Patrick received an average of 5081 likes and 113 comments across all her sampled photos, less than half the likes received on the photo in which she is posed at the beach with friends.
However, increased popularity in the form of likes and comments only applies when the body in question aligns with popular norms on beauty and femininity, as “women who appear heterosexually feminine are privileged over women perceived as masculine.”\textsuperscript{142} As Holliday and Hassard\textsuperscript{143} have noted, “different bodies are afforded differential value in comparison to the ideal feminine body; for example, Black, queer, and disabled coding of bodies are considered inferior to this heterosexual, White ideal.” In other words, when alternative body types to the white ideal are presented, they are denigrated by both the media and its consumers and these alternative types challenge expectations of femininity in sport. Such has been the case with Britney Griner who happens to be a Black athlete. Griner’s ‘masculine’ appearance has been the subject of controversy in traditional sports media; in 2013, Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA’s Dallas Mavericks, considered drafting Britney Griner.\textsuperscript{144} He told ESPN, “If she's the best on the board, I will take her […] You never know unless you give somebody a chance.”\textsuperscript{145} Cuban’s remarks spurred a “cesspool of misogynistic and transphobic ("she's a he!") comments about Griner”\textsuperscript{146} on ESPN’s Twitter feed.\textsuperscript{147} Professional tennis player Serena Williams is subject to similar treatment - her muscular physique has been used as grounds to question her gender. As Erika Nicole Kendall notes\textsuperscript{148}, in 2014, “a high-ranking Russian tennis official snarkily referred to Serena and her sister Venus as ‘the Williams brothers.’” Similarly, Brittany Slatton has explored “how whites have constructed black features, including body shape, facial features, and hair as the dyadic opposite of white features.” She explained further that “because femininity is heavily rooted in the woman’s physical body, what is defined as a beautiful body becomes the mark of femininity, and that beautiful body is rooted in a white woman norm.”\textsuperscript{149} This exclusion
of black women from the definition of beauty, and subsequently hegemonic femininity has created cultural narratives from which black athletes such as Griner or Williams find it impossible to extricate themselves, despite how they self-present on Instagram. Moreover, as Susan K. Cahn has noted, black women’s entry and achievements in masculine sports have further distanced black female athletes from definitions of femininity. In this framework then, Griner’s status as a strong competitor and black female athlete become coded as masculine, as demonstrated by many comments on her posted photographs.

How other users view Griner’s Instagram account is exemplary of these assumptions of the black female body as more masculine. Many of Griner’s posts have public comments wherein the commenters question her gender and subject her to online slander. The following comments were collected from a topless photo of Griner posing with her back to the camera, and an image in which she poses nude holding a basketball (Figures 9.1a and 9.1b).

dixhi_q commented: “Ok but at least tell us you’re gender so we can stop guessing”

haddixhha commented: “wtf are you a guy or a girl?”

chanceyork commented: “She’s a girl right?”

ant_valentine3 commented: “Girl? Or man?”

king_davis24 commented: “She’s a girl? Ew but that wingspan tho she can dunk for real”

Congruent with historical representations of women in sport and black women more generally, Griner is considered to be “too masculine.” Consequently, the source of her
excellence in sport is attributed to her alleged masculinity, which reinforces her position outside traditional gender norms and casts her as socially abhorrent. Kate Fagan has characterized women’s basketball as a “Catch-22, because what these critics seemingly want is to watch female ballers who can athletically rival the men -- but in the bodies of swimsuit models […] Women's basketball is maligned for not being as athletic as the men's game, but as women become more athletic, these players are often labeled unfeminine, and therefore unwatchable.”151 In this framework then, Instagram comments related to Griner’s perceived nonconformity to hegemonic norms serve to reify cultural assumptions around femininity, and black womanhood in particular. The comments’ primary focus was not on her skill, but instead attacked her identity based on her race, appearance, and lack of traditionally feminine attributes. As a black female athlete, Griner has been tasked not only with negotiating being a woman in sport, but also has faced intense scrutiny for not adhering to the ideals of whiteness and heterosexuality I’ve outlined previously.

It is important to note that Griner has received comments that were coded as positive and sexualized; however, of all athletes considered for data collection, she received the least number of comments in this category. Griner also received the highest average of negative, appearance-related comments out of all athletes considered for data collection (see Raw Data in Appendix 1.0). The negative comments that Griner received differ from those of the rest of the athletes in that while all the athletes had comments implying they were unattractive, only comments on Griner’s posts suggest that she is not actually a woman. By comparison, when the other athletes (both fitness and competitive) receive negative appearance-related comments, they were still considered by commenters
to be women. On one of Jen Selter’s photos (Figure 9.3), she was described by only_football_rockz as not pretty, but this assessment did not make any references to masculinity or maleness: “idk her face isn’t actually that great but her body is good.”

Massy Arias received a similar comment on Figure 9.4. The commenter characterizes her abdominal muscles as “too strong,” which has the implication that they could be considered as unfeminine, but again, there was no overt reference to masculinity, or a challenge to her gender:

immortal6788@msinspirationalstar noted: “she looks yummy but her abs are too strong she need to chill”

st_nicholas84 commented “her abs looking like a windows logo is a bit too much. …not a fan”

In Figure 9.5, Danica Patrick is considered to be “cavemanish.” While this negative descriptor could be interpreted as masculinizing the athlete, it’s important to note that the observation is restricted to her face, and does not question her gender in the same ways that commenters did with Griner:

jashby91 commented: “Danica’s face looks cavemanish”

These comments can be considered illustrative of how the above athletes, although perceived as unattractive, continued to be perceived as women. Further, they continued to be representative of how commenters are primarily focused on athlete’s body and appearance rather than their skill, and reinforcing the narrow margins for beauty female athletes and women in general are perpetually expected to navigate.

Because the fitness models on Instagram need to be perceived as attractive as part of their business model, a more instructive comparison would be between Griner and
Olympic alpine ski racer Lindsey Vonn. Despite being an athlete who competes in a traditionally masculine sport, as a white woman with blonde hair and small, narrow facial features, Vonn more successfully embodies contemporary ideals of beauty and feminity. She received the following comments on a photo in which she is posed in a bikini doing exercises at the beach (Figure 9.2):

jpecie commented: “Your beautiful Lindsay”

emez24 commented: “those thighs 😘 @chomchird”

carp8dm commented: Wow Super Sizzling HOT! 🔥🔥🔥

In a stark contrast from the negative public response to images of Griner, comments on Vonn’s photo are generally positive, albeit focussed on her physical appearance. She remains the object of a heavily-sexualized gaze. Responses to Vonn’s photo suggest they more readily accept her body and more germane to this study – deem it normative and sexually attractive. Significantly, Vonn was selected to model in the 2016 Issue of *Sports Illustrated*’s Swimsuit Edition, an issue of the magazine that purportedly caters to a dominant readership of heterosexual men. The *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition’s primary discourse positions female athletes mainly as beautiful objects. While they may be considered for inclusion in the issue because they are athletes, the magazine also has a long history of superceding their athleticism with sexuality both when selecting which athletes to photograph, and determining how they will be represented in the images. This lengthy history of replacement suggests that traditional representations of women’s bodies in sport and physical activity, where bodies align with current beauty and femininity standards, continues to be as palatable on social media as it
is as in traditional media. In line with historical representations of women’s bodies in sport, the women are either overtly sexualized to continue to secure their status as women or, like Griner, cast as deviant despite their best efforts, a characterization which still serves to solidify the continuing stranglehold the white heterosexual ideal on public discourse around women’s bodies.

In general, Instagram observation was most concerned with commenting on the athletes’ appearances, suggesting that value is placed on the women’s appearance first and their abilities second. However, image content demonstrating athletic ability was more likely to provoke responses related to skill and athletic performance. Competitive athletes such as Rousey, Griner, Vonn, and Patrick who posted images of being in action in their sports elicited skill and performance-related responses, suggesting that Instagram has some potential to act as a space for change; or, at the very least, can create a dialogue that negotiates between dominant and underrepresented presentations of sportswomen’s bodies. This space for negotiation confirms Instagram as a potential means by which to present alternate narratives around sportswomen’s bodies that traditional media tends to omit.

Fitness and competitive athletes also received nearly equal amounts of comments with a sexual content, suggesting that regardless of how the athletes self-present their bodies, they are still perceived sexually. Regardless of the athletes’ own intentions behind posting their images, they ultimately cannot control how their bodies are perceived. As I argue above, this ongoing sexualization of images of women has been ingrained in our society, and female athletes are not exempt from participation (willing or unwilling) in this longstanding paradigm. Women are understood as bodies first and
human beings second, a viewpoint that only serves to perpetuate the dehumanizing idea that women’s bodies are objects to be viewed, sexualized and consumed.

Figure 9.0 – Danica Patrick

Figure 9.1a – Britney Griner

Figure 9.1b – Britney Griner

Figure 9.2 – Lindsey Vonn
Women as ‘Women’ First, Athletes Second

Comments coded as Skill Related and Inspirational and Congratulatory (where skill/performance were noted) were nearly exclusive to the competitive athletes. These athletes received both praise and admonition for their athletic performances. Some Instagram users wrote comments that were specifically related to the photos while others used the posted photos to air grievances that happened unrelated to the posted photos. For example, commenters discussed Ronda Rousey’s November 14th, 2015 loss to Holly Holm on photos posted several weeks prior to the fight. While positive comments were more common to the competitive athletes, the negative comments they did receive revealed that the perceived poor performance was a result of the athlete’s femininity. Attributing poor performance to gender creates a double standard wherein the degree to which the athlete adheres to ideals of beauty and femininity means she cannot be taken seriously as an athlete. For example, Danica Patrick has received the following comments on various photographs:
racerxt commented: “She just doesn’t have the stamina and strength for this, stick to yoga there are no winners or losers there at least”

grayghost8179 commented: “If she put as much effort into racing as she does posting selfies she might win a race.”
easyale46 commented: “poor performance due to her inability to deal with various conditions and lack of aggressiveness and strength required to be successful”

willbranham83 commented: “If you concentrated on driving as much as your handstands and yoga you might finish higher than 30th.”
ericthrockmorton commented: “Would really like to see Danica buckle down and really really put forth an effort to win a race separate from distractions and posing pretty for the camera”

In the commenters’ opinions, Patrick was considered to be an unsuccessful athlete because she lacked strength, stamina, and aggressiveness, all considered to be traditionally masculine qualities. She is further characterized as frivolous for being more concerned about yoga and ‘taking selfies’ than NASCAR racing. This lack of credibility evokes the treatment given to Janet Guthrie – the first woman to compete in the Indianapolis 500 and Daytona 500 in 1977– and countless other women in sport. Guthrie received comments such as “After 40 laps, Guthrie won’t be able to steer a car,” and “Indy racing is too demanding physically for women,” from fellow male competitors and NASCAR fans alike. As I discussed in Chapter 1, women in sport have had to fight almost perpetually against the dominant narratives linking femininity and fragility as a means by which to exclude women from athletic competition. As such, the comments on
Patrick’s photo are congruent with the idea that women are not competent enough to compete in men’s sports on the grounds of fragility. Further the comments Patrick receives aligns with research by Jay Coakley that suggests when women in sport and physical activity fields exhibit poor performances, they are judged more harshly than male athletes, which reifies the notion that sport is a traditionally masculine space.

In the case of Ronda Rousey, her perceived lack of femininity resulted in negative comments about her performance and attitude, further elucidating the narrow path female athletes must tread to be taken seriously as competitors, as well as women. For example:

jaycebda commented: “maybe if she wasn’t such a loudmouth she wouldn’t be in this position. ZIP those lips! Ronda don’t you know how to play nice? ”

“her arrogance is so UGLY. what guy would want to deal with that? What happened to being nice? Karma’s a 🐶”

je_suis_jorge commented: “It’s about time someone puts her in her place”

The first comment on Figure 9.6 calls for Rousey’s silence, and used the term ‘loudmouth’ to describe her behavior. Her lack of submissive behaviour has been well-documented in sports media and exemplified in headlines such as, “Rashad Evans on Ronda Rousey’s ‘arrogance’: ‘It was kind of disgusting” and “Rousey’s History of Arrogance Caused Widespread Backlash After UFC 207 Loss.” While public criticism for arrogance and “unsportsmanlike” behaviour is not new for male and female athletes alike, what separates Rousey’s criticism from negative comments received by the other athletes on Instagram is that Rousey became entangled with cultural narratives around what it means to be a proper female, which often includes adhering to submissive behaviours such as meekness, compliance, and silence. Rousey’s “arrogance” violates
these norms, and draws public ire. There is extensive scholarly research that has
examined the links between femininity and silence.¹⁶¹¹⁶²¹⁶³ This research has focused
both on how women self-silence in coded-masculine spheres such as politics and business
from lack of confidence, a lack of encouragement, as well as having to navigate the
gender gap in speaking behaviours between men and women.

Women who adopt more masculine speaking behaviours are subject to both
public praise and scrutiny concurrently.¹⁶⁴ The first comment on Rousey’s photo is
representative of this type of public scrutiny, where Rousey’s perceived masculine
bravado is viewed negatively. The commenter was of the opinion that Rousey needs to be
‘nicer.’ Niceness is reiterated in the second comment as well, with Rousey’s behaviour
further characterized as ‘ugly.’ Rousey became implicated in a common trope for
female athletes – one in which engaging in stereotypically masculine behaviours evokes
concern for the athlete’s ability to attract a heterosexual partner. This hearkens back to the
historical narratives around motherhood and fragility, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, with
reproduction positioned as the primary role of all women.¹⁶⁵ Drawing further on the idea
of niceness as a performative aspect of femininity, Penelope Eckert and Sally
McConnell-Ginet¹⁶⁶ have argued that “women and girls avoid direct conflict and
specialize on being nice. They orient towards empathy and intimacy with care for others
the top priority. They are cooperative and polite” Politeness and conflict avoidance has
long been aligned with Western conceptions of femininity, yet there is very little research
to suggest that women are inherently reluctant to engage in direct conflict and much to
suggest that this is culturally-conditioned behaviour.¹⁶⁷ Ironically, comments on Rousey’s
photos demanding niceness appeared to misunderstand the function of public antagonism
as part of staged “feuds” in UFC fighting. Contentious interactions between combatants creates suspense and increased consumption and viewership.\textsuperscript{168}

The last comment Rousey receives on her photo desires to ‘put in her place.’ While the comment could be considered as participating in the feud-aspect of UFC publicity and promotions, its placement alongside other comments that expressed dislike for Rousey’s arrogance can still be contextualized within gender role expectations. What intrigued me about this idea of “place” was not necessarily whether this comment was warranted or not, based on her behaviour, but that the language itself expressed another common trope that women are subjected to as part of a wider framework of oppression. Putting a woman “in her place” threatens punitive measures against women who transgress the social and cultural boundaries of femininity to ensure women’s compliance with gender roles and expectations.

The comments that Griner, Rousey and Patrick receive dictating the fine lines they must negotiate between the social construction of ‘woman’ and ‘athlete’ are also representative of the ‘double-bind’ that female athletes and women alike experience in daily life. Double bind, refers to the idea that no matter what decision or action the female makes, she is scrutinized for it, otherwise known as a ‘no-win’ scenario.\textsuperscript{169} For example in the case of Rousey, as a UFC athlete she is expected to both verbally antagonize and physically fight her opponents, however is scrutinized for her lack of femininity when she successfully embodies her role as athlete. Thus, this concept of the ‘double bind’ is rooted in the longstanding constructions of what it means to be masculine, feminine and an athlete, wherein the construction of woman is oppositional to the construction of man and athlete.
Yet, for every negative comment the athletes received, whether it was skill-related (e.g., Patrick), behavior-related (Rousey), or appearance-related (e.g., Griner), fans were quick to argue with detractors. In these arguments, Instagram users disagreed on a number of topics. Most notably however, the debates for both competitive and fitness athletes were situated around the athletes’ physical appearances. For every negative appearance-related comment, several supporters counter-claimed that the athlete was ‘beautiful’, ‘strong,’ ‘sexy’ or a ‘good’ person. The nature of these arguments supports the notion that Instagram can be considered a space for negotiating changing perceptions of sportswomen in media, as well as provided insight into the different ways Instagram users engaged with the content. Categorizing comments thematically reveals that Instagram users interacted with the athletes in a number of ways: to gain information on health, fitness, fashion, and photo contexts; to debate related topics with others; and to share the content with other Instagram users via the app’s internal sharing function. In particular, in the next section, I address (a) the implications of seeking health and fitness information from the athletes and what this says about who the public trusts as authorities in health and fitness; and (b) how the perceived authenticity of the athletes’ posted content has implications for how health and fitness has been consumed.

Authorities on Health and Fitness

Unlike the competitive athletes, who received mainly performance-related comments, the fitness athletes almost exclusively received comments seeking health, nutrition, and fitness advice. This suggests that the fitness athletes are considered to be authorities on these topics. This is perhaps a result of the perception of fitness athletes as
an ‘everywoman,’ particularly in contrast to the competitive athletes. The very fact that
the competitive athletes contest with one another on a world stage reinforces the notion
that they are somehow superhuman in a way that the fitness athletes are not. Moreover,
the competitive athletes are positioned as having dedication, or even a calling, to their
sport, well beyond that of the fitness athletes, let alone the general public. However, in
their self-presentation, the fitness athletes also play an active role in presenting
themselves as the ‘everywoman.’ In other words, the fitness athletes use impression
management to make their presentations seem ‘authentic’ and therefore more attainable.
For example Emily Skye posts unposed images of herself to show the role camera angles,
body position and lighting can change how the body appears. In this, Skye’s posts read
as though she is more relatable. However, the Instagram accounts of the fitness athletes
also explicitly function to promote their brand and sell their fitness products, such as
clothing or fitness routines. In this framework, their business model depends on
cultivating the impression that they are authorities on health and fitness.

One thing the fitness athletes do that the competitive athletes do not, is to position
themselves as authorities on health and fitness by selling fitness in the form of prescribed
workout plans, supplements, clothing, and other fitness-related products. These ideas
combined can explain why the public seeks information on health and fitness from the
fitness athletes compared to the competitive athletes. When we take into consideration
the images the athlete’s post in conjunction with the associated comments it becomes
evident that public discourse around what it means to be ‘healthy’ is often messy, with
health conflated with a toned appearance and body weight. This conflation occurs
regardless of the degree to which the fitness athlete espouses beauty ideals disguised as
health concerns. Emily Skye, for instance, is an advocate for “health at every size” (HAES), a movement rooted in body acceptance. Skye sheds light on how individuals on Instagram employ impression management strategies to present the ‘best versions’ of themselves. As the caption for Figure 2.3 Skye wrote,

_Just because someone is "slender" or "toned" or "muscly" or "curvy" or whatever else doesn't mean they're healthy or happy. Don't try to be like anyone else - just aim to be healthy. Stop looking at other people and comparing yourself with them then feeling down because you don't look like them. Stop beating yourself up for not being perfect. Nobody is perfect and everyone is beautiful in their own way. Learn to love and accept yourself and always aim to be YOUR best._

Comments responding to Skye’s assertions suggest that response to Health at Every Size discourses are mixed, where some comments concur with Skye, while others continue to situate body appearance as the primary signifier of health:

kayla_raquel commented: “You’re such an inspiration!!! Your body is goalsss! I want to be toned and healthy like you!“Your message is always on point! You're absolutely stunning, and it's enhanced by your positive message to everyone about our bodies. Such a shining light and big heart!!”

chrysa_geo_ commented: “Can you post an ab workout / what you regularly eat to keep/ get a flat and toned stomach?? My goal is to get a toned stomach so I can be healthy like you!!”
Comments in general on fitness athlete’s posts also suggested that exercise and diet are seen as a means by which to sculpting their bodies and conform to aesthetic norms to reap the benefits of catering to the male gaze, more so than as a source of enjoyment or to improve strength and skill:

shereayford commented: “LOVE that you offer vegan meal plan options, how quickly do you think I will lose weight following them??”

11rhiannon11 commented: “just wondering what kind of workouts or exercises you do specifically for love handles? Thanks!”

saragalvis commented “Can you tell me some exercises for toning legs and butt??”

izzy.clem commented: “OKAY @morgan.hecker I’m so excited now! Starting today I’m going to have salads for lunch! Her abs are goals!!”

Confusing the issue, fitness athletes themselves also posted content with contradictory messaging. Kayla Itsines, for example, has advocated publicly for HAES and loving your body, and yet her workout plans are called “Bikini Body Guides,” or BBG. Further, Itsine’s Instagram feed is primarily comprised of before-and-after photos of her clientele, as her approach to building her brand is not through photos of herself, but of other people who have achieved their desired fitness results, presumably by adhering to her diet and exercise plans.

While photos that did not include the athletes were not central to my research, Itsines’s lack of personal photos was markedly different from the other athletes researched and deserves special mention here. Paul Waltzlawick et al. have noted that, “activity or inactivity, words or silence all have message value.” Akin to a fermata in
music, which signifies a hold, stop or pause between measures, the absence of Itsines’s personal photos is revealing, by inference. Itsines herself only appeared in 35% of the sampled photos (comparatively, the average percentage of photos in which the athletes appear was 59%). The remainder of Itsines’ photos tended to be of healthy food, workout videos, and inspirational quotes related to health and fitness. Itsines built her business empire on these persuasive before-and-after photos that showcased real people and their weight loss results from using her program. Itsines referred to these women as being part of “Kayla’s Army”, because they constitute the primary means by which she promotes her alleged expertise and her brand.

Of interest to my analysis is the conflict between the individual messages posted by Itsines’ on her Instagram account. In some posts, she promoted loving yourself and your body in its current state. Yet she still promoted fitness and health, with the client photos implying these women’s bodies needed to be improved upon for not adhering closely enough to beauty and femininity norms. Further her clients’ success reinforced ideas that beauty, social acceptance, and ultimately happiness can be obtained through ongoing vigilance in terms of healthy food, diligence in exercise, and the continual consumption of Itsine’s fitness and health guides. However Itsines’s account raises the question of failure: how many women tried her program and did not achieve the same compelling body transformations? The omission of these alleged failure narratives shapes our understanding not only of Itsines and her brand, but health and fitness more broadly. Failure isn’t sexy, nor does it sell fitness programs. Further, the absence of failures on Itsines’s account has sent persuasive messages to her followers on the attainability of a particular body type, most often a narrow waist, with rounded backside.
Kayla shows many different bodies in her before-and-after posts, all of which reinforce ‘success’ in achieving their fitness goals with her programming. She included post-pregnancy bodies, women of varying ages, women who do not naturally adhere to the popular hourglass shape. The implication was that the programming has been effective in getting many different body types to adhere to contemporary standards, as embodied by Itsines herself as well as the other fitness models. While Itsines appears to show variance in body type on her Instagram page, her neglect to show any ‘failure’ narratives means viewers of her account are unable to see how the posted body “transformation” images differ from those who did not make the cut on her page.

The consumption of the fitness mindset and products was the main driving force behind the content that the fitness athletes posted on Instagram, and is a key difference in the motivations behind posting images between the two fitness and competitive athletes groupings. The fitness athletes used Instagram to build their clientele base, predicated on the cultural need to adhere to social norms of beauty, femininity and whiteness. Yet this adherence becomes doubly problematic as the perceived authenticity of the fitness athletes lends credibility to their heath and fitness messaging, no matter how contradictory. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Instagram can be seen as an extension of everyday life and can provide us with information around a wider understanding on perceptions of health, fitness, and nutrition in the context of social norms, femininity, and cultural conditioning. At the same time, the comments below represent discourses on health that are somewhat antithetical to the dominant discourses that conflate health with a toned and fit physique:
becausecrystalsaysso commented: “I love that you're one of the few IG fitness gurus who are in shape, obviously healthy, show plenty of workout videos and not tons of photos with her ass and boobs.”

lola_lma commented: “You inspire me every day! I am so grateful to have come across your feed!! I’ve struggled with body image and low self esteem and you have helped me embrace my body for what it is! ❤️”

The negotiations women must make as part of the process of navigating what it means to be “healthy” is instructive when reconciling how we have consumed and made sense of information on health and physical activity. The varying ways in which discourses on women’s bodies, health, and fitness are understood reinforces Instagram as a place wherein narratives on health, and women’s bodies in sport are simultaneously curated, presented, and contested. Moreover, the conceptualization of the fitness athlete as an authentic ‘everywoman’ deliberately promotes the illusion of attainability, fostering the belief that looking like the athlete is in fact a reasonable goal, despite evidence to the contrary.

**The Illusion of Attainability: Fitness Athletes as the “Everywoman” vs. Competitive Athletes as Superhuman**

In their comments on the athletes’ photos, Instagram users seem to be in agreement that the competitive athletes’ bodies are the production of not only superhuman dedication but also supreme genetics. Conversely, the fitness athletes’ bodies are framed as the product of healthy nutrition and exercise habits. This framing positions nutrition and exercise as a necessary and obligatory means by which to change physical
appearance. As such, the following comments provide an example of how the fitness athletes are perceived to be both normal and ideal and also how their bodies are positioned as feasible and attainable goals:

mrscastle31 commented: “@bbnriris love this girl she is so REAL! Just look at her!! She inspires me every day!!”

klachlan commented: “@claireswanston this is going to be us after 6 weeks!! Let’s do this!”

These comments evoke discourses on nutrition, health and physical activity and, further, suggest that the these women’s bodies are viewed as worthy goals. As I have argued, positioning the bodies of fitness models as universally achievable deliberately elides how the fitness models employ impression management to show the best versions of themselves, and also, how the same narrative of dedication and genetics could be applied to the fitness athletes and yet it is not. Downplaying the role of genetics in obtaining a particular body type and the dedication often required to attain a particular physique is a business strategy, given that the fitness athletes have a vested interest in attainability as a business model. Consumers would be less likely to purchase their products if they thought it would not work, or would be difficult.

As Alice Marwick has argued in *A Companion to Celebrity*, audiences presume there is little difference between the perceived and actual persona of the “micro celebrity,” a term whose definition refers to celebrities on social media and online. Interestingly there is a growing awareness that presentations of women’s bodies in traditional media such as television and magazines are rife with photo-editing and the use of body doubles, which are the more obvious tools of impression management. Yet
audiences have distinguished between the two forms of media, with social media being perceived as more authentic\(^\text{175}\) – that is, less obviously invested in impression management – than in print media. Moreover, popularity and celebrity status on social media are negotiated through the “ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona.”\(^\text{176}\)

For fitness athletes in particular, Instagram constitutes the perfect medium for performed intimacy, where the application’s functionality supports the editing and curation of images, along with the immediacy of having a posted image become instantly visible to other users. The instantaneous nature of Instagram allows the athletes to maintain an ongoing fan base in a diverse, evolving, and participatory landscape. Reifying the idea that beauty necessitates consumption, the fitness athletes have a vested interest in being perceived as relatable and their bodies attainable as part of their business model. Fitness consumers would be less inclined to purchase their workout and nutrition plans if they think they will not work or would be too difficult. Thus the perceived relatability and authenticity – as measured in the alleged absence of filtering or other impression management strategies – of the fitness athletes is reinforced via Instagram. Their increased status as fitness instructors encourages the sales of their workout plans and nutrition. This becomes problematic when discourses on health and fitness become conflated with a particular body type, subsequently excluding fatness, disability, and visible minorities from definitions and perceptions of fitness and health.

Reconciling rhetorics around women’s bodies in sport and definitions of health are ‘messy;’. There might be some pushback against the dominant discourses that position sportswomen as bodies first, and athletes second. Posted images coupled with
comments by other Instagram users suggests that sportswomen continue to be expected to negotiate the fine line between being ‘feminine’ enough while still retaining athletic credibility. While dominant discourses about the athletes’ bodies continued to situate these women within traditional gender roles, the varying conversations arising between Instagram users on the athletes’ photos continues to position Instagram as a possible avenue for social change as a venue for underrepresented discourses on women’s bodies to exist alongside salient ones. For example in the following Figure, 9.8, Emily Skye challenges beauty norms and reveals how individuals on Instagram employ impression management strategies (body position, camera angles, filters and lighting) to show the ‘best’ versions of themselves. Here, Skye encourages her followers to be critical of what they see on Instagram and to not compare themselves to others, but to focus on embracing themselves. Skye’s image shows how varying types of women’s bodies can coexist on Instagram and potentially help to expand our strict definitions of what women’s bodies ‘should’ be.
Figure 9.7 – Emily Skye

My 3 second transformation! 😄

- The left pic is with my tummy pushed out
- the right is with my tummy flexed. 😄

Your posture, angles, posing & lighting makes a big difference!
Next time you look at a photo of someone who looks “perfect” online or in a magazine remind yourself that the person in the photo doesn’t walk around looking like that! They’re posed, in their best angles with a tight or flexed tummy in “good” lighting. Nobody is perfect! Nobody has the perfect life, body, face, relationship or family etc. We’re all just imperfect humans.

Don’t strive for “perfection” or compare yourself to anyone else - just focus on being your best and embrace being YOU! 😘

23,999 likes
SEPTMBER 25, 2016

Add a comment...
Chapter 4: Summary and Conclusions

For a full understanding of the responses to the athletes’ posted images, we must acknowledge that what happens on Instagram does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it can be understood better as a growing part of the media landscape wherein traditional media sources, society, culture, and social media form a complex web where each aspect informs the others. Indeed, you would be hard pressed to turn on a sports or news channel and not find analysts discussing what an athlete said on social media, or inviting fans to comment on current sports events on their own social media pages.

However, the fact that Instagram’s user-generated content allows for underrepresented versions of the female body to be presented alongside those more commonly represented in the media suggests that Instagram, functioning as both stage and public sphere, has the potential to inform social change. This change is most evident in the debates among Instagram users, particularly those comments that push back against body shaming, or other online hate. The fact that normative representations of women’s bodies continue to be the most ‘popular’ on Instagram suggest that this social change is perhaps in its infancy, but is nonetheless has begun to gain traction. Even television and print media have seen the benefit of espousing body positivity, where companies like Aerie, Dove and Seventeen Magazine have discontinued editing their photos to modify the models’ bodies. Ashley Graham was recently the first plus-sized model to be featured on the cover of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition. Graham was also featured in Vogue, which is notorious for their policy requiring their cover models to adhere to size norms.
Recent body-positive\textsuperscript{180} campaigns on social media such as #Fatkini, #LoseHateNotWeight, emerging in the spring of 2015 and Love Your Body are widening the narrow confines of beauty as the exclusive province of thin, white women. Opening up beauty standards to be more inclusive might contribute a sense of growing optimism towards the allusive possibility of seeing women as more than just bodies and sexualized objects.\textsuperscript{181} An array of articles titled “Love Your Body” in popular magazines such as \textit{Cosmopolitan}\textsuperscript{182}, \textit{InStyle}\textsuperscript{183} and \textit{Marie Claire}\textsuperscript{184} Articles suggests that traditional fashion media appears to be taking cues from movements born on social media in order to remain relevant, as the dominant narratives are shifting. Social media sites such as Instagram provide the capacity for users to express a wide range of ideas, and anyone with access to the Internet and to Instagram can post and interact with the app’s content. In many ways Instagram has become an extension of people’s lives and thus has the potential to inform us on a myriad of aspects of social life. This opens up Instagram as a discursive space with a variety of avenues for research and exploration.

As I address in Chapter 1, academic research in this emergent area conceptualizes social media as both a public sphere and a stage for self-presentation. Smith and Sanderson\textsuperscript{185}, Lebel and Danylchuk\textsuperscript{186}, Burch\textsuperscript{187}, and Geurin-Eagleman and Burch\textsuperscript{188} have also employed Goffman’s framework to discuss how different genders self-present on social media to provide suggestions on how athletes can create brand identity and what kinds of presentations are the most marketable/consumable. Yet to date, little scholarly attention has been paid to analyze sub groups of women such as fitness or competitive athletes; to position presentations of sportswomen’s bodies in social media against typical presentations of women in sport; and/or to examine the conversations and
discourses that arise from social media forums. To address this gap, my research focused on eight female athletes to determine how these women displayed their own bodies on social media and how the public interacted with those images via the comments. My research focused on two sub groups of women – fitness and competitive athletes – to provide an understanding of how a variety of women post on social media. To analyze how the athletes were presenting their bodies, I performed a quantitative, content analysis on a selected sample of both groups images, adopting coding protocols from a number of previous researchers to create a hybridized coding protocol that both fit with my research and addressed shortcomings in previous protocols.

In order to determine how other Instagram users interacted with the images, I used a data-driven method used by previous researchers who performed an analysis on written text on social media. This method allowed for comment categorization to be developed and continually be refined throughout the process, instead of being predetermined prior to analysis. Positioned within the area of feminist cultural studies, categories were then analyzed for emergent themes. Six major categories with four underlying themes were addressed. Comments were categorized as Inspirational/Congratulatory, Skill/Performance-Related, Physical Appearance-Related, Information Seeking, Conversational and Miscellaneous. These categories were then subdivided to reflect accurately the content within. The categories themselves in addition to the frequency of comments in each category were instructive in that they lead to the development of four overarching themes: 1) women as bodies first, and athletes second; 2) women as “women” first and athletes second; and 3) the paradoxes between cultural constructions of femininity and athlete, with particular focus on the difference in
treatment between black and white athletes, and; 4) impression management and its role in reinforcing health and fitness as a consumable product.

Comment content was reminiscent of traditional representations of women’s bodies in sport and physical activity, where women must mediate how to be feminine enough, yet not too feminine, and masculine but not too masculine in order to be taken seriously as athletes. This forms an endless “no-win” negotiation between the constructions of “woman” and “athlete.” Further categorization of comments and comment type frequency provided information on how Instagram followers use the app to seek information on health, nutrition, and physical activity from the fitness athletes in particular. Because this information was solicited from the fitness athletes but not from the competitive athletes, this suggests the former individuals are considered to be authorities on these topics. I argue that the fitness athletes are trusted as authorities on these topics because they are seen as both authentic and also position themselves as self-positioned leaders of health and nutrition by marketing “health” to the public through nutrition and workout plans.

However, the comments also revealed that users are constantly renegotiating ideas on beauty, femininity, gender roles, and women’s bodies in sport, with varying understandings being presented on these topics. Some commenters and athletes alike supported body acceptance and produced content that suggests an understanding that Instagram is in part, theatrical, where images are tailored to reflect “better” versions of the athlete. Yet visual and written content also revealed that both athlete’s and commenters still hold misconceptions on health, nutrition and fitness, with these ideas around what it means to be healthy being conflated with weight and appearance.
Overall for fitness and competitive athletes, comments related to physical appearance were the most common, revealing how much discourses on sport, fitness, and nutrition have been subsumed into beauty discourses, where interest in exercise is to change one’s appearance, instead of developing new skills, strength training, or for the pure enjoyment of the activity.

In my research, I delimited my data set to observing the 100 most recent posted photographs as of October 25th, 2015. Given that my research questions ask how the athletes were displaying their bodies, both photos that did not include the athlete and videos were not considered for data collection. To gain an understanding how the public responded to these images I limited data collection to the first 5 comments per photo, where only comments written in English were considered for analysis. This allowed me to gain insight into what kinds of images were posted and how the public responded to them, without becoming overwhelmed by thousands of similar comments.

There are two obvious limitations to this research I would like to address. First, this research explored comment content, but not demographics behind who posted the comments. Thus, one possible avenue for future research may to be explore commenter demographics from a gendered perspective by gaining insight into how men and women interact with the posted images. A second limitation is that images were noted for presence of sexualization but the degree of sexualization was not addressed.

As Instagram constitutes a reflection of daily social life, there are a great deal of possible avenues for further research that my limitations precluded me from examining in this study. In my work, I analyzed how the public interacted with the presented images via photo comments; however, I did not gather information on the demographics of
commenters in order to understand “who” the public is in this case. As well it is possible for some images to be considered “more” sexualized than others, a form of interpretation described by Hatton and Trautner. Further research that engages with commenter demographics, measures the degree of sexualization, incorporates comments in languages other than English, and involves a wider scope either in terms of a larger sample size or a longitudinal study could provide a deeper understanding on the kind of content female athletes post and how audiences connect with that content. I also discussed how Instagram is a place for social change and proposed that this change is perhaps in its infancy. Research that follows this group of athletes or another group of female athletes over time may provide insight into whether this potential avenue of “social change” is optimistic or realistic.
END NOTES

2 Minor exception exists in antiquity where particular women were allowed to watch the Games for religious purposes (vestal virgins). Stephen G. Miller outlines a number of instances in antiquity where women did participate in sport or physical activity. For example in Sparta, women were involved in exercise but only insofar as to aid in childbirth with the goal of producing strong sons. See Steven G. Miller, Arete: Greek Sports from Ancient Sources (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 105-110.
5 Ibid
7 Sportsnet is a Canadian English-language television channel with an associated magazine and website owned by the Rogers Media division of Rogers Communications.
8 My experiences undoubtedly shape the ways in which I may approach and analyze information. While I cannot entirely separate my experiences from my work, I hope that you, the reader, conceptualize this not as bias or advantage, but as a lens, which colours my work and influences how I approach a set of information.
10 Note that I am making an assumption here that Instagram users have the ability to control their own content. It is possible that some high profile athletes may employ another to manage their social media accounts. However, the intimate nature of the photographs they post- photos relaxing in their homes, out for walks with their dogs, visiting with family and/or friends, or photos taken at events and posted in real time suggest that they manage their own accounts. It is also worth noting that Instagram does have a history of censoring women’s nipples and women’s periods, where women who have posted photos of their bare chest or of period stains are removed by Instagram. However, Instagram has since apologized for menstruation censorship. See Instagram apologises for deactivating photographer Harley Weir's account after pictures showing menstrual blood, by Heather Saul Thursday 8 September 2016. Independent. Date
Instagram also allows users to report content they deem inappropriate. Instagram then reviews the reported content and decides whether the content should be removed or not based on their “Community Guidelines.” See Instagram Help Center: Privacy and Safety Center – Community Guidelines. Date accessed November 12th, 2016. https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119?helpref=faq_content

13 It is not my intention to argue a definition for sport here. Rather I hope to show that as discussed by Young and Schneider, qualities associated with sport and the construction of the traditional athlete tend to align with the attributes of the traditional male rather than the traditional female. Following from Frank McBride, there is no single definition of sport and so it might be more appropriate to move towards a non-definition of sport. See Frank McBride, “Toward a Non-Definition of Sport,” Journal of Philosophy of Sport 2, no. 5 (1975): 4-11.
16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
23 In the late 18th century, women began to enter the sport of basketball. However the sport was completely modified to make the game more appropriate for female athletes. The court was divided into three sections, where players could not leave their prescribed section. Female basketball players were also expected to play the game in proper, modest, womanly attire – floor length dresses where only hands, neck and head were exposed.

In volleyball, you had to set the ball to yourself before passing to anyone else. See Kelly Belanger, *Invisible Seasons: Title IX and the Fight for Equity in College Sports* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017) 32.


not to be confused with Lindsey Vonn, an American downhill skier and a subject of this research


28 Ibid


30 Ibid


35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.


39 Ibid

40 Ibid.


Ibid.


Cahn notes that the AAU was a popular sports organization in the 1930’s that believed “unregulated sport posed physiological and moral dangers”. However she notes that the group also opposed popular protectionist policies that safeguarded women’s bodies in sport arguing that sport (under proper guidance) could strengthen women’s reproductive organs as a means to birth strong sons.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

61 By ‘traditional media sources’ I am referring to all sources of media that do not include social media, such as magazines, newspapers, television, internet sites etc.


68 Ibid


Upon a brief review some of the images featured on Instagram do appear on each of the athlete’s Twitter or Facebook accounts, however images posted on Twitter and Facebook will not be extensively reviewed.


Ibid


Ibid.


Ibid.


However it is important to note that content analyses do not “limit data extraction to quantitative measurement.” See Thomas Carney *Content Analysis*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), 25.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.
129 Ibid.
133 Ibid
136 Ibid.
138 An onomatopoeic representation of masturbation often used online.
141 Ibid.

147 Ibid


162 Ruth Simpson, Patricia Lewis, “An investigation of silence and a scrutiny of transparency: Re-examining gender in organization literature through the concepts of voice and visibility,” Human Relations, 58, no. 10 October 1, 2005. 1253-1275


167 Ibid.


170 Linda Bacon discusses “health at every size” (HAES) in her book Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight. HAES is a social movement that is aimed at body acceptance often through the rejection of dieting. Thus HAES programs often do not include weight loss as a primary goal.

171 It is perhaps also worth noting that these ‘best’ versions are also ones that most closely adhere to social norms on beauty.


175 Alice Marwick and Danah Boyd The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies 17 no.2 (2011): 139-158.

176 Ibid.


Body positivity, or 'body-positive' attitudes were initially used in anorexia treatment, but also have strong ties to the 'fat acceptance' and 'Health at Every Size movements. The key components of body positivity are to “learn how to uncover the messages that have influenced your relationships with your body, food and exercise, and develop a weight neutral, health-centered approach to self care and to become the authority on your own body by sorting out facts from distorted societal myths about health, weight and identity.” See Kaili Prins, “Here’s Why the Definition of body positivism isn’t up for Debate,” in Everyday Feminism, May 13, 2017. https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/05/body-pos-definition-undebatable/ (accessed February 10, 2018).


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England, Sport. *This Girl Can.*


Hoffman, Annette, Shannon Jette, and Patricia Vertinsky. "Skinerinas in the Olympics: gender, jsutice and gender politics at the local, national and international levl over the


**Instagram Sources***


**Historical Sources**


* Note Instagram sources include links to the personal Instagram pages of each athlete and include all content posted up to the current date in addition to the content sampled at the time of data collection. The instantaneous and dynamic nature of Instagram also means that the content has the potential to constantly change.
Appendix 1.0

Raw Data For Appendix

“Category Breakdown” refers to a detailed breakdown of 6 main thematic categories (Inspirational/Congratulatory, Physical Appearance Related, Skill/Performance Related, Information Seeking, Miscellaneous and Photos with Conversation). “Frequency” refers to how often a comment was designated into each category expressed as both a rational value and percentage. For example for Itsines, 6/175 total comments were designated as “Inspired by athlete’s skill,” or 3.43%. Five comments were sampled from each photo part of data collection. Thus 35 total photos would yield 175 total comments. Note that comment categorization was not mutually exclusive, where more than one theme could be present in the same comment.

Fitness Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kayla Itsines</th>
<th>Category Breakdown</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspirational/Congratulatory</strong></td>
<td>Inspired by athlete’s skill</td>
<td>6/175</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congratulate athlete on performance/competition</td>
<td>0/175</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>49/175</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>9/175</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Appearance Related</strong></td>
<td>Positive (i.e. beautiful, strong, fit, healthy, feminine, attractive)</td>
<td>117/175</td>
<td>66.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative (i.e. ugly, nasty, looks like a man, unattractive)</td>
<td>12/175</td>
<td>6.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual (i.e. hot, sexy)</td>
<td>56/175</td>
<td>32.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill/Performance Related</strong></td>
<td>Negative (i.e. not focused, poor performer, not skilled, should quit activity in question, condescension)</td>
<td>0/175</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive (i.e. skilled, excellent, great competitor, entertaining)</td>
<td>8/175</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
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<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Seeking</td>
<td>Information on health</td>
<td>61/175</td>
<td>34.86</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>21/175</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
<td>37/175</td>
<td>21.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where photo was taken or at what event</td>
<td>7/175</td>
<td>4.00</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Comments not represented in previous categories</td>
<td>19/175</td>
<td>10.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photos with Conversation</td>
<td>Conversation to gain information/answer questions</td>
<td>8/175</td>
<td>4.75</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conversations that were argumentative</td>
<td>12/175</td>
<td>6.86</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conversation that responds to a ‘share’</td>
<td>34/175</td>
<td>19.43</td>
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<th>Massy Arias Category Breakdown</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inspirational/</td>
<td>Inspired by athlete’s skill</td>
<td>4/190</td>
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<td>Congratulatory</td>
<td>Congratulate athlete on performance/competition</td>
<td>0/190</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>58/190</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>6/190</td>
</tr>
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<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>Positive (i.e. beautiful, strong, fit, healthy, feminine, attractive)</td>
<td>75/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related</td>
<td>Negative (i.e. ugly, nasty, looks like a man, unattractive)</td>
<td>9/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sexual (i.e. hot, sexy)</td>
<td>25/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill/Performance Related</td>
<td>Negative (i.e. not focused, poor performer, not skilled, should quit activity in question, condescension)</td>
<td>0/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive (i.e. skilled, excellent, great competitor, entertaining)</td>
<td>14/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Seeking</td>
<td>Information on health</td>
<td>72/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>8/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
<td>42/190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where photo was taken or at what event</td>
<td>13/190</td>
<td>1.58</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<td>Photos with Conversation</td>
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<td>Emily Skye</td>
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<td>0/325</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congratulate athlete on performance/competition</td>
<td>0/325</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>55/325</td>
<td>16.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>2/325</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Positive (i.e. beautiful, strong, fit, healthy, feminine, attractive)</td>
<td>234/325</td>
<td>72</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual (i.e. hot, sexy)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Positive (i.e. skilled, excellent, great competitor, entertaining)</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Information on health</td>
<td>78/325</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>27/325</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
<td>26/325</td>
<td>8.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where photo was taken or at what event</td>
<td>3/325</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>7/325</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Photos with Conversation
- Conversation to gain information/answer questions
  - Total: 8/325 (2.46%)
- Conversations that were argumentative
  - Total: 8/325 (2.46%)
- Conversation that responds to a ‘share’
  - Total: 16/325 (4.92%)

### Jen Selter Category Breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational/Congratulatory</td>
<td>Inspired by athlete’s skill</td>
<td>0/460</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congratulate athlete on performance/competition</td>
<td>0/460</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>170/460</td>
<td>36.96</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>0/460</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Appearance Related</td>
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<tr>
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<td>feminine, attractive</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18.04</td>
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<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>69/460</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
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<td>Comments not represented in previous categories</td>
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<td>1.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photos with Conversation</td>
<td>Conversation to gain information/answer questions</td>
<td>12/460</td>
<td>2.61</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Conversations that were argumentative | 10/460 | 2.17
Conversation that responds to a ‘share’ | 40/460 | 8.70

Competitive Athletes

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<tr>
<th>Ronda Rousey</th>
<th>Category Breakdown</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Inspirational/ Congratulatory</strong></td>
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<td>20/325</td>
<td>6.15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspired by athlete appearance</td>
<td>2/325</td>
<td>2.62</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>31/325</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>0/325</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category Breakdown</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversations that were argumentative</td>
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<td><strong>Danica Patrick</strong></td>
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<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>21/200</td>
<td>10.50</td>
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<td><strong>Physical Appearance</strong></td>
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<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
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<td>10.5</td>
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<td>%</td>
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<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
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<td>Lindsey Vonn</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Support for athlete</td>
<td>41/400</td>
<td>10.25</td>
</tr>
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<td>Physical Appearance</td>
<td>Positive (i.e. beautiful, strong, fit, healthy, feminine, attractive)</td>
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<td>Skill/Performance Related</td>
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<td>2.25</td>
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<td>Positive (i.e. skilled, excellent, great competitor, entertaining)</td>
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<td>Information on health</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on clothing/fashion</td>
<td>9/400</td>
<td>2.25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information on healthy diet</td>
<td>0/400</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Where photo was taken or at what event</td>
<td>10/400</td>
<td>2.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Comments not represented in previous categories</td>
<td>49/400</td>
<td>12.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photos with Conversation</td>
<td>Conversation to gain information/ answer questions</td>
<td>17/400</td>
<td>5.23</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conversations that were argumentative</td>
<td>12/400</td>
<td>3.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation that responds to a ‘share’</td>
<td>33/400</td>
<td>8.25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Erin Ratelle

Education

MA Candidate Sport History, the University of Western Ontario: September 2013 – Current

Graduated from the University of Western Ontario Bachelor of Arts Honors Specialization in Kinesiology with a Minor in Classical Studies: June 2013

Research and Teaching Experience

Lab Assistant at the Clinical Education Suite for Simulated Nursing Education: September 2010-April 2013

Experimental Interviewer for research conducted at the Richard Ivey School of Business, The University of Western Ontario: February 2011- March 2011

Teaching Assistant for Sport and Body in Western Culture Kinesiology 3363B at the University of Western Ontario January 2014 – April 2014

Teaching Assistant for Integrative Health Kinesiology 3325A/ Health Sciences 3025A at the University of Western Ontario: September 2013 – December 2013

Extracurricular Activities

Represented Canada at the ITU World Championships in Aviles, Spain for Duathlon: June 2016

Qualified for 2017 Team Canada for ITU World Championships

Varsity Track and Field athlete, The University of Western Ontario: 2008-2011

Member of Ontario Cycling Association (OCA) as a competitive road and mountain cyclist: 2012-Current

Conferences

Presented “Bodies We Want: Discourse Analysis ESPN's Body Issue” at the MacIntosh Conference, Queens University, January 2015.