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**MARKETING BRANDS, JUGGLING JARGON, AND COUNTERING
SPACE: SIX FITNESS ENTHUSIASTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH
EXERCISERS WITHIN INSTAGRAM'S FITNESS COMMUNITY**

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MARKETING BRANDS, JUGGLING JARGON, AND COUNTERING SPACE: SIX
FITNESS ENTHUSIASTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH EXERCISERS WITHIN
INSTAGRAM'S FITNESS COMMUNITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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New York

by

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ABSTRACT

MARKETING BRANDS, JUGGLING JARGON, AND COUNTERING SPACE: SIX FITNESS ENTHUSIASTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH EXERCISERS WITHIN INSTAGRAM'S FITNESS COMMUNITY

Sydney Elizabeth Denham

As of December 11, 2022, 791k users had utilized the hashtag #FitnessInfluencer on their Instagram content. A fitness influencer is a user on Instagram who has a large follower count and posts fitness-related content to their platforms. In all aspects, the fitness influencer is an enthusiast who contributes to the digital fitness community. This research examines the role that the fitness enthusiast plays within this community on Instagram.

Carmen Kynard's definition of literacy as something that we *do* rather than *have* inspired much of my thinking throughout this project. Also, Diana Bossio's research on journalists greatly informed my methodology for this research, in which I chose six enthusiasts of various identities on Instagram. By looking specifically at the literacy practices, rhetorics, and spaces that six enthusiasts utilize through their biographies, workout plans, and hashtags, I attempt to respond to the following question: What literacy practices and rhetoric are enthusiasts using to engage with the fitness community?

Driving questions for the content analyses include: how do fitness enthusiasts present themselves in their biographies?; how do the literacy practices, rhetoric, and multimedia content used by fitness enthusiasts fulfill their role in the mentor/mentee literacy relation with exercisers?; and how can the use of hashtags in a fitness enthusiast's caption create a counter-space that engages their literacy relation with exercisers?

Chapter 1 focuses on the biographies of these six fitness enthusiasts, and reveals their positionalities within the fitness community and their close connection with brands – both personal and public. Chapter 2 looks closely to the workout plans they offer and complicates the mentor/mentee literacy relation between enthusiasts and exercisers. Chapter 3 examines hashtags and raises awareness for underexplored hashtags in the community that create counter-spaces for marginalized folks in mainstream fitness. This research intends to explore and respond to the many literacy practices, rhetoric, and spaces that exist within the fitness community; with this, it discovers what may be necessary for a clearer vision of ways to imagine a more holistic, inclusive, and empowering fitness community.

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It has been an absolute *honor* to work with my advisor, Dr. Anne Geller. Thank you, Dr. Geller, for pushing me to be the thinker, researcher, writer, and scholar I am today. Without your help, I wouldn't even have had the courage to begin to think about this thesis. You pushed me to do research on what I am passionate about and made me realize that a thesis does not have to be about academia or about novels to be “academic.” Without you, I never would have embarked on this journey, and I will *forever* be grateful for all that you have done thus far in my career as a scholar. Thank you for being the supportive, caring, and amazing person that you are.

Dr. Latoya Sawyer, your impact on my research stems back to Fall 2021, when I enrolled in your Black Feminist Theory Course. Having only been in my second graduate-level course, I was frightened, but you crafted a class and space that made me leave that fear at the door every Monday evening. You truly fostered a warm, welcoming space, and I will hold onto my gratitude forever for all that you taught me as a scholar. Thank you for assisting me in my graduate studies.

To my colleagues, classmates, and cohort, who always reminded me that my work is valuable and encouraged me to keep pushing during moments of imposter syndrome: thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	<i>ii</i>
LIST OF FIGURES.....	<i>vi</i>
INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Enthusiast And The Exerciser On Instagram.....	3
Engagement And Relationships Over Instagram.....	4
Fitness Literacy On Instagram.....	7
Methodology.....	8
CHAPTER 1: MARKETING THEIR BRANDS: LITERACY PRACTICES WITHIN THE SIX ENTHUSIASTS’ BIOGRAPHIES.....	15
Massy Arias.....	18
Belinda Hicks.....	19
Erica Nangle.....	20
Janáe Michelle Holmes.....	22
Sophie Butler.....	24
Nkacy Douglas.....	25
Their/They’re Brands: Marketing As Engagement.....	26
For More Information: Emojis As Engagement.....	28
This Page Is For “You”: Second-Person Engagement.....	29
Joining The Fitness Community: Active Engagement.....	30
Conclusion.....	30
CHAPTER 2: ‘EMPTY PHRASES OF PERFORMANCE’: MIS-INSTRUCTION THROUGH THE WORKOUT PLAN.....	33
The Mentor/Mentee Literacy Relation.....	38
Belinda Hicks.....	42
Erica Nangle.....	44
Janáe Michelle Holmes.....	47
Sophie Butler.....	53
Nkacy Douglas.....	55
Rough Rhetoric Of The Fitness Community.....	58
Let’s Get Reel: Video Components Of The Plan.....	60
Save/Share/Try And Let Me Know: Asking For Engagement.....	62
Conclusion.....	64
CHAPTER 3: CRITICALLY COUNTERING THE MAINSTREAM: HASHTAG SPACES IN THE FITNESS COMMUNITY.....	67
Mainstream Fitness.....	70
The Counter-Space.....	75
Hashtag Hija De Cristo.....	77
Hashtag Asian Fitness.....	80
Hashtag Black Fitness.....	82

Hashtag Disability Pride.....	84
Hashtag LGBT Fitness.....	87
Fitness In Its Name.....	88
Interdisciplinary In Its Nature.....	90
Conclusion.....	92
CONCLUSION.....	96
Chapter Review.....	97
Engaging To Self-Perform.....	98
Practicing Both Roles.....	100
The Need For Critical Media Literacy.....	101
The Need For Social Media As A Site Of Research.....	101
Building Your Brand.....	102
APPENDIX A.....	104
APPENDIX B.....	105
REFERENCES.....	106

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Screenshot of @sydneydenham.fit biography, November 18, 2022.....	3
Figure 2: Screenshot of @massy.arias biography, October 6, 2022.....	19
Figure 3: Screenshot of @xoxobelinda_ biography, October 6, 2022.....	20
Figure 4: Screenshot of @ericananglefit biography, October 6, 2022.....	22
Figure 5: Screenshot of @thiscurvygirlsfitness biography, October 6, 2022.....	23
Figure 6: Screenshot of @sophjbutler biography, October 6, 2022.....	25
Figure 7: Screenshot of @nkacyfitness biography, October 6, 2022.....	26
Figure 8: Screenshot of a workout plan on @sydneydenham.fit, January 21, 2022.....	34
Figure 9: Word cloud of the captions including workout plans.....	36
Figure 10: Screenshot of @xoxobelinda_ workout plan: September 23, 2022.....	42
Figure 11: Screenshots of @ericananglefit workout plans: Post 1 (on the left), October 4, 2022; Post 2 (on the right), October 5, 2022.....	44
Figure 12: Screenshots of @thiscurvygirlsfitness workout plans: Post 1 (top left), September 15, 2022; Post 2 (top right), September 29, 2022; Post 3 (bottom row), September 30, 2022.....	47
Figure 13: Screenshot of @sophjbutler workout plan: October 5, 2022.....	53
Figure 14: Screenshots of @nkacyfitness workout plans: Post 1 (top left), October 1, 2022; Post 2 (top right), October 5, 2022; Post 3 (bottom left), October 6, 2022; Post 4 (bottom right), August 23, 2022.....	55
Figure 15: Word Cloud of the hashtags in this research.....	69
Figure 16: Screenshot of <i>The New York Post</i> headline and image from November 2, 2022 article.....	72
Figure 17: Screenshot of @iamchrissyking post on Instagram from November 7, 2022.....	73
Figure 18: Screenshot of @miriamfried post on Instagram from April 2022.....	73
Figure 19: Screenshot of the space of #hijadecristo on Instagram, November 8, 2022.....	80
Figure 20: Screenshot of the space of #asianfitness on Instagram, November 8, 2022.....	82
Figure 21: Screenshot of the space of #blackfitness on Instagram, November 8, 2022.....	84
Figure 22: Screenshot of the space of #disabilitypride on Instagram, November 8, 2022.....	87
Figure 23: Screenshot of the space of #LGBTfitness on Instagram, November 8, 2022.....	88
Figure 24: Pictures from the St. John’s University Fitness Center on September 28, 2022.....	91
Figure 25: Table showing the number of posts used with the analyzed hashtags as of November 8, 2022.....	92

INTRODUCTION

When my dance career came to an end in 2017, I craved the feeling that came with that movement. The freedom to move my body toward the goals *I* wanted to reach and most importantly, to move my body in the way that *I* wanted to move it not only myself but also in collaboration with fellow artists. The space of the dance classroom seemed unmatched; I thought that feeling was gone, a chapter closed. But, then I found similar feelings after getting my first gym membership at Planet Fitness. I was doing my exercises in counts of eight to the music coming through the headphones that filled my ears. I would even catch myself moving in sync with other people in the gym and catching the rhythm in the mirror. This feeling of movement is what initiated my passion and love for strength training. I never knew how much of an impact strength training had on my life until I started my research for this project in Spring 2022.

It was February 2022. I searched, re-searched, and searched again until I came to no conclusion on what route this project would take. Finally, my thesis advisor, Dr. Anne Geller, told me to think of the questions I have about the world around me. So, I began asking myself questions about the world around me – those only centered in academia. It took a couple of more meetings with my advisor for me to realize that when she said the world around me, she literally meant the world around me – even outside of the four walls of academia.

I had Dr. Geller that spring semester for a course on the teaching of writing, and it was this class that introduced me to taking risks in my research. For a roundtable assignment in this course, I found Mariah Wellmann's article published in *The*

Communication Review, “What it means to be a bodybuilder: social media influencer labor and the construction of identity in the bodybuilding subculture.”

You can do that in academia? I was hooked. I needed to know more about this kind of research, reading the world – the actual world – around me. Perhaps I was doing this the whole time in my academic career, but this time it felt different.

And so, my questions about the fitness community that were once on how to ‘do fitness’ turned into ‘what is fitness’. I thought about how I got to where I was in the fitness community, and my mind just kept going back to the influencers that I scrolled by everyday on my Instagram.

Do I define fitness by what I learned from these Instagram accounts?

It’s true: in 2017, my Google searches on exercising quickly turned into my following of fitness influencers on Instagram. From influencers to fitness brands, my Instagram became flooded with workouts, nutrition tips, transformation pictures, and way too many workout clothes for the money in my bank account. I was completely engulfed by the digital fitness community. Despite this flood of digital fitness content, my place in the fitness community online felt so different from the space in the gym.

What is it about the online fitness community that feels so distant from me?

Flash-forward a couple of years: in March of 2020, I struggled adjusting to the shift from the physical gym to the living room at my house. I was looking for anything to help find motivation to move my body. It started with taking my dog for longer walks everyday, but then that got so habitual to my routine that I got bored of it. It was not that I was bored of walking my dog, but I was bored of walking being my sole source of exercise.

Just like déjà vu, I was back to where I was in 2017: on Instagram. I was looking for tips on how to keep up with strength training when the equipment I used at the gym wasn't accessible. I was using laundry detergent that hadn't been opened yet, gallons of water from my kitchen closet, and sand bags that were holding down tarps in my backyard. At first, it was tiring trying to find new ways to do what I loved to do, but it eventually became what I looked forward to most everyday.

It was fun to think of all the different ways to work out when the gym wasn't open to go to. During the summer of 2020, I wanted to engage more with the fitness community through these ways of displaying how I adjusted to this shift. My nerves got the best of me and it took a whole year to build up the courage to create my own fitness Instagram account, but finally, in the summer of 2021, I did it.

My new role in the fitness community became [@sydneydenham.fit](#).

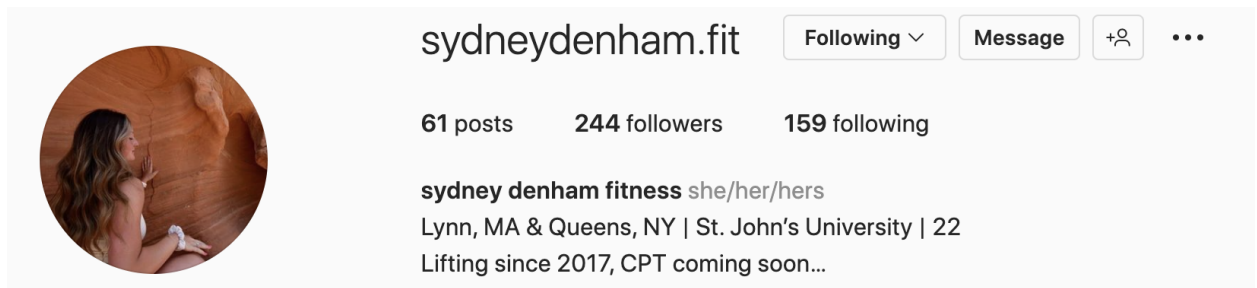


Figure 1: Screenshot of [@sydneydenham.fit](#) biography, November 18, 2022.

THE ENTHUSIAST AND THE EXERCISER ON INSTAGRAM

As of December, 11, 2022, 791k users were using or had used #FitnessInfluencer on their Instagram content. A fitness influencer is defined as a creator on Instagram who posts fitness-related content for a large following of folks. Sometimes this influencer position leads to the marketing of brands, monetary gain, and becoming an ambassador for particular industries. In all cases, fitness influencers are contributing to the digital community of fitness through the content that they post.

Despite the commonality of the term influencer, in this research, I exchange the term “influencer” for “enthusiast,” and the term “follower” for “exerciser.” I believe that a fitness enthusiast is always an influencer, based on their morals and care for the field of fitness. For this research, a fitness enthusiast is defined as a person who posts fitness-related content. “Enthusiast” attempts to strip an influencer from their micro-celebrity identity and brings in these Instagram users’ human-creator-artist relationships that occur behind, on, and beyond the screen. “Exerciser” strips the followers from their ‘following’ connotation; in other words, to use the term exerciser is to see members of the fitness community as more than just an admirer of enthusiasts, but also leaders of their own fitness journey.

The notion of breaking down the different names of the enthusiast and the exerciser resists the traditional power structure that exists between an influencer and their follower. Furthermore, it (re)centers the individual at the heart of their fitness journey by stripping the inherent power dynamics that come with the following of a micro-celebrity platform. My choice in doing so was to rid the influencer and follower from connotations that come with those names; this ensures that my research builds from a neutral standing on their relationship.

ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS OVER INSTAGRAM

Social media is a place for person-to-person engagement to occur; this is evident in its name containing the term “social,” which reveals a kind of networking that occurs over these media sites. Thinking of Instagram as one of these social media, this medium is a place for social networking to occur through visuals and language within rhetorical moments and literacy practices. I think of Instagram as a site that fosters the

human-creator-artist relationship between its users, which then allows users to become a part of communities in their own ways.

Thinking through and borrowing from research done by Or Glicklich, Sara C. Shabot, Cheyenne Seymour, and Crystal Abidin, I better understand the way that social media fosters a space for engagement and relationships between users. Glicklich and Shabot articulate what distinguishes engagement between a creator and their followers on this social media platform. They gauge this research by way of looking at posts made by the official WW (formerly known as Weight Watchers) Instagram page. Through analyses of themes found in WW Instagram posts in 2019, Glicklich and Shabot analyze a number of themes found in WW Instagram posts in that year, some of which include fatness as burden, humor, inspirational messages, and the temporality of SmartPoints. On these posts' engagement with followers, they write:

WW engages with its social media followers almost every day, sometimes more than once. Since its posts serve as both advertisements for the program and a way to keep current clients engaged and motivated, we treat all messages, visual or textual, as being constructed with intention and precision, not random or spontaneous. (Glicklich 185)

This research articulates that engagement and relationship building does not always include responding back to comments, but is present in the flow of content – “almost every day, sometimes more than once” – to ensure that an account is consistently on followers' feeds. Glicklich and Shabot determine that each and every post stands as both motivation for clients and promotion of the program. The number of times a user posts on Instagram impacts the engagement they have with others; therefore, the more a fitness enthusiast posts, the more exercisers will engage with those enthusiasts' platforms.

One of the most recent research articles written on relationships built through social media found that students foster many relationships on social media with folks they have never met face-to-face in academia (Seymour). In this project, Seymour writes:

Individuals on social sites have many options regarding how they connect with others. A user can choose to link to the profiles of only those they know offline; extend and accept connection requests to and from strangers; share posts publicly; or send messages privately. Each time one of these actions is taken, social media serves as a vehicle to foster interpersonal relationships, bringing people together. (Seymour 95)

These “interpersonal relationships” also stem from engagement between Instagram users. Every user on social media has “many options” for how they choose to engage with others. This engagement brings people together and the presumed relationships that are fostered in the space of social media not only in academia, but also within the fitness community, which is where I bring Seymour’s research in conversation with my own. Within the fitness community, enthusiasts and exercisers take actions between one another that shape the relationship they build online.

I am reminded of Crystal Abidin’s term “perceived interconnectedness” when I think of engagement and relationships on social media between enthusiasts and exercisers. Abidin determines “perceived interconnectedness” as the seeming engagement that enthusiasts have with exercisers through reciprocity, commercial, interactive, and disclosive intimacies (Abidin). My research borrows from these ideas from Gilcklich, Shabot, Seymour, and Abidin to focus on the relationships that are built from the rhetoric and literacies that exist between the fitness community’s enthusiasts and exercisers.

FITNESS LITERACY ON INSTAGRAM

The idea of fitness—what it is and how we should define it—has been questioned and researched by many scholars, though for the purpose of this project, I focus on two. Decade-long research done by Tracy Isaacs and Samantha Brennan shows that “feminists have begun to interrogate the very assumptions about what constitutes ‘fitness’ in the first place” (Isaacs 2). Utilizing authentic voices from women-identifying folks within the fitness community, Isaacs and Brennan’s research gets at the heart of where these four themes exist from a bioethical standpoint. Isaacs’ and Brennan’s research on fitness consists of narratives from those in the field, their own narratives and research, and develops a feminist lens that highlights their four themes of fitness—equality, inclusivity, empowerment, and aesthetics and feminine embodiment.

In this research on the Instagram fitness community, I come to analyze the enthusiasts-exerciser relationship interpersonally, utilizing the literacy practices, rhetoric, and visual content of enthusiasts on Instagram. To situate how I am using the term literacy, I look to and borrow from Carmen Kynard’s definition of how to situate New Literacy Studies (NLS) in the everyday:

NLS theorists specifically situate literacy in its ideological, cultural, and political locations. This means that we acknowledge that literacy is something that people do, rather than something that they have or do not have; that literacy represents social and cultural practices, rather than a set of skills to be acquired according to given hierarchies of understanding and social organization; that literacy is a deep engagement with the political (we either construct ourselves as objects or we are subjects) and an issue of context—personal, social, cultural, geographic, and historical (Kynard 32).

When thinking of the literacies that fitness enthusiasts utilize on Instagram, I see them as Kynard describes NLS as things “that people do” (Kynard 32). In terms of Instagram, this ‘doing’ is articulated by users and seen by others in a number of different ways (i.e.

posting content, adding to one's story, writing a biography on one's page, commenting on posts, etc.); within the fitness community, Kynard's definition of NLS is reflected in everyone's participation, enthusiast and exerciser alike, crafting "social and cultural practices" unique to their community. The "doing" and participation in the fitness community is both active and passive, in that members either construct themselves as objects to be gazed at through Instagram (enthusiast) or are subjects of their own fitness journey (exerciser). This is dependent upon the context of Instagram's purpose in members' journeys; though an enthusiast/exerciser may objectify themselves as content, this does not mean they are not also subjects in other contexts. Everyone may contribute to the fitness community by way of enacting their own literacies.

My research explores the following questions about the fitness community on Instagram:

- What literacy practices and rhetoric are enthusiasts using to engage with the fitness community?
- How do fitness enthusiasts on Instagram contribute to the fitness community through their multimodal content?

To answer these questions, I focus on the biographies, visuals, and captions of six fitness Instagram enthusiasts' posts and biographies.

METHODOLOGY

Researching journalists' professional identities via Instagram, Diana Bossio offers a framework for selection of accounts and close visual content analysis. In her article, "Journalists on Instagram: Presenting Professional Identity and Role on Image-focused Social Media," Bossio's qualitative research method borrows from commonly adopted

methods in social media research. I utilize a similar selection framework as Bossio in choosing enthusiasts based on their positionality in the fitness community, which posts were chosen to be analyzed, number of followers each enthusiast has, and the number of times the enthusiasts post over a certain period of time.

I have chosen a woman-identifying group of individuals who seek to empower other women-identifying folks on their fitness journeys. The gym is typically recognized as a male-dominated space, so this research seeks to dismantle the traditional male superiority in fitness and focus on the interaction between women-identifying folks. For this reason, male-identifying enthusiasts are excluded from this research. Other pages that are excluded are brand pages and nutritionists. Brand pages step away from the interpersonal connection I seek to explore in this research. Their promotion and marketing-heavy focus takes more of a capitalist lens, and while that is a huge aspect in the fitness community, it is not the foundational focus of my research. While nutritionists would be an interesting research pool, I keep my research focus group on solely fitness-based accounts to ensure a specific lens into the fitness community. This does not mean that the fitness enthusiasts that I research do not post nutrition-based posts or are not nutritionists themselves, but it means that their content is not driven by nutrition content and rather, fitness content.

The six enthusiasts I have identified for this research all have at least 7,500 followers and have posted at least three times within a week of choosing their pages to be sure that they are actively engaging with their exercisers. Each of the six women-identifying enthusiasts I have chosen post an array of content, including that of

their personal lives, but so long as there was indication of fitness within their six most recent and/or pinned posts or biographies, accounts were considered for research.

The six accounts I have chosen to research include: @massy.arias, @xoxobelinda_, @ericananglefit, @thiscurvygirlsfitness, @sophjbutler, and @nkacyfitness. These Instagram handles are how these enthusiasts are known within the fitness community on Instagram, as it is what appears above their posts on someone's feed. These accounts are all profiles of woman-identifying enthusiasts within the fitness community. Furthermore, these woman-identifying enthusiasts collectively speak to sides of fitness that I cannot speak to as a white, cisgender, able-bodied, and heterosexual woman-identifying exerciser and researcher, and I strive to craft a more-inclusive research in the community. I chose women-identifying enthusiasts who have a number of different backgrounds as well as current lives in an attempt to gauge the large spectrum of not only enthusiasts, but also exercises that exist within the fitness community.¹

These are only six of thousands of fitness enthusiasts on Instagram. A possible limitation to this research may be that at the time of research, the six most recent and/or pinned posts of the chosen six enthusiasts may not be heavily fitness-driven. Furthermore, there could be aspects of the posts that contribute to the engagement between fitness enthusiasts and exercisers that I may not account for, such as comments and likes.

The research group of enthusiasts I chose for this research also actively fills an inclusive approach where research has otherwise neglected. In centering women-identifying enthusiasts, this research grants them an autonomous space in which they are examined outside the gym-as-masculine space. Inclusivity takes into account not

¹ See Appendix A.

only the gender of these enthusiasts, but also their ability, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

My research began with the making of a Google Sheets document, titled ‘Thesis Research Document,’ where I assembled all the content that I explored. This Google Sheet consists of seven tabs, which are labeled as the following: Links to Posts, Biography, Caption, Multimedia, Workout Plan, Hashtags, and Hashtags as Counter-spaces.

The ‘Links to Posts’ tab has a table that includes each enthusiast’s account handle followed by their posts; Post #1, Post #2, Post #3, Post #4, Post #5, and Post #6, in which, Post #6 is the most recent or latest pinned post and Post #1 is the least recent post. I compiled these links in one space for easy access during the research process.

The ‘Biography’ tab has five columns, which are labeled as the following: Account, Biography, Description, Notes, and Questions/Wonderings. The Account column lists the enthusiasts’ handles, followed by the Biography column, which includes, copy-and-pasted, the biographies that appear on their pages starting with their names in bold and ending with any links that may be provided (i.e. linktr.ees or websites). The last three columns, Description, Notes, and Questions/Wonderings, consist of my personal notes that pull out what each biography includes, my analysis of them, and any questions that may have arisen in that process.

The ‘Captions’ tab on the Google Sheet is my source to look back to and the foundation to which I pulled out my major themes from. On this, I have the following columns: Account, Post #1 (least current), Post #2, Post #3, Post #4, Post #5, and Post #6. Like the other tabs, the Account column lists the enthusiasts' account handles. Under the

corresponding post number, I copy-and-pasted the entire caption to each post, from the words that start right after their handle to the last word before the comments start. On this tab, I color-coded the text by which posts were in enthusiasts' feed chronologically and which were pinned posts; in this, chronological posts were written in black text and pinned posts in red. Furthermore, I highlighted in orange any post that consisted of a workout plan for further research.

The 'Multimedia' tab includes seven columns: Account, Post #1, Post #2, Post #3, Post #4, Post #5, and Post #6. Under each post number, I describe the multimedia in each of the 36 posts in the research pool. For example, for @xoxobelinda_'s Post #3, I write "Reel - array of videos, music," to note the literacy practices that exist within the multimedia framework of Instagram.

The 'Workout Plan' tab on the document includes the following columns: Handle, Post #, The Plan, Description, Notes, and Questions/Wonderings. In this, the first two columns list the accounts' handles and the post number that has the workout plan in the caption/media. The Plan column has, copy-and-pasted, the captions that induce the workout plan within them, stopping before the hashtags that may be included. Much like the other tabs, the Description, Notes, and Questions/Wonderings columns consist of my personal readings and analyses of these workout plans. I added a note on the bottom of the Workout Plan tab that notes to include an Appendix in the project that explains the fitness vocabulary of the workout plans.

The 'Hashtags' tab pulls and compiles the hashtags out of each caption from the earlier 'Captions' tab. The columns include Account, followed by columns for Post #1 through Post #6. If a caption did not include any hashtags, I wrote 'NA' in the

corresponding block for those posts. Within this tab, I bolded any hashtag that included the word motivation, as it was a trend I saw appear in them while copying them over. On the bottom, I included notes that counted the exact number of hashtags that included the word motivation. Then, I plugged the hashtags into a word cloud that generated the most commonly used hashtags, the image which I included in the tab.

Pulling particularly interesting hashtags from the 'Hashtag' tab, I then copy-and-pasted these into a tab called 'Hashtags as Counter-spaces.' The columns in this tab are as follows: Account, Hashtag, Post #, Multimedia, and Caption. Each of these columns include information copy-and-pasted from the other tabs to compile the elements of the posts that include hashtags that act as counter-narratives to mainstream fitness.

The chapters that follow are built from my analysis of my Research Document and the pieces from the 36 posts that are laid out in that document. In Chapter 1, I further introduce the six enthusiasts of this research by closely examining and analyzing their biographies. In looking at these biographies, I ask specifically how the enthusiasts' literacy practices contribute to possible engagement with exercises who go on their pages. The following questions guide Chapter 1's analysis:

- How do fitness enthusiasts present themselves in their biographies?
- What literacies and rhetorics are present in these biographies to engage with exercisers?

In Chapter 2 I examine the captions that I pulled from the 36 posts in this research that include a workout plan. In this, I look at the multimedia contexts, literacies, and rhetoric of these enthusiasts' workout plans and investigate how these may invite

exercises to engage with their content. The following question guide Chapter 2's analyses:

- How do the literacy practices, rhetoric, and multimedia content used by fitness enthusiasts fulfill their role in the mentor/mentee literacy relation with exercisers?

Finally, in Chapter 3 I define mainstream fitness and explain the counter-spaces that some of the hashtags used in the captions of enthusiasts' posts contribute to. Through these analyses, I think about ways in which some hashtags used in the fitness community counter mainstream fitness. My findings show how these possible spaces can exist within the fitness community and how they embody empowerment, equality, and inclusivity in the community. The following questions guide Chapter 3's analyses:

- How can the use of hashtags in a fitness enthusiast's caption create a counter-space that engages their literacy relation with exercisers?

CHAPTER 1: MARKETING THEIR BRANDS: LITERACY PRACTICES

WITHIN THE SIX ENTHUSIASTS' BIOGRAPHIES

The first thing I remember thinking about when I made my fitness page on Instagram was what to include in my biography. I didn't know what folks wanted to know nor did I know how much information was too little or too much to include in it. *My name is already there. Do I want everyone to know where I am? Is age important?*

I felt so lost as someone just starting out in this creatorship within the fitness community. In an attempt to navigate the space of this position, I kept my account private with no profile picture or biography until I sourced enough pages to decide on what I wanted to include in my own biography.

I found the many things popular across a number of pages and in the end, most important in order to be transparent about who I was to the exercisers on my page. The things I decided include the following:

- Location(s)
- University
- Age
- Experience in the fitness community

Location(s)—for relatability. I felt that my locations (both my home city and where I go to school) opened a space for folks in and around those areas to feel more comfortable engaging with my content. As an exerciser, I always looked for enthusiasts in areas that I was in because it was something that we shared and their content didn't feel as distant as others who were further away.

University—for situation-ality. I put the University that I attend(ed) in my biography because it displays that I am a college student. In this, I was transparent on the days that it was harder for me to get to the gym, whether I had an assignment due the next day or I was just too tired.

Age—for contextuality. Including age in my biography puts into perspective what stage of life I am at. I am in my twenties, and stating this may make other exercisers more obliged to engage with my content. On the other hand, including my age also reminds folks that I am in my twenties, and this may put into context some of what I am posting.

Experience in the fitness community—for transparency. I note how long I have been a part of the fitness community so that exercisers can better understand what and how my content is adding to the digital community. I wanted exercisers to understand that I have been active in fitness since 2017. I have a personal connection with the community that I hope to instill for others. In openly stating that I am not a certified personal trainer, I articulate that my personal experience is my own journey and I am not qualified to speak on others' specific journeys.

What I came to see through composing my own biography, and what I've come to see through researching the biographies of the six enthusiasts in this research, is the important role enthusiasts' biographies play in their presence on Instagram. An Instagram account's biography is one of the first pieces of information that folks have about a creator on this application; the other information includes their handle, profile picture, six posts, number of followers, and number of following. The biography is a space accessible to any user on Instagram, and it is a space where an enthusiast can name themselves. The act of naming oneself is powerful; it labels the identity that person is to a larger

community. The beauty in the biography is that it grants Instagram users a space to be themselves on their own platform, before their content goes to the public eye.

But, there are complexities that come with what Instagram users *choose* to put in their biography. For example, fitness enthusiasts tend to use this space to sponsor themselves to create a brand for their platform as a whole. It is important to note that the biography is not a static element on Instagram. Given this idea, it can be changed and altered at any time by the creator of a page. Furthermore, it is especially interesting to think of how this biography is the *only* aspect of an Instagram page that is always public to *all* users on the platform, even if a user's account is private.

This chapter takes a closer look at the biographies of the six enthusiasts that are a part of this research. The biography offers brief highlights of creators' pages, personalities, aesthetics, looks, and languages. Thus, my exploration of the biographies introduces and describes the type of enthusiast each of them are and sets up the foundation for the language they use and the personalities that are present in their other content.

First, I describe and analyze each enthusiast's biography individually. I include images following each individual description and analysis as well. Finally, I pull four larger themes from all of the biographies: the enthusiast as a brand, the use of emojis, the use of second-person pronouns, and the use of the term "join." Through these four themes, I analyze them more closely in relation to one another. The following questions guided my research:

- How do fitness enthusiasts present themselves in their biographies?

- What literacies and rhetorics are present in these biographies to engage with exercisers?

MASSY ARIAS

Massy Arias does not include her name in the place on Instagram where one's bolded name appears (see Figure 2). Rather, she puts an unclickable link, www.MASVIDA.io in its place. The content of Arias' Instagram biography begins with the naming of her many identities on Instagram: Mom | Health Coach | CEO. Arias promotes her supplement brand, Tru Supplements, and her fitness brand, MA Warriors, by way of tagging their separate pages in her biography. Within her biography, Arias also opens her platform for exercisers to engage with her through the use of providing her email as a contact point and using the terms "you" and "join." She provides her email, massy@bodega7.com, in her biography as a point of contact for exercisers on her page. In promoting her fitness brand, Arias writes: "Join @mawarriors and my fitness 🙌 with thousands behind you!" The 🙌 emoji directs exercisers to the link at the end of Arias' biography, gettrusupps.com/pages/train-with-Massy.

Arias' biography seems to be identity-driven, as she is careful to list her roles not only in life, but also on her platform. It is important to recognize the order in which she lists her identities. Arias places her role as a mother before that of a fitness enthusiast on her fitness platform, creating for viewers the idea that she is a mother over being an owner and founder of brands.

Arias is so open to sharing her identities, and it seems conflicting that in the placeholder in one's biography where a creator puts their name, she rather puts an unclickable link to her website. Yes, her Instagram handle is her name; however, a social

media handle is different from your name. It is your username in the digital world, but may not always be your name in reality. Where she has the opportunity to name herself as Massy Arias, she created this vision of herself as just a link in this fitness community, distancing herself off screen even more on her platform on Instagram.

The unclickable link in place of her name creates a boundary between herself as an enthusiast and the exercisers engaging with her content. In order to get to her website, an exerciser must leave the Instagram application, and the fitness community on Instagram, and copy and paste or manually type in her website's link on different browsers.

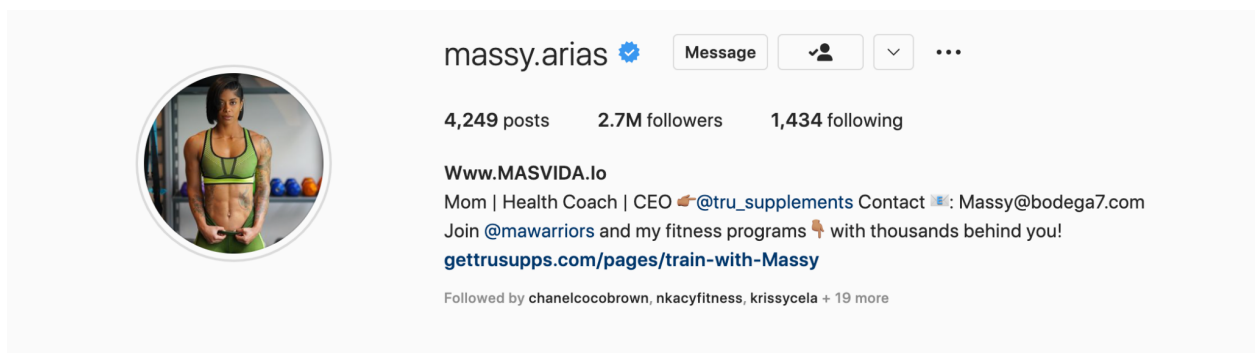


Figure 2: Screenshot of @massy.arias biography, October 6, 2022.

BELINDA HICKS

Belinda Hicks' biography is quite minimalist. She does not have her full name anywhere on her Instagram page (see Figure 3). Rather, she has one letter, her initial, followed by a period: "B." Hicks' Instagram biography consists of two locations, California and Texas. Her geographical information speaks to exercisers in that exercisers from those locations may be able to relate to her posts on a more personal level. This personal feeling may feel lost, though, because Hicks does not provide her full name anywhere on her Instagram page—neither in the placeholder nor her handle. The minimalist style of Hicks' biography and name, "B.," does not overwhelm exercisers

with fitness-heavy vocabulary, positionality, and links. This may enhance exercisers to come to Hicks' page as a place of comfort within the fitness community. Perhaps this comfort is evident in that exercisers are on Hicks' page without any mention of fitness in her biography at all. Exercisers *have to* explore more on Hicks' page beyond the biography to even know she is a fitness enthusiast. While they are still receiving fitness content, the fitness page aesthetic is not apparent everywhere, thus perhaps placing the enthusiast on a closer level to exercisers on their side of the Instagram fitness community.

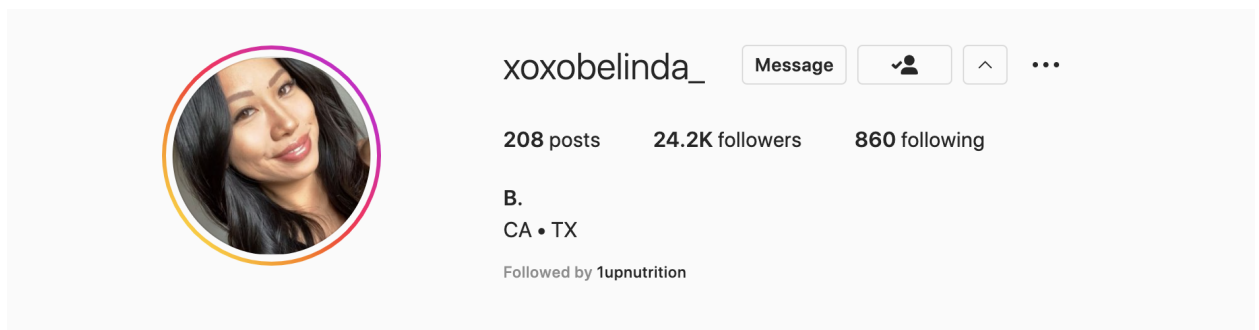



Figure 3: Screenshot of @xoxobelinda_ biography, October 6, 2022.

ERICA NANGLE

Erica Nangle's Instagram biography begins with her first name and her position in the fitness community: "Erica | Health & Fitness Coach" (see Figure 4). This position is reiterated on the following line, where she has her Instagram account type as a Fitness Trainer. Following this, Nangle provides more insight into this position, as the founder of the Grow Strong App and an FTF (Full-Time Fitness) Head Coach. Nangle also provides exercisers with the handle of the Grow Strong App in her biography. Further positioning herself in the fitness community, Nangle lists the brands that she promotes as an enthusiast: PEScience, NVGTN, and PeachBands. She writes her "code," which is ERICA, into her biography; this "code" is the code linked to the brands listed above. This code may be for exercisers to use for a discount and to support Nangle in her partnership

with the brands. Through this code, Nangle may receive monetary gain from exercisers' purchases. Nangle, then, motions exercisers to her "YouTube 

her Linktree.

According to the given information, Nangle's biography is brandedly-driven, which is explained later in this chapter. In other words, her biography contains her own brand (Grow Strong application), her position as a fitness coach, all of her branded affiliations (PEScience, NVGTN, and PeachBands), and her "code" to those named brands. This term "code" is particularly interesting, as in having a code, this means that Nangle has been coded, or encrypted, into "ERICA" for the benefit of different brands. Nangle's focus on her positionality with brands highlights her involvement in the fitness community brand-to-exerciser, but seems to strip a sense of engagement with exercisers on the exerciser-to-exerciser connection. Unlike Arias and Hicks, Nangle utilizes Instagram's function that allows creators to make their page occupation specific; she claims her occupation as a "Fitness Trainer" openly on her page. The clickable link, which is guided by an arrow emoji, allows exercisers to engage with her brands (AKA platforms) and who she is. Though, outside of this link, there seems to be little language that opens space for engagement with exercisers directly in this biography.

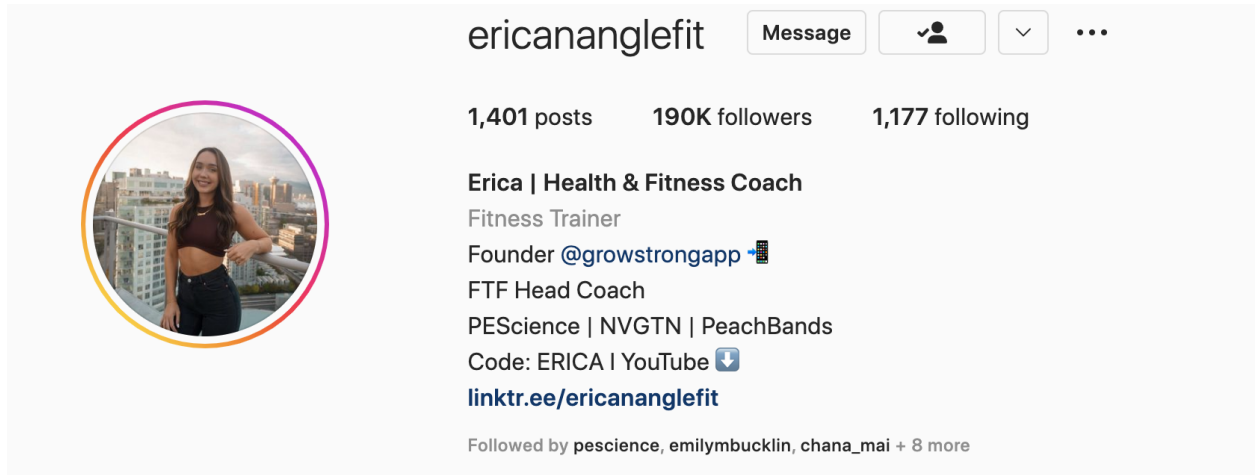


Figure 4: Screenshot of @ericananglefit biography, October 6, 2022.

JANÁE MICHELLE HOLMES

Janáe Michelle Holmes' biography begins with the stating of her full name, which is followed one line down with the account type that she runs: Sports & Fitness Instruction (see Figure 5). She continues with the content of her biography, which states “Supporting Queens 👑 to build healthy bodies.” Holmes is transparent with her fitness journey, as she provides her S.W. (starting weight) and C.W. (current weight). She also states what her page will provide for exercisers, which are daily workouts and weight loss inspo (inspiration). Holmes then provides her geographical location in her biography by using the 📍 emoji followed by LA. Lastly, Holmes direct exercisers to “join the Curvy Community” through the use of 📺 emoji pointing to her Linktree.

Holmes' biography is seemingly very community-building and action-driven. Introducing her biography with the active term “supporting” shapes Holmes' page to be a space for a community that encourages “Queens to build healthy bodies.” Holmes' use not only of “supporting,” but also of “join” later in her biography initiates engagement with the exercisers on her platform. Placing her whole name in the placeholder for it, Holmes welcomes exercisers into a person-to-person space; she is transparent about who

she is behind the screen. Like Nangle, Holmes has her positionality within the fitness community as her occupation, which is “Sports & Fitness Instruction.” Though, within this occupation, it is “instruction,” a term which nods to what her content does rather than “instructor” (or “trainer” as seen on Nangle’s biography), which would direct the act of instructing in her position as a teacher to the fitness community. Similarly to Hicks, Holmes provides exercisers with her location, which perhaps sparks the interest of those in her area to more openly join her space.

A common theme in Holmes’ biography is inspiration. This is seen most prominently in providing exercisers with what her page contributes to the fitness community: “DAILY WORKOUT & WEIGHTLOSS INSPO.” Her use of the word “inspo” speaks to a style of fitspiration that focuses on weight loss, and perhaps is utilized in order to reach exercisers with goals of losing weight. Building on this “inspo” is her use of her own weight loss journey numbers within her biography: “S.W. 391 lbs | C.W. 271 lbs.”. As the founder of the Curvy Community, Holmes primarily utilizes her biography to describe her positionality with the action she provides to the fitness community on Instagram.

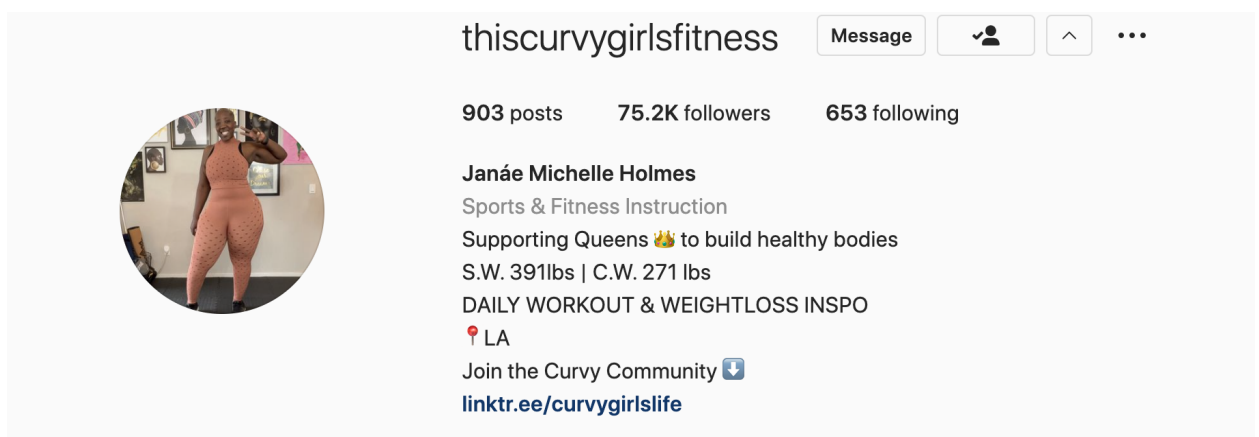


Figure 5: Screenshot of @thiscurvygirlsfitness biography, October 6, 2022.

SOPHIE BUTLER

Sophie Butler's biography begins with her full name and pronouns in the top line (see Figure 6). She starts the content of her biography off with "hi, welcome," inviting users to read on. She opens her platform as a "judgment free space" very clearly in her biography, which is followed by her many interests and roles on social media, which include fitness, fashion, and "everything in between." She also notes that she was one of Cosmopolitan's Influencers of the Year and Attitude Magazine's 101 LGBT Trailblazers. The last thing that is present in Butler's biography is the link to her Linktree.

Butler's biography begins with an open space for communication, thus engagement, with "hi welcome,,"; the use of the comma shows that there is more to be established between herself and those on her page. While her biography is not highly fitness-driven, it uses welcoming language to greet other users (I use users here outside of speaking solely of fitness, or exercisers) to the "judgment free space" that her page is. Butler's use of her name and pronouns creates a safe space for everyone to be their true selves on and off Instagram. Having such an opening, judgment free space, Butler contributes to a level of comfort that many exercisers seek on their fitness journeys. It is evident that Butler is an enthusiast in many different communities on Instagram—fitness and fashion being two of them—and has a large following due to her naming as "Cosmo's influencer of the year" and "Attitude Magazine's 101 LGBT trailblazer." I find it particularly interesting that in opening a "judgment free space," Butler concludes her biography with this credibility which is determined by the judging and ratings of outside sources. This seems contradictory to this space; though, perhaps this can lead one to question whether this "judgment free space" is performative.



Figure 6: Screenshot of @sophjbutler biography, October 6, 2022.

NKACY DOUGLAS

Nkacy Douglas' Instagram biography, like others, begins with her full name, followed by her account type, which is Fitness Trainer (see Figure 7). Douglas is open about her certification as a Personal Trainer and Nutritionist, as she lists them below her occupation. Building on her position as a fitness trainer, Douglas offers exercisers her services by writing "Virtual 1 on 1 Training 📈" in her biography. Douglas then writes "fashion" in her biography, followed by the last line consisting of her Linktree.

Douglas' biography is very to-the-point; in this, it is very fitness-driven. Her full name places her identity within this community, followed by her occupation just as Nangle and Holmes provided. As a "Fitness Trainer," Douglas situates herself more similarly to Nangle, as the terms instructor/trainer displays who they are to the fitness community rather than the term instruction that describes what they do within the community. Douglas uses her title as a Certified PT (Personal Trainer) to show her expertise in her role as a trainer. Douglas opens her page as a space for engagement with exercisers by way of advertising her "Virtual 1 on 1 Training," with a careful emphasis on advertising as she uses the "📈" emoji just after.

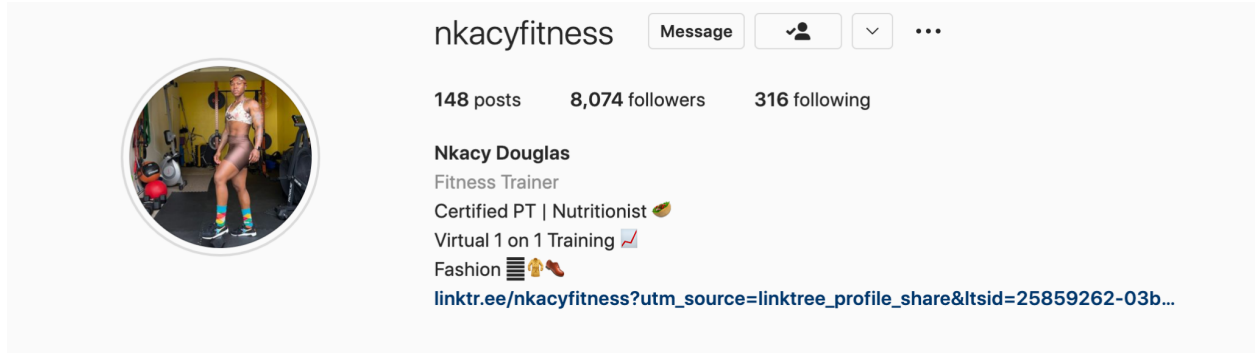


Figure 7: Screenshot of @nkacyfitness biography, October 6, 2022.

THEIR/THEY'RE BRANDS: MARKETING AS ENGAGEMENT



Of the six enthusiasts, two are what I call “brandedly-driven identities,” meaning these enthusiasts present their pages mainly through their partnership and ownership of brands – athleisure, fitness, supplement, etc. These brandedly-drive identity enthusiasts are Arias and Nangle; though the others do not convey brands as prominently as these two, they are all still in a brand-heavy position on Instagram.

An enthusiast cannot completely be separated from their marketing rhetoric in the fitness industry, as it is inherent that their role as an enthusiast is to promote a kind of brand. In her master’s thesis, *Gold’s Gym as a “Home”: Exploring the Tensions Between Traditional Bodybuilders and Fitness Influencers in a Commercially Branded Space*, Wellman focuses on the tensions between bodybuilders and fitness influencers in the space of Gold’s Gym Venice – the “mecca.” The reading of these positions introduced and analyzed fitness influencers’ brands on social media:

While influencer rhetoric might say personal brands are built to work outside a corporate framework, they never are truly outside the world of capitalism. They are generating capital by turning themselves into the corporation. (Wellman 60).

Capitalism exists everywhere in fitness, and capitalism informs the complex relationship between the fitness industry and the fitness community. While there are communities that exist within the world of fitness that are not created by capitalism, these communities



only exist under the larger umbrella that is the industry – capitalist-driven corporations and small businesses. In the end, aren't enthusiasts' Instagram platforms their own personal brand?

Half of the six enthusiasts in this research – Nangle, Holmes, and Douglas – have their platforms designed as a business account rather than a personal account. This business-aspect grants users with access to in-app insights (i.e. how many users click links on their page, how many users go on their page from a post or story, how many users they are engaging with, etc.). In terms of this in-app insight, Douglas' use of the  emoji also seemed notable. This emoji is a chart with an upwards trend, which hints at a growth in something. In context, she uses it as the following: “Virtual 1 on 1 Training .

The enthusiast-marketer positionality is evident in all but one, Hicks', biography above. In each of them, Arias, Nangle, Holmes, Butler, and Douglas use links at the end of their biographies. In my reading of these links, they are there to play the role of ‘Want more information? Click here!’ in a person's biography. In other words, links are a tool to guide an exerciser off of Instagram. In the case of the enthusiasts in this research, these links take the form of either a website or a Linktree. The Linktree is particularly interesting, as research has shown that these ‘links in bio’ can be seen as “being a brand that encourages self-expression, discovery, connection and community” (“Linktree to

Re-Create”). Though this claim may be true for some cases, links can also be read as a tool to further promote the monetary side of marketing one’s brand.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: EMOJIS AS ENGAGEMENT

Half of the links in these enthusiasts’ biographies are directed to by the use of an emoji – either  or  – issuing instructions to look down. For the purpose of this discussion, I am going to refer to these emojis collectively as ‘pointing down emojis’.

Emojis have become a part of users’ language on social media. Research has recently stated that “emojis are becoming a new visual and linguistic tool that allows users to express their feelings and communicate with each other on social media” (Lee). Furthermore, emojis’ effect on human affect has been studied by a number of researchers, who include Monica Riordan, Isabelle Boutet, Megan LeBlanc, Justin A. Chamberland, and Charles A. Collin. From my reading of this research, I highlight that emojis are not unnecessary in their usage. In other words, emoji use “enable a user to act out emotion work that preserves and enhances social relationships” and “can enhance processing of its content” (Riordan 563; Boutet 11). This is a kind of teaching instruction, in a way speaking to the idea of the enthusiast as a mentor, which is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

The biographies that utilize the pointing down emojis place them in such a way that speaks with an exerciser to look below. It guides and directs the eyes of an Instagram user to then look down and perhaps act on what is there—in this case, links. The use of these pointing down emojis communicates something between an enthusiast and an exerciser, and despite how minimal it may be, the communication between the two is still there.

THIS PAGE IS FOR “YOU”: SECOND-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

Two of the six enthusiasts, Arias and Butler, use a form of “you” in their biographies. For these two enthusiasts, directly using the second-person pronoun creates a one-on-one experience for the exerciser reading their biographies. In Arias’ biography she uses this “you” in the context of her fitness programs: “Join @mawarriors and my fitness programs 🙌 with thousands behind you!” Arias’ use of “you” speaks to the “you” that is supported by her platform and community that is built from it. It potentially develops a collective mindset for exercisers considering her workout programs; it separates the “you” from the community in that an exerciser is on their own fitness journey, yet at the same time, it expresses the support that comes with such a journey in joining her fitness programs. In this vein, Arias speaks not only to each exerciser individually, but also collectively; though, it is debatable whether this communication is for all exercisers on her page or only those that become a part of her fitness programs.

Butler also uses a form of the term “you” in her biography, yet she uses the possessive form of the second-person pronoun. She writes: “your judgment free space.” Butler grants ownership of her platform’s space to users that are on there and engage with her content. In this, users feel connected to her space in that it is theirs and in being their own, there is no judgment. A “judgment free space” welcomes Instagram users who feel they may be judged on other platforms. Thinking of an Instagram account’s platform as space for something speaks to the way in which enthusiasts may be inviting exercisers into the community, whether at large or solely on their page. Ensuring, or seemingly ensuring, no judgment in a space that has to do with the gym welcomes many individuals who may be hesitant due to the vulnerability that comes with working out and our bodies.

JOINING THE FITNESS COMMUNITY: ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Another term similar to the use of “you” that is present in two of the six enthusiasts' biographies is the term “join.” The term “join” means “to put together, to unite one thing to another, in any kind of connection physical or immaterial” (“Join, v.1”). In its literal definition, this word has a connotation that unifies two things, or folks, in its action. Arias uses the term “join” in the same context she uses “you” in: “Join @mawarriors and my fitness programs 🙌 with thousands behind you!” This lines up similarly to the context in which Holmes uses “join”: “Join the Curvy Community 📌.” Both enthusiasts utilize “join” as a way to promote a piece of the fitness community that exists within the larger one on Instagram. For Arias, this community is her brand, MA Warriors, and her fitness programs; she invites exercisers to join them as a way to unify themselves with their fitness journeys as led by her expertise. Holmes’ use of join, on the other hand, is more community-based in that, based on my research, there is no monetary gain in the Curvy Community. Rather, it is a collective weight loss journey for anyone who chooses to join, though this community based on weight loss speaks to mainstream fitness ideals, which will further be discussed in Chapter 3.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I’ve revealed the complexities of the exercise enthusiast’s Instagram biography. While some may see the biography merely as a place to ‘say a little bit about themselves,’ biographies on Instagram go so much further – especially for those who consider themselves enthusiasts of a particular community. The biography is one space to, in a way, summarize all that one’s platform has to offer the public. On an enthusiast’s social media account, *you* feel connected with them through the literacy

practices on their pages. *You* are connected with them merely through this application that lives behind a screen. *You* are one of about 1.440 billion users on Instagram in the world (“The Latest Instagram Statistics”). *You* are one of the many exercisers on their pages. The way that fitness enthusiasts present themselves in their biographies affects the engagement between themselves and exercisers.

For fitness enthusiasts, the biography is a space for them to market their brand, present their aesthetic, and provide some context to their handle and profile pictures. Thus, we must keep in mind that it is seemingly impossible to separate an enthusiast – and perhaps any social media user – from their personal brands, especially those that have sponsorships with many outside brands.

The brandedly-driven identities presented in some of the biographies in this research show how much of an impact brands – both personal and associated – have on not *only* the enthusiasts themselves, but the fitness community/industry as a whole. These brandedly-driven identities shift the biography’s focus away from the individual behind the screen and re-focuses the public’s attention to consumer goods. This calls to question whether these enthusiasts’ biographies welcome exercisers as humans or if they are rather targeted as possible buyers to their brands in the long run. Is the engagement with the enthusiast, with fitness, or with the brands?

Through literacy practices, fitness enthusiasts’ biographies present their aesthetics and positionalities within the fitness community. Throughout this chapter, I’ve worked to highlight those literacy practices that fitness enthusiasts enact in attempting to engage with exercisers. Through marketing rhetoric, emojis, second-person pronouns, and invitational terminology, the six enthusiasts in this research open their platforms to not

only exercisers but also to users across the platform of Instagram as a whole. However, it is important to recognize the complexities that come with these literacy practices when one is reminded of the capitalist-driven umbrella that fitness lies under.

From my own experience, I always went directly to fitness enthusiasts' pages not to learn about them or the brands they represent, but rather, to get workout ideas. In this, their engagement goes far beyond just this welcoming space of the biography. The workout plan is an essential aspect within the entire world of fitness, on- and offline. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at these workout plans and what they do in relation to the enthusiast-exerciser relationship in the digital fitness community.

CHAPTER 2: 'EMPTY PHRASES OF PERFORMANCE': MIS-INSTRUCTION THROUGH THE WORKOUT PLAN

September 2017:

I waited three weeks to open the DropBox file in my email. Not only did the file sit untouched, but the entire email sat unread in my inbox. I knew what was in it, and I was too scared to face the workout plan I had just spent \$30 on. *What if I can't do it?* I hadn't been to the gym since I was younger when my grandmother brought me to the local YMCA while she babysat my sister and me. I merely would walk on the treadmill next to her or get my summer reading done as I slowly spun the pedals on the bike down the row.

But, finally, I opened it and it read:

Biondi Body

Crafted by my former soccer coach who was just starting her journey as a personal trainer, this workout plan was my first step into the fitness community. I read on and on, and with each word, I kept wishing I just left it within the inbox of my email. *It was better off there, I'll never learn all of this.* It didn't take much for me to make up any excuse not to start this workout plan. The first excuse: I didn't have a gym membership. The second excuse: I didn't have storage on my phone to download DropBox. The third excuse: I knew nothing. I read it, but none of it made any sense to me, a former competitive dancer with little experience in soccer. Despite these excuses, I still read on, getting more confused by the second.

Good Mornings 12 x 4

January 2022:

Good Mornings 4 x 10

I typed this into my Instagram caption (see Figure 8), not even thinking twice about it. Now in the position of enthusiast, I thought it was my “job” to be posting my daily workouts for exercisers on my page. And so, I was posting—or at least trying to—my workouts everyday. I shared my workout split, captioned workout plans, videos to go with each exercise, and sometimes posted workout plans on my story.

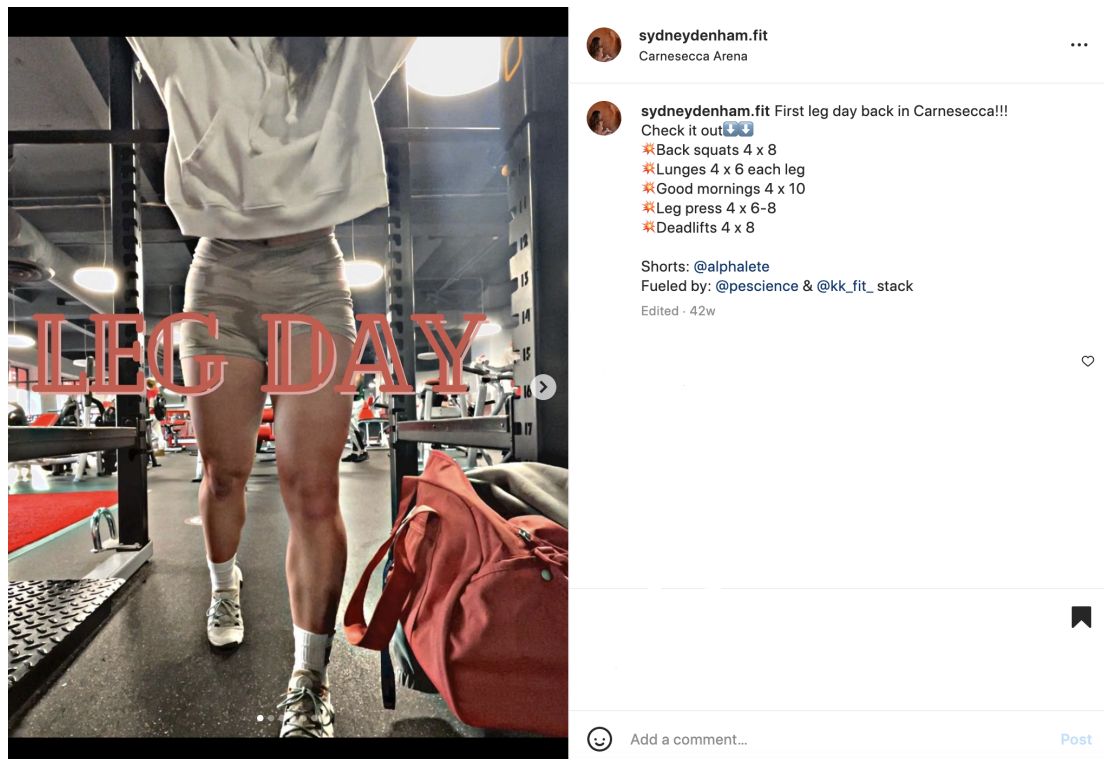


Figure 8: Screenshot of a workout plan on @sydneydenham.fit, January 21, 2022.

I thought I was really engaging with the exercisers that liked and saved my posts, but then at work one day, my coworker asked me, “What is a superset?”

That’s when I understood.

I was posting all of this content for exercisers, but I was completely ignoring the space between what I was posting and the explanation of what each exercise was.

Although there were videos correlating with each workout I posted, I was still leading

many folks to their Google search bars, where I had been just five years before. I know and experienced that feeling of confusion and yet, here I was, still using this language with the sole explanation being the videos of *me* doing them in my *own* space. No further explanation on how others could enact the exercises. Just the jargon and my body, leaving everyone else to juggle with that.

My coworker's seemingly simple, mundane question from years ago, and with a push from my advisor, I found myself looking at this issue from the perspective of a researcher, striving to erase, or at least account for, both of my roles – as an exerciser and enthusiast – from my analyses. To do this, I examined the captions of all 36 posts that are a part of this research and pulled out those that consisted of a workout plan. Eleven of these captions have them. Across these 11 posts, five of the six enthusiasts posted at least one workout plan. The enthusiasts who shared workout plans were Hicks, Nangle, Holmes, Butler, and Douglas.

By posting a workout plan to their Instagram page, I mean that the enthusiasts wrote out a workout and/or portion of one in the caption of their posts. The following word cloud accumulates all of the captions of the eleven workout plans:

within captions and Reels. Without the poetry of the workout plan, the Instagram fitness community would be without its main connection to unifying bodies and the physical space of the gym/home with what we see on our devices.

Borrowing from theoretical frameworks of bell hooks, Paul Kei Matsuda, Shannon Crowley, and Suzanne Bost, I read five of the six enthusiasts' workout plans through pedagogical and language studies. In this, I refer to their overwhelming use of fitness vocabulary as "empty phrases of performance." I use this term to describe the kind of "linguistic homogeneity" that is assumed by enthusiasts and the "privileged variety" of language they speak from in the fitness community (Matsuda). In an enthusiast's attempt to instruct exercisers, they perpetuate empty phrases on their platforms, which could also be read as a kind of stage. These phrases are filled only with explanations through movement and performance rather than written or spoken words. The vocabulary of the fitness community does have both written and bodily meaning, yet if both are not explained, enthusiasts mis-instruct an exerciser's meanings to that vocabulary.

This chapter first examines closely each enthusiasts' workout plans. By this, I describe both the caption around the workout plan (up until the hashtags), the workout plan itself, and the visual components that correlate with the captions and workout plans. In describing each enthusiasts' workout plans, I briefly analyze them in relation to one another to note that there are complications that come with the position of an enthusiast as a mentor and their literacy practices. I then bring these individual analyses to a larger picture in an attempt to answer the following question:

- How do the literacy practices, rhetoric, and multimedia content used by fitness enthusiasts fulfill their role in the mentor/mentee literacy relation with exercisers?

Through the lens of this driving question, I then pull recurring themes from what I saw in the captions, workout plans, and visuals, which include: the use of rough rhetoric, a recurrence of Reels, and asking for engagement. I conclude this chapter by summarizing the main ideas from the analyses of the workout plans and investigating how these analyses speak to the fitness community at large.²

THE MENTOR/MENTEE LITERACY RELATION

Because I think of fitness enthusiasts as holding a position similar to teachers within the digital fitness community, my research of the enthusiast and exerciser relationship is also informed by how bell hooks describes teaching:

Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom. To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage “audiences,” to consider issues of reciprocity. Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning. (hooks 11)

Applying hooks’ description of the “performative act” of teaching to the content of fitness enthusiasts allows me to consider when they use Instagram as “the space for change, invention, [and] spontaneous shifts” in the fitness community (hooks 11). This assumes that the enthusiast must “serve as a catalyst,” which as hooks describes the teacher, “is not meant to be a spectacle” (hooks 11). Teaching fitness through content as “a spectacle,” does not initiate the “reciprocity” from exercisers; there is far more to the Instagram fitness community than just the aesthetics of a picture or video (hooks 11).

There is an audience for fitness enthusiasts, as all social media have an audience to the

² As an experienced exerciser and enthusiast, the vocabulary of the fitness community is not as intimidating as it used to be. Seeing this vocabulary through the lens of a researcher, Figures 9 through 14 enhance even more the uniqueness of the language within the fitness community. In this, I crafted a table that correlates with some of the vocabulary of fitness that is present in this research. See Appendix B.

content that gets posted. However, enthusiasts who want to focus on the community of fitness and their engagement with exercisers on Instagram have to step away from this audience-based posting and move to gauge more engagement with those they teach.

Enacting this engagement initiates a mentor/mentee literacy relation between enthusiasts and exercisers. Thus, it is important to critically question where enthusiasts speak from in this literacy relation when it comes to the workout plans that they are posting to their platforms. Do fitness enthusiasts live, or post/perform, up to their role as teachers/instructors/mentors?

I build from Paul Kei Matsuda's notion of the myth of linguistic homogeneity to think of this question further. Matsuda defines the myth of linguistic homogeneity as "the tacit and widespread acceptance of the dominant image of composition students as native speakers of a privileged variety of English" (Matsuda 638). In writing workout plans, enthusiasts are like compositionists, and in this, they may be enacting a kind of "myth of linguistic homogeneity" in fitness. This is due to the "privileged variety" they have built from their experience in the community. A compositionist teaches writing, just as a fitness enthusiast may be teaching the writing of fitness solely through individual movement-based descriptions. In the instruction of their plans, enthusiasts sometimes assume a linguistic homogeneity between themselves and exercisers, which ignores the inherent power dynamics that exist between them.

Enthusiasts seemingly speak from their expertise in the fitness community, which enacts a kind of linguistic homogeneity and reveals their superior position in the power dynamic between themselves and exercisers. While some folks may argue that it is the exercisers job in the fitness community to learn this language, enthusiasts are also

seemingly posting for the interest of these exercisers; this hints back to their use of terms like “you” and “join,” which literally welcome exercisers to their spaces. In this engagement with exercisers, there should be a place of departure in teaching and guiding these exercisers that meets them more in the middle.

In an attempt to re-imagine where enthusiasts instruct exercisers from in their mentor/mentee literacy relation, I build from Shannon Crowley’s note from “Linguistics and Composition Instruction”:

Linguists taught teachers to look at the language actually used by their students as a departure for instruction; they emphatically rejected the claim made by more traditional teachers that instruction should present students with an ideal language to which their own linguistic performance must be made to conform. (Crowley 502)

Enthusiasts have an opportunity to depart from where exercisers are in their fitness journeys. Exercisers should not be expected to conform their “own linguistic performance” to the “ideal language” that enthusiasts utilize due to the movement that comes with such a performance (Crowley 502). Performing *to* this ideal language disengages the text-to-mind connection exercisers must find within themselves as part of the fitness community. Without that connection, there lies no mind-to-body relationship within oneself. Furthermore, performing *to* this ideal is not true engagement with enthusiasts; rather, it is a performance *with* enthusiasts upon the stage of the “fitness theater,” which obstructs an exerciser from their personal journey.³

In “look[ing] at the language actually used by their students,” namely exercisers, this would require that enthusiasts envision *themselves* as a mentor in their literacy relation with exercisers – that they are a kind of catalyst between an exerciser and their

³ “Fitness theater” is a term that got brought up in discussion with Dr. LaToya Sawyer. I borrow this term for the purpose of this project to emphasize the performative nature of workout plans that enthusiasts post.

fitness journey (Crowley 502). While these workout plans are geared toward the targeted audience of exercisers in the fitness community, the idea of the enthusiast as a teacher sometimes seems to be misconceived given the amount of self and brand promotion that goes on alongside the plans, which was discussed at length in Chapter 1.

The lack of mind-to-body relationship leads me to discuss the connection between the written language of a workout plan and the movement in exercisers' bodies. Thinking further about this relationship, Suzanne Bost's work inspires me. She seamlessly writes about the relationship between the language of Gloria Anzuldúa's poetry and the movement of folks in yoga classes. Bost utilizes this thinking to show how instructors of these classes connect the individual to the community through movement:

Yoga is regulated, following pre-scripted poses, but also anarchic, with practitioners getting the poses wrong, making them up differently, falling down, or lying down. Individual and community blend in yoga...Like this heterogeneous community, each body itself is an aggregate, both coherent and fragmented, with parts pulling in opposite directions, sharing and shifting the weight. As one of my yoga teachers recently said, "our bodies are diverse societies." (Bost 192).

Within the "heterogeneous community" of fitness are exercisers from a number of different backgrounds and in many different aspects of their lives (Bost 192). More specifically to the act of working out, these "aggregate" bodies make up the beauty of the fitness community, from differences of humans to those of workouts. Because I envision the language of fitness as having a similar poetic ability in connecting to the human body as Bost does in her piece about yoga classes, the captions of fitness enthusiasts' Instagram posts have the power to move exercisers. The power of "sharing and shifting the weight" (that of language) lies in the hands of the enthusiasts, much like that of the yoga instructor (Bost 192).

Enthusiasts' usage and, for that matter, descriptions of the language of fitness in their workout plans become worth looking at in further understanding their empty phrases of/and performances within the mentor/mentee literacy relation with exercisers. Do enthusiasts post/perform up to their position in the mentor/mentee literacy relation?

BELINDA HICKS

8-10reps each:
•Landmine RDLs
•Landmine sumo straight leg deadlifts

Figure 10: Screenshot of @xoxobelinda_ workout plan: September 23, 2022.

Hicks' only workout plan within the six posts of hers (see Figure 10) that I looked at was only a portion of an entire plan. In this, she provided exercisers with a superset within her whole workout. She emphasizes the beginning of her workout plan by way of writing "OKAYYYYYY." Following this, she explains the exercises that follow by way of noting that it is her "new fav superset for hammies/glutes," or her new favorite set of two exercises for working out her hamstrings and glutes. Hicks also uses this emoji, ✨, after saying what kind of workout this plan is. She completes this workout plan by including the two exercises with their rep count: eight to 10 reps for each exercise. These exercises include landmine Romanian Deadlifts (RDLs) and landmine sumo straight leg deadlifts.

The caption described above is partnered with Reel of Hicks doing the two exercises in her workout plan. The Reel consists of videos that are overlaid by the song *Euro\$tep* by West, while Hicks is wearing forest green biker shorts, a large black t-shirt, and white high-top Vans. It begins with a video of her in the gym locker room mirror,

showing the peace sign then turning around to do a common pose in the fitness community; one in which exercisers and enthusiasts sit into one hip, looking over their shoulder. The Reel then changes to a video of Hicks applying the landmine RDL onto her body in the gym, which is followed by a short clip of her changing her feet positioning to do the landmine sumo straight leg deadlifts. All in all, Hicks' workout plan consisted of written language and an array of videos applying such language online to movement in the gym.

It seems that the way Hicks opens both her caption and reel mirrors one another. The "OKAYYYYYYY" initiates that this post was anticipated by exercises, like an "OKAYYYYYYY" here is it moment. This could also hint at the way in which the following superset feels on her body, thus speaking to the text-to-body connection that occurs in fitness. This is shown in the pose in the mirror and smiling with the peace sign that she does in the video, displaying a feeling of confidence; furthermore, in this moment, West is saying "okay" in the song playing. In providing exercisers with the kind of workout—a superset for glutes and hamstrings—early in the post, Hicks grants them with body consciousness in terms of where they should expect to feel these exercises. Throughout this caption's entirety, Hicks utilizes her expertise in the fitness community by way of using the unique vocabulary within it (i.e. superset and RDL).

ERICA NANGLE

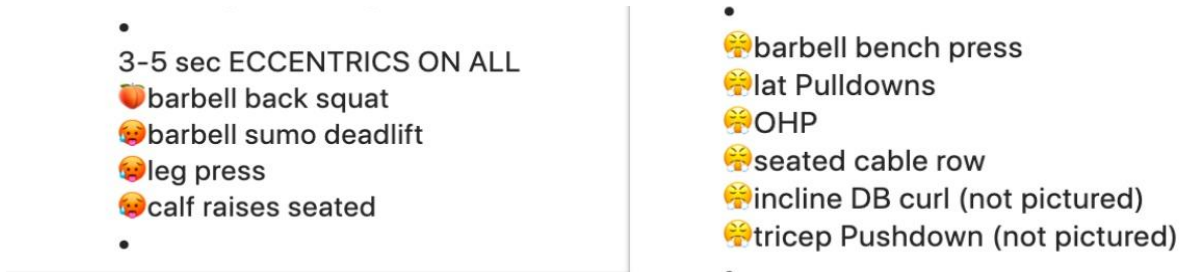


Figure 11: Screenshots of @ericananglefit workout plans: Post 1 (on the left), October 4, 2022; Post 2 (on the right), October 5, 2022.

Nangle’s page accounts for two of the 11 workout plans in this study. In the first post (see Figure 11), she opens the caption by saying what kind of workout the following is: “full follow along leg day.” This is followed by these three emojis, 🏋️🍑🏋️. The next element of this caption consists of a short paragraph that briefly explains Nangle’s making of and reasoning for the plan. She asks exercisers to both let her know how they like the style of video paired with the workout and try out the workout with feedback on what they think. Concluding this small paragraph, Nangle includes a post scriptum: “P.S. if you’re looking for help with structuring your workouts, head to the link in my bio to apply for coaching and let’s get to work!” Next in this caption is the workout plan itself, which Nangle opens by saying how long each exercise should be and that each exercise should be done eccentrically. Following this, she provides the four exercises of the workout: barbell back squat, barbell sumo deadlift, leg press, and calf raises seated. These exercises are listed in that order, with the 🍑 and 🏋️ emojis as markers of a new exercise. Finally, Nangle promotes the clothing that she is wearing and supplements she is drinking, which are from the brand NVGTN and PEScience.

The visual portion that is partnered with Nangle’s workout plan on the left is a Reel of videos, music (*Massive* by Drake), written content and spoken word explaining

each video. In these videos, she is wearing blue biker shorts, a black sports bra, and white Nike socks. She begins with a video of herself in the mirror, the camera positioned on the floor behind her, with the words “Brutal Follow Along Leg Day” over the visual. The Reel then moves onto a video of Nangle rolling her muscles on a foam roller, stretching, and doing bodyweight squats with the words “Dynamic Warm Up” over. Next, Nangle gets into the exercises in the plan with words written over the visuals in the order that they appear in the caption. The written text over the videos explain what exercise she is doing in what video and how many sets and reps (typically displayed as # x #) of each exercise should be done as the workout. The multimedia within this workout plan makes it accessible in a number of different ways for exercisers to apply it to their personal fitness journeys.

The caption on the right in Figure 11 has a similar pattern to Nangle’s other workout plan. This workout plan follows the same rhythm: what kind of workout it is (FULL UPPER BODY), a short paragraph, the workout plan, and promoting brands. “FULL UPPER BODY” is followed by the following two emojis, 🤔💪. For this caption, Nangle’s short paragraph asks exercisers a question, “...does anyone else have an obsession with this song [*Unholy*] r[ight] n[ow]?” She then includes the 🧑 emoji. She notes that the song was “on repeat” during her workout. Using the 🤔 emoji, Nangle connects this discussion on the song to the workout by writing: “Speaking of, here’s a killer eccentric focused upper body day from my new split!!” She finishes this short paragraph by asking exercisers to try the workout below and provide feedback on what they think.

The workout plan itself includes more exercises than the follow along leg day above. Consisting of six exercises, Nangle separates them by listing them and using, again, the 🥵 emoji. The exercises in this workout go as follows: barbell bench press, lat pulldowns, OHP, seated cable row, incline DB curl, and tricep pushdown. The first four exercises are partnered with a visual, while the last two are not. Lastly, Nangle again promotes the brands that her clothing is from, which in this post are Amazon and NVGTN.

For this workout plan, Nangle again creates a Reel, though in this post, she uses an array of videos, music (*Unholy* by Sam Smith), and written text over the videos. In the videos, Nangle is wearing light grey biker shorts, a light pink sports bra, and white Nike shoes. With the words “Full Upper Body” across the video, Nangle shows herself warming up before getting into the first exercise, which is the barbell bench press. She then shows herself doing the rest of the exercises, with their names written over the video. Along with the names of the exercises, and similar to her previous plan, Nangle writes the rep and set count for each exercise, which she notes are to be done eccentrically.

All in all, Nangle’s language actively seeks engagement from exercisers. The “follow along” aspect of this workout plan suggests that exercisers and Nangle will be completing it alongside one another. In the caption this aspect invites exercisers to try out the workout, though the addition of the word “brutal” in the Reel almost takes back this open invitation. Nangle is adding value to “brutal” workouts, which otherwise may be what some exercisers are intimidated by most when on their fitness journeys. Furthermore, Nangle also asks questions in her posts. Nangle hints at the multimedia in

her post by noting that its style was enjoyable for her to make. In this, directly asking for feedback on both the post’s style and the workout itself opens the space for exercisers to get involved in this workout plan. Similarly to Hicks, Nangle’s expertise in the field is demonstrated through her use of fitness vocabulary, rhetoric, and literacy practices across her caption and reel. Though, again, as I discussed in Chapter 1, an enthusiast cannot completely be separated from their brand, and Nangle follows up this open space with a promotion of her coaching. Even later in the post, she promotes athleisure brands and her connection to them.

JANÁE MICHELLE HOLMES

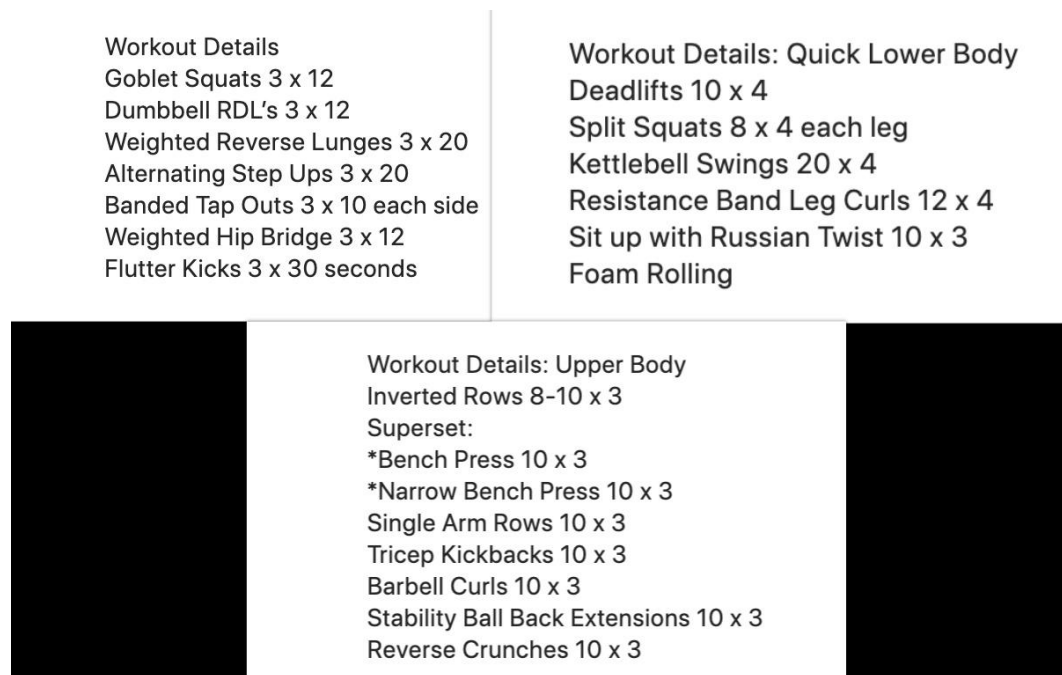


Figure 12: Screenshots of @thiscurvygirlsfitness workout plans: Post 1 (top left), September 15, 2022; Post 2 (top right), September 29, 2022; Post 3 (bottom row), September 30, 2022.

Holmes’ workout plans accounts for three of the 11 posts with workout plans in my research group for this project. She opens her first caption, which correlates to the plan on the top left above, with “Hey Beautiful People!” She then goes into explaining

how she has fallen off her workout routine. Holmes remains lighthearted, though, as she notes “the beauty about falling off is that we can get up and start again!” In this, she is transparent about getting back on track by writing that it is not easy for her, and she has been “slipping back into old habits.” Thus, she follows up with her need to stay focused and diligent in her workout routine. Before getting into her workout plan, Holmes writers:

This journey is never a straight path, there will be lots of twists and turns that will challenge you but you are stronger than any obstacles that come your way. Remember how strong you are, what you’ve overcome in life, the battles that you were victorious! Use those moments to stay diligent on this journey!
You Got This! We Got This! Let’s Go ♥️💪♥️

Before diving into the details of the workout plan, like Nangle, Holmes provides exercisers with the details of her outfit, which is from Fabletics and Peach Perfect Apparel.

In the first workout plan, Holmes does not specify what body focus the exercises have. She notes the separation from the rest of the caption by writing “Workout Details.” Next are the listed exercises that are a part of this workout plan, which includes seven in total. These exercises are listed in the following pattern: *exercise | set count x rep count* (my adding of “|” for content separation). The exercises are listed in the following order: goblet squat, dumbbell RDLs, weighted reverse lunges, alternating step ups, banded tap outs, weighted hip bridge, and flutter kicks.

The visual content partnered with Holmes’ first workout plan is a Reel with music as the sound and written text explaining the workout details on the videos. The song that is playing is *Elevate* by Ye\$ha Yahu, and Holmes is wearing printed leggings, a hot pink sports bra, and black New Balance shoes. Holmes is doing this workout in what seems

like her house, with equipment she has there. The reel begins right at the first workout, with the words “Goblet Squats 3 x 12” written over it, and these videos continue through the last exercise. These exercises are done in the same space of her home, on a yoga mat that is lying on a larger, thicker black mat.

In the second of Holmes’ posts I’m analyzing (see Figure 12), she again opens with “Hey Beautiful People!” Though the content of the next part differs, she discusses with exercisers a common theme in working out: “when you just don’t want to workout.” She admits to being “in a funk” that is getting in the way of her goals on her fitness journey. She notes that when she doesn’t feel like working out, she dedicates 30 minutes to “simply be in the space of working out.” She writes that once in the space of working out—whether home or in the gym—she has “no excuse” to not move for at least 30 minutes. Holmes notes that this is her “personal default,” emphasizing that it works for her, as it builds the habit of working out in going to the space, wearing workout clothes, and playing music. Finally she writes: “Even when we are in a funk, we have to stay consistent because our goals are bigger than our funky mood 😊,” followed by the same saying as plan one, “You Got This! We Got This! Let’s Go 💪❤️”

Getting into the workout plan itself, Holmes distinguishes it from the rest of the caption by writing “Workout Details” like post one, but this time, she includes the body-focus; in this case, the following workout plan is a “quick lower body” workout. Just like before, Holmes lists her exercises in a similar pattern of *exercise | set count x rep count*, though, this time she interchanges the placement of the set and rep counts; therefore, they read as *exercise | rep count x set count*. The order of these exercises go as follows: deadlifts, split squats, kettlebell swings, resistance band leg curls, sit up with

Russian twist, and ending off with some foam rolling. She completes her caption with the details of her outfit, in which her shirt is from her personal brand, This Curvy Girls Fitness, and her leggings are from Fabletics.

Much like before, the visual for this workout plan is partnered with a Reel, consisting of an array of videos, music, and written text over the videos. The song playing is West's *Euro\$tep*, just like Hicks' reel, and she is wearing dark grey leggings, a dark grey t-shirt, a black baseball cap, and black New Balance shoes. Holmes is in the same space—her yoga mat in her home—as her other video, and she follows suit with similar styles of crafting this video. First, she has a video of her doing deadlifts, however, different from the written plan in the caption, in the video (and text over the video), she has “deadlifts with pulse.” The rest of the written text over the video visuals match the workout plan in the caption, finishing off with foam rolling at the end of the workout.

Finally, Holmes' third workout plan (see Figure 12) once again opens with “Hey Beautiful People!” Sticking to her openness on her workout routine, Holmes writes that the week has been “tough.” She says that she has “struggled a bit to stay motivated” though she still “stayed consistent throughout the week” and is proud of it. She admits that at times she wanted to “throw in the towel,” but she “fought through the excuses, and not feeling motivated.” She knew if she kept moving, she would “find [her] footing again.” On the topic of motivation, she writes:

Motivation eludes us all at times and for others like myself it hits hard and we can easily surrender but if we just give ourselves a pep talk, throw on some workout clothes, listen to some good music and just get it done... believe me you will be proud you did it! Everyday that we push past the excuses is a VICTORY! You Got This! We Got This! Let's Go ♥💪♥

She, again, connects her personal experience to a larger audience on Instagram. In doing so, her connection hints at a level of commonality between Holmes and exercisers in the fitness community.

The patterns that Holmes writes in her workout plan is nearly identical to the ones discussed above. This pattern reads in a poetic style, following suit with connecting personal experience to communal experience; followed by the motivational line “You Got This! We Got This! Let’s Go 🖐️❤️”; concluding with the workout plan itself. In this final workout plan, Holmes notes that the workout is an upper body one in the workout details. Then, she goes onto describe the workout plan by way of providing exercisers with their names, set counts, and rep counts. Though this workout plan is quite similar to the others, in this one, she adds a new kind of exercise: the superset. This is followed by two exercises that are starred: bench press and narrow bench press. The other exercises read as follows: inverted rows, tricep kickbacks, barbell curls, stability ball back extensions, and reverse crunches. In this workout plan, Holmes’ outfit details are provided last, with her top being from Old Navy and her leggings being from Bash Fit.

Visually, Holmes’ final workout plan is, again, displayed by a Reel of videos with music (*Coupe* by Pop Smoke) and written text over the videos. Holmes is wearing blue leggings, a white t-shirt, and black New Balance shoes. She begins the Reel with a photo of herself that transforms into a clip of her preparing for the workout with the words “Upper body workout” laid over. The only written text in the visuals that differs from that in the workout plan is for the first exercise. In the workout plan, she writes to do 8-10 inverted rows three times, though, in the visual, she writes 8-10 or as many as possible three times. The rest of the visuals match with the exercises that the workout plan lays

out in correlation to the movement on Holmes' body in the gym space she has crafted in her household.

Overall, Holmes' workout plans really spoke to the poetry that enthusiasts can enact in the creation of captioned workout plans. She remained consistent in keeping the conversation with exercisers first and foremost in the captions, then getting into the plans. Addressing exercisers so vulnerably connects Holmes back to the level of exerciser; for example, she uses her own struggles to stay on track and motivated to connect to larger themes in the fitness community. Doing so brings humanity back into the act of working out by way of being transparent with exercisers about the reality of it. Even the act of being in the space of her own home, Holmes is displaying that exercisers do not have to be going to the space of the gym to be en route of a fitness journey. Speaking directly to and alongside exercisers, Holmes connects with those on her page through her collective motivation for enthusiast and exerciser alike: "You Got This! We Got This! Let's Go

♥💪♥"

SOPHIE BUTLER

**you just need one kettlebell.
clean & press, swings, lateral raises &
clock face &press.
15 reps of each exercise with only 10
seconds rest before each different
exercise.
once you've done a full round of every
exercise, rest for 1 minute, then repeat
4 more times. completing 5 full
rounds in total.**

Figure 13: Screenshot of @sophjbutler workout plan: October 5, 2022.

Butler has one workout plan within her six most recent and/or pinned posts that I looked at for this research (see Figure 13). In this, she shares with her followers a “busy girl workout” for anyone who wanted/needed a quick trip to the gym. Unlike any other workout plan above, Butler notes that exercisers will only need one kettlebell. Also, the pattern in which Butler writes her workout plan also differs in how it is presented visually, as she does not separate the exercises line-by-line nor does she bullet them in any way – i.e. with emojis, numbers, bullet points, etc. Rather, Butler writes the exercises out consecutively on the same line, like so: “clean & press, swings, lateral raises & clock face &press.” She then goes on to explain the rep and set counts for these exercises. She writes that each exercise should be done for 15 reps with a 10 second rest between each exercise. After completing one round of all four exercises, take a one-minute rest, then complete that four more times (five times total).

The visual component of Butler's workout plan is a Reel that consists of an array of videos where Butler is wearing blue leggings, a white sports bra, and white Converse. Throughout this Reel *Gaslight* by Inji is playing over and text is written over the videos. The Reel opens with a clip of her flexing her biceps with the words "busy girl workout – one kettlebell" over it. The Reel then moves into a video of her performing the first exercise (clean & press), another explanation of the rep/set counts, and describes how the exercise should be done for exercisers who use a wheelchair, like herself. She also adds the note: "if you can, do standing" by way of providing her workouts for exercisers without a disability as well. On the next exercise—swings—Butler provides exercisers with text written over her showing the exercise that explains what this exercise is working on our bodies: "a test of balance, using obliques to control the movement." Next, she incorporates a video of her doing lateral raises with a brief reminder of the rep/set counts for this workout. Lastly, Butler includes a video of herself doing clock face rotation & press, again including the rep/set count reminder.

Not everyone has the time to spend an hour or more at the gym, and here is Butler, an enthusiast herself, granting exercisers with a short workout for the "busy girl" lifestyle. By telling exercisers that they will only need one kettlebell for the workout, this also may incline them to do a workout like this rather than one that requires a lot of equipment. Making her workout accessible to a large population of exercisers at all is an act of engagement. Providing brief context in the Reel that describes the benefit of exercises adds to this as well.

NKACY DOUGLAS

🏋️ Kettlebell Workout
6 rounds
1 Seated Alt Press- 12
2 Loaded Lateral Openers- 10 / side
3 Halo Openers- 12
4 Side Plank Presses- 10/ side
5 Alt Single Hand Swing- 12

AMRAP 10 mins
20 Snatch
15 Swings
10 Burpees

1 KB Zercher Squats - 5/12
2 Dead High Pulls- 5- 10/side
3 1/4 Halo- 4- 10/side
4 PullOvers- 4/10
5 KB Chops... Low to High- 3-10/side

Lower Body Finisher: Plyometric
Focus using 2-3 sec tempos. 5
rounds/ 10 reps per exercise

1 Goblet Squat- 3 sec hold at the
bottom
2 Squat Jumps
3 Goblet Squat Pulses- 3 sec tempo
up and down
4 Vertical Jumps
5 Curtsy Lunge - 3 sec tempo going
down
6 Rotational Squat Jumps

Figure 14: Screenshots of @nkacyfitness workout plans: Post 1 (top left), October 1, 2022; Post 2 (top right), October 5, 2022; Post 3 (bottom left), October 6, 2022; Post 4 (bottom right), August 23, 2022.

The last enthusiast of the six that I researched who included workout plans in her literacy practices is Douglas, who posted four of the 11 in this study. The first workout plan is displayed on the top left of Figure 14. She opens the entire caption by stating “Welcome to October!!” She then connects that to a common theme in fitness that emphasizes a “new month,” though she follows that up with “same journey 🍂.” Douglas moves quickly right into the actual workout plan, separating it from the rest of the caption with an emoji and noting the style of workout: “🏋️ Kettlebell Workout.” She notes how many rounds the workout is (six), followed by the exercises which are separated by line and numbered emojis (1) through (5). The exercises go as follows: seated alt press, loaded lateral openers, halo openers, side plank presses, and alt single hand swing. She writes

out the rep count for each exercise following their names. After the workout plan, Douglas asks exercisers to save, share, tag, and like her post. She finishes her caption with a note on her personal brand: “👉 Currently accepting new clients, fill out form in bio.”

The visual component of this workout plan is a Reel consisting of videos with their original sound. Douglas is wearing black biker shorts, a black t-shirt, a black baseball hat, and red and yellow sneakers. These videos display Douglas doing each exercise in the workout plan from the caption in the order in which they appear. In these videos, Douglas is working out in a garage, although we are not told if it is her own, and uses only a kettlebell(s) from her array of equipment behind her.

Douglas’ second workout plan (see top right image in Figure 14) opens in the caption to her saying what the workout is below: total body strength crusher. She then goes right into the exercises of the plan, again separated by line and number emojis. These exercises are listed as follows: KB Zercher squats, dead high pulls, ¼ halo, pullovers, and KB chops low to high. After the name of each exercise, Douglas writes out the rep and set counts as either *# of sets-# of reps* or as *# of sets/# of reps*. Like the first workout plan, she invites exercisers to save, share, and try her workout plan.

Douglas pairs this workout plan with a Reel of videos that has music (*Lyrical Exercise* by Jay-Z) playing over the original sounds. She is wearing black biker shorts, a blue t-shirt, a black baseball hat, and white low-top vans. Much like the first Reel discussed above, the videos are a compilation of the entire workout plan, from the KB Zercher Squats to the KB chops low to high. Douglas is in the same garage gym setting as she was in the first workout plan video as well.

The third workout (see the bottom left of Figure 14) begins with what Douglas notes is the “key to life.” In this, she says that this is the act of working out and eating. She gets right into the workout plan after that, and writes out an AMRAP-style workout, which means as many reps/rounds as possible. In this case, she says that this AMRAP is to be done in 10 minutes, so an exerciser is to do the specific rep count of exercises for as many times as they can in 10 minutes. The exercises are snatches (20), swings (15), and burpees (10). She finishes the workout plan caption with “then refuel...” following the last exercise.

The visual for this AMRAP-style workout plan is a Reel of videos with music (*Who Gon Stop Me* by Jay-Z and Kanye West) playing over the original sounds of the videos. She is wearing a matching Adidas set of running shorts and a long sleeve with light blue Converse. Following suit with the patterns of her other Reels, Douglas keeps the rhythm of this one the same as the other two, going through the exercises in the space of her garage gym.

Douglas’ fourth and final workout plan in this set of 11 that I am looking at is located in the image on the bottom right of Figure 14. In this, she begins the caption with the following: “Trust the process. You don’t get yours how everyone else get theirs. Everyone’s journey is specific to them, create your own goals 🍷.” She then separates this context from the workout plan with two emojis—🔥 and 😡—and with noting what kind of workout the one below is. To me, these emojis interestingly enough do not correlate with one another based on their literal meanings (🔥, representing hot springs and 😡, representing an anger symbol). In the context of her post, I wonder if they were chosen based on their sameness in color, or if perhaps Douglas interpreted them as being

representative of one's personal goals arising (🔥) and reaching a goal (🏆). The workout plan that follows these emojis is for a lower body finisher, with a plyometric focus of two to three second tempos. The workout is to complete five full rounds of 10 reps per exercise, as they are listed: goblet squat, squat jumps, goblet squat pulses, vertical jumps, curtsy lunges, and rotational squat jumps. Douglas concludes this workout plan with, "Save/Share/Tag a friend/Try," which is similar to the rest.

Another workout plan, another Reel. Douglas utilizes the Reel feature on Instagram for this fourth workout plan, in which she compiles videos of her doing the exercises of the plan with music (unnamed) playing over the original sound. Douglas is wearing blue biker shorts, a black tank top, a black baseball hat, and white low-top Vans. Again, she is in the setting of her garage gym doing these exercises in the order that they appear in the plan.

Douglas' workout plans stick to the point of what they are in the fitness community. She keeps the layout of them consistent throughout all four, while sometimes providing some quick statements that could be of motivation for exercisers. The most engaging feature of Douglas' workout plans are her use of sayings that use terms like "Save," "Share," "Tag," and "Like." These speak directly to exercisers in that it asks them to apply her written context to their own bodies as part of their fitness journey.

ROUGH RHETORIC OF THE FITNESS COMMUNITY

Without even getting into the specifics of the vocabulary (superset, AMRAP, set/rep, etc.), the rhetoric of the fitness community is historically built upon toxicity (Fedden). In this, it is common that violent language is associated with and perpetuated in working out; it has become the standardized way of describing an 'effective' workout.

Interestingly, this language is perpetuated both through written text as well as emoji use. When I think back to Riordan and Boutet et. al.'s research on emojis in Chapter 1, it is clear that emojis and their connotations are both done purposefully by their users and heavily affect their receivers. Through the use of language and emojis, we see the rough rhetoric of the fitness community in Nangle's, Holmes', and Doulas' workout plans above.

Beginning with Nangle's workout plans and their partnered captions, the rough rhetoric of the fitness community is quite prominent from the language she uses to the emojis throughout the text – “killer,” “brutal,” 😞, and 😡. As I briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, this rhetoric cuts loose any invitation an exerciser may have felt by the rest of the caption. Associating a workout plan with this rhetoric assumes a negative connotation. Nangle's “killer” and “brutal” workouts take a whole extra level of motivation for someone to not only try but even engage with at all. Further pursuing this negative connotation, her emoji use – 😞 and 😡 – and their placement before each exercise may repel exercisers from adding those exercises in their fitness journey.

Holmes' use of negative terminology – “tough” – is very different. In this, she discusses the realities of working out and staying on track. She grants exercisers her workout plans in hopes that they will motivate exercisers to join her in getting back/staying on track. In this, “tough” is understood by both of its meanings – something difficult to overcome and to become durable against rough conditions. In Holmes' use of this rough rhetoric, she uses it as an outlet of engagement and motivation between herself and exercises.

Douglas' rough rhetoric takes the form of her use of language as well as emojis – “crusher” and 🤬. Describing a workout as “crusher” implies that this workout is in line with “violent compression or pressure that bruises, breaks down, injures, or destroys” (crush, n. 2a). A “crusher workout” seems quite uninviting for exercisers at any level of expertise. Furthermore, after having looked up what this emoji, 🤬, means, it is literally an emoji that symbolizes anger. Though this may not have been Douglas' intention, it still surrounds workout plans with negative connotations. The emoji in appearance seems aggressive, without even knowing its exact meaning.

Enthusiasts perpetuate rough rhetoric, historically toxic language, which may have (and from personal experience, tends to) turn exercisers away from fitness. Mentoring with rough rhetoric guides exercisers into a standardized, ‘brutal’ way of exercising, which leads to the construction of a specific understanding of what determines an ‘effective’ workout.

LET’S GET REEL: VIDEO COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN

Every workout plan above, 11 out of the 11, is partnered with a Reel. Instagram created its ‘Reel’ feature in an attempt to compete with the growing popularity of Tik Tok in 2016, and researchers have found that the main reasons for Instagram users to use this feature are: socially rewarding self-promotion, entertainment, escape, surveillance, novelty, documentation, and trendiness, all while influencing folks’ engagement in social media (Menon). Given these research findings, it seems fairly simple why fitness enthusiasts would use Reels. Though, in partnering these Reels with workout plans, the reasoning could go even further.

The multimodal practices that the enthusiasts use assist in providing visual movement to written text. Furthermore, it sometimes provides a resource that can stand on its own, separate from the captions of the post, as seen in Nangle's, Holmes', and Butler's use of written text overlaying the videos. In a way, this partnership between the video and the workout plan is an outlet for bodily context of workout plans and exercises.

Though this context and those visuals are there, this does not mean that in uptaking the workout plan into their own movement, exercisers will be able to fluently convey their bodily meanings. Movement-based linguistics do not naturally convert onto our bodies, even as individuals within the same community. Each exerciser has a different familiarity with movement going into their fitness journeys. Thus, this speaks back to the empty phrases of performance that enthusiasts provide in their workout plans.

Relating this to the use of Reels on Instagram, one must question whether these are being utilized by the enthusiasts for engagement or if they are solely there for self-promotion – trendiness even. The Reels that correlate with the workout plans described above all share very similar multimedia: videos and music being the two most notable ones. Five of the 11 posts promote the brands of the clothing that enthusiasts are wearing. It is common for these promotions to appear later in the captions; therefore, it returns exercisers' attention back to the Reel to see their clothing. On top of these brand promotions, there are also two in the 11 posts that include a self-promotion (their fitness plans, training, etc.). Even if the language is not there in the caption, the act of videotaping oneself and posting it, in a way, is a kind of self-promotion – whether of a physical brand or the brand of their fitness journeys.

In using Reels to partner with their workout plans, enthusiasts literally invite exercisers into the space that they are in. Within these spaces enthusiasts pursue their own fitness journeys, whether it be in their home, garage, or the space of the gym. Where their invitation falls short, though, is the space where the enthusiasts' journeys meet those of the exercisers due to their mis-instruction of the workout plans. Mis-instruction becomes evident in enthusiasts' empty phrases of performance, especially through the combination of Reels, the language of fitness, and rough rhetoric.

SAVE/SHARE/TRY AND LET ME KNOW: ASKING FOR ENGAGEMENT

Eight of the 11 workout plans initiate direct engagement with exercisers. Whether through the literacy practice of using plural first-person pronouns, like “we,” or asking for a like or for feedback, enthusiasts attempt to craft a collaborative space when it comes to engaging with and working out alongside exercisers.

Beginning with Nangle, she uses phrases like “LET ME KNOW” and “Give it a try and let me know what ya/you think.” These phrases urge exercisers to engage not only with the multimedia content, but also with the workouts themselves. Engaging with new techniques of posting, like her follow-along workout, initiates Nangle's use of “let me know.” In this, she wants feedback on the style of the video. I find this particularly interesting, as asking for this feedback could be for many different reasons, two possible ones being: (1) caring about how exercisers engage with her content or (2) caring whether or not it helped promote her branded platform. In using the phrase, “Give it a try and let me know what ya/you think,” Nangle pushes for her content to be used by exercisers in their own fitness journeys. Furthermore, she asks for feedback on them, which opens up the space for exercisers to speak their voices on such workouts.

Holmes also utilizes tools for engagement, yet similar to what we saw in Chapter 1, she does so through using “you,” which further extends to “we.” This engagement is seen most prominently in her phrase, “You Got This! We Got This! Let’s Go 💪❤️.” Through the use of this phrase, Holmes initiates the collective motivation for enthusiasts and exercisers alike to continue pushing through their fitness journeys. Just as she performs her workouts in the Reels accompanying them, she writes that in uptaking these workout plans, exercisers can also perform them. Thus, in saying “We Got This,” she denotes the act of doing fitness, doing the literacy, together. This support is emulated in her use of the “❤️💪❤️” emoji combination, initiating love and strength amongst the fitness community.

Three of Douglas’ workout plans ask for exercisers to take action with them. These took the form of “Save/Share/Tag/Like,” “Save/Share/Try,” and “Save/Share/Tag a friend/Try.” Separating these words one-by-one, I think of save, share, and tag in the line of self-promotion, while I think of try in the line of engagement. In this, the act of exercisers saving, sharing, and tagging friends further supports the promotion of Douglas’ platform. The act of trying workout plans directly engages with exercises in that they will be implementing these plans into their journeys. Though, tagging a friend could also be seen as an outlet for engagement because in doing so, more exercisers would be engaging with and possibly trying these workout plans. Despite the two groups of connotations that these actions take, looking at them collectively, Douglas overall is asking for engagement with exercisers through initiating their participation with her workout plans.

Overall, I can't help but think of how asking for engagement through likes and shares is also a tool for self-promotion across all of these enthusiasts' accounts. Thinking back to the purpose of Reels as discussed by Menon earlier in this section, this industry-driven mindset seems foundational to enthusiasts' creations of them. The industry-driven tactics for self-promotion pull away from the community aspects, thus possibly lead to a larger number of empty performances. The 'trying' aspect of engagement begins to complicate the mentor/mentee literacy relation when 'saving,' 'sharing,' and 'liking' are surrounding that attempt to instruct.

CONCLUSION

This chapter leaves me with an understanding and complicating of what it is that enthusiasts are conveying in the workout plans they provide on Instagram. Borrowing from theoretical frameworks of hooks, Matsuda, Crowley, and Bost, I present the mentor/mentee literacy relation that exists between an enthusiast and an exerciser. This literacy relation stems from the way I think of Kynard's definition of literacy, as something that people *do* rather than *have*. Though, as my findings showed, the mentor/mentee literacy relation between an enthusiast and an exerciser becomes complicated when there are underlying notions of performance and/or self-promotion for the enthusiasts.

Through this literacy relation, I build specifically from Matsuda's notion of linguistic homogeneity; through this, I note that the enthusiasts are seemingly conveying empty phrases of performance. These empty phrases of performances are evident in the enthusiasts' overwhelming use of fitness vocabulary with only visual representations of that seeming jargon. This jargon – press, RDL, superset, etc. – demonstrates the need for

enthusiasts to meet exercisers at their places of fitness. Without this connection at that level, enthusiasts are performing as their expertise in the community rather than truly engaging with exercisers.

The empty phrases of performance highlight the fitness theater, discussed earlier in this chapter, that exists within the digital community on Instagram. Are enthusiasts and exercisers both performing, in a way? Of course, these performances exist under the capitalism of the fitness industry as a whole. So, does the fitness community only exist as a singular performance under the more branded industry's control?

If the mentor notes how “brutal” or “killer” a workout is, the mentee is turned away from attempting to not only try the workout but also even fill the space within the empty phrases of performance. The empty phrases of performance, partnered with rough rhetoric that exists within the fitness community, complicate the positioning of enthusiasts in their mentor/mentee literacy relation with exercisers. In Chapter 1, I looked closely at the enthusiast as a brand, the enthusiast's use of Reels fulfills these empty phrases of performance. These Reels consist of the movements partnered with the phrases that enthusiasts use in their workout plans. Interestingly, a Reel is a compilation of videos that does not have the function for exercisers to fast forward or go back to a point in the compilation. Also, in order to pause a Reel at a certain point in the compilation, a user must hold onto the video; it is difficult for an exerciser to hold on to a video while also working out. The difficulty that comes with navigating Reels leads to even an emptiness in performance, given that an exerciser would have to swipe back and forth from the written workout plan to the visual explanations. Enthusiasts may be utilizing these Reels as self-promotion of their brands more than using them to provide visual descriptions of

the written workout plans within the captions. Thus, I notice that they ask for engagement through sayings like “save,” “share,” “try,” and “let me know.”

Within these patterns and analyses of the workout plans, it is evident that there is a need for a stronger link between the enthusiast and the exerciser in their mentor/mentee literacy relation. Thus, I am aware of the need for more accessible outlets to the fitness community for exercisers through the workout plans that enthusiasts provide. From my own experience as an exerciser, juggling the jargon of the fitness community becomes an obstacle in one’s fitness journey. After seeing the literacy, rhetoric, and multimodal practices of the five enthusiasts in this research, I have a better understanding of where this juggling came from. Therefore, there must be a better understanding and awareness of the lack of equity in the fitness community within the mentor/mentee literacy relation of the enthusiast and the exerciser.

This chapter looked at the 11 captions in their entirety, though the descriptions and analyses stopped where the hashtags began. The following chapter takes a closer look at these hashtags and how they engage exercisers not only on enthusiasts’ individual pages but also in larger communities across Instagram as a whole.

CHAPTER 3: CRITICALLY COUNTERING THE MAINSTREAM: HASHTAG SPACES IN THE FITNESS COMMUNITY

I grew up pretty much at the same time as social media. When I first made my Instagram account in 2011, there was a growing stigma around hashtags being a literacy practice for more followers.

[#FollowForFollow](#) [#LikeForLike](#)

These hashtags could be found underneath nearly every post on my feed. This idea of hashtags as solely being used for followers and likes became instilled in my mind in the making of my fitness account. I thought it would look like a cry for popularity if I used hashtags in my posts.

But, at the same time, I consistently saw hashtags underneath almost every fitness enthusiast I followed. Seeing fitness enthusiasts building their pages through the use of these hashtags made me think again about the hashtag's purpose.

Was I misjudging what hashtags are meant to do?

I knew that if I wanted to build my platform as a fitness enthusiast beyond just my family and closest friends, I would have to start re-thinking my use of social media altogether. Re-thinking and, in a way, re-educating myself on my literacy practices as an enthusiast.

And so, the ending to my posts' captions began looking a little like the following:

[#Workout](#) [#Gym](#) [#FullBodyWorkout](#) [#Fitness](#) [#PlanetFitness](#) [#LegDay](#)

[#HomeWorkout](#) [#HIITWorkout](#) [#Beach](#) [#BeachWorkout](#) [#Summer](#)

Hashtags began filing into the bottoms of my captions—because that's where they should go, right? I tried to keep my hashtag use to the obvious things I could pull out from my content, as I knew that those hashtags were directly in relation to the multimedia I

provided for exercisers (i.e. what kind of workout it was, where I was working out, whether it was a gym or home workout, etc.). I really think my hashtags ended up just being a description of anything that met the eye of exercisers who were using my workout plans.

With Kynard's definition of literacy in my mind, thinking back on my focus of what hashtags *look like* rather than what they *do*, I realize how uninformed I was on the literacy practices and rhetorics that came with the hashtag. Hashtags are far more than what I understood them not just early in my experiences on social media but also early in becoming a fitness enthusiast myself.

In looking closer at the captions of the six enthusiasts' six most recent and/or pinned posts, the hashtags within the posts' captions stuck out to me, as 25 out of the 36 posts and five of the six (all but Nangle) enthusiasts utilized them in the captions. See the following word cloud, which compiles all of the words that appear in these hashtags:

#LGBTFitness.⁴ In this chapter I ask: What is it that these hashtags *do* in relation to enthusiast-exerciser engagement on Instagram?

MAINSTREAM FITNESS

I define “mainstream fitness” as (1) the idealization of the white, thin, able, and heterosexual body and (2) the aesthetically goal-driven exerciser. Maria José Camacho-Miñano, Emma Rich, and Sarah MacIsaac’s extensive research on the fitness community looks closely at the trends in the “‘perfect’ fit body” (Camacho-Miñano 661). ‘Fitspiration,’ which they study, literally combines the words fitness and inspiration to merge the two into a function of an enthusiast’s posts to their platform. While fitspiration has notions of positive motivation, Camacho-Miñano et. al. remind us that it tends to perpetuate a particular way young girls understand their bodies:

The girls and young women reported that they were constantly exposed to images of ‘perfect’ fit bodies on Instagram, through pedagogies of algorithmic media [Rich, 2018] that sustain, nurture and reproduce postfeminist biopedagogies compelling girls to work on their bodies and their minds toward a constant improvement of the self (Camacho-Miñano 661).

I find that Camacho-Miñano et. al.’s findings on how fitspiration impacts “girls and young women” also conceptualizes fitspiration as constructing fitness to be an action constantly moving toward a goal towards the “‘perfect’ fit bodies on Instagram” (Camacho-Miñano 661). This perpetuation sustains, for exercisers, a persistent feeling of needing to improve themselves.

The idea of the “‘perfect’ fit bodies on Instagram” stems from “mainstream fitness.” Mainstream fitness mirrors that of “mainstream feminism” in which the

⁴ I have chosen to capitalize the hashtags throughout this research, as inspired by research done by Jackson, Bailey, and Welles in *#HashtagActivism: networks of race and gender justice*, as well as research done by Paulette Parris in “‘Glowing Up Ain’t Easy: How #BlackGirlMagic Created an Innovative Narrative for Black Beauty Through Instagram.’”

community has historically centered Eurocentric ideals in image and thought.

Mainstream feminism is the way in which waves of feminism focused solely on gender equality, ignoring intersectionality, as coined and defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Thus, mainstream fitness, especially on Instagram, is fitness which centers and dominates the message that the thin, Western eurocentric female body is the one to strive for in exercising.

Chrissy King – writer, speaker, fitness and strength coach, and the creator of The Body Liberation Project – posted on her Instagram page after the publication of Adriana Diaz’s 2022 article from *The New York Post* titled “Bye-bye booty: Heroin chic is back” (see Figure 16). King writes on her Instagram:

There are a myriad of issues with it – bodies aren’t trends; calling someone ‘heroin’ chick is insensitive and problematic; it’s quite possibly encouraging people to go to downright dangerous measures to shrink their bodies – ie. extreme dieting, disordered eating, prescription drugs (like people without diabetes taking diabetic medication because weight loss is a byproduct) etc. But I want to point out the thing most people are missing: The anti-Blackness and white supremacy wrapped up into the idea of booties being out of style now. (King)

King notes the evident “insensitive and problematic” issues that come with naming “someone ‘heroin’ chick.” This rhetoric encourages folks to “shrink their bodies” to ‘fit’ the now ‘trending’ body-type. Though, more importantly here, King brings to the forefront the white supremacy and the power that eurocentric ideals have in health and wellness industries, including the fitness community. As King notes, there is anti-Blackness in the ideology that “booties” are “out of style”; in this, the idea that a body is a trend is a problem in and of itself, though, calling things that Black women “grew up with naturally” (i.e. big butts and big lips – see Figure 17) “out of style” is reinforcing the mainstream, white culture that dominates communities (King). This *NY*

Post article completely reinforces and further perpetuates the mainstream fitness ideal of the white body.

Bye-bye booty: Heroin chic is back

By *Adriana Diaz*

November 2, 2022 | 6:01pm | Updated



Kate Moss (center) made being ultra-thin chic in the '90s. Now Kim Kardashian (from left), sister Khloé, Miu Miu models and Bella Hadid are bringing the look back.

Figure 16: Screenshot of *The New York Post* headline and image from November 2, 2022 article.



Chrissy King
@iamchrissyking



One of the things I discuss in The Body Liberation Project is that many BIPOC, Black women in particular, grew up with naturally big butts and big lips, features that weren't praised until society deemed them fashionable or attractive. In fact, it was often quite the opposite.

Figure 17: Screenshot of @iamchrissyking post on Instagram from November 7, 2022.

Mainstream fitness's ideals are also found in the centering and upholding of working out for aesthetic goals, especially because these aesthetic goals typically point back to that 'ideal and trending body.' Miriam Fried – Instagram fitness enthusiast and founder of MF Strong – spoke on this issue on her social media in April 2022:



Miriam Fried ✓
@miriamfried

Working towards something specific can be great, but it's also okay to workout with zero goals in mind.

Just wanting to move your body IS enough.

Figure 18: Screenshot of @miriamfried post on Instagram from April 2022.

Fried seeks to challenge the goal-driven fitness mindset that the fitness community typically perpetuates. According to Fried, those who have personal training certifications learn based on this goal-oriented motivation, as “training certifications place a ton of focus on goal setting and using them as a main motivator for clients” (Fried). Because certified trainers, and enthusiasts, are educated in this mindset, they typically uphold goal setting. In turn, exercisers in the fitness community also learn this, leading to multiple layers of goal-oriented mindsets. These multiple layers create what Fried notes as “the nature of [the fitness community’s] society” (Fried). Naming these mindsets as “the nature” of the fitness community reveals just *how* rooted that community is in mainstream fitness ideals.

A heterosexual male gaze is also built into the discourse of mainstream fitness. Many visuals I have come across on Instagram within mainstream fitness fall within what Laura Mulvey notes as a kind of “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 837). The “to-be-looked-at-ness” stems from Mulvey’s notion of the heteronormative male gaze. Her naming of this gaze speaks to something about human beings: humans are obsessed with looking and internalize what they see to make up for themselves. While enthusiasts post content driven by the “to-be-looked-at-ness” mindset, this may be an attempt to show off their work and progress in the gym. Their progress reveals what body is worth showing off. It leads me to question: who is fitness for and what systems are mainstream fitness ideals playing into?

THE COUNTER-SPACE

My research attempts to challenge mainstream fitness ideals within the digital community. This chapter is informed by a critical race methodology lens, especially Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso's definition and use of the counterstory:

We define the counter-story as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. (Solórzano 32)

I will use this definition to think of counter-stories including and beyond race through languages other than English, ethnicity, ability, and sexuality. The “majoritarian stories of racial privilege” exist in mainstream fitness, favoring thin, white bodies as the ideal. In the analysis that follows, I think of the counter-story in the fitness community as “the stories of those [folks] whose experiences are not often told” within mainstream fitness. By way of challenging these stories, the counter-story dismantles complacency in only understanding the fitness community as a eurocentric space.

These counter-stories are present in the pool of enthusiasts I chose to look at, and are especially noticeable through their uses of hashtags. The clickability of a hashtag leads social media users into a space that accumulates different users' posts on similar topics. In discussing *hashtag activism* on Twitter, Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles write:

Hashtags, which are discursive and user-generated, have become the default method to designate collective thoughts, ideas, arguments, and experiences that might otherwise stand alone or be quickly subsumed within the fast-paced pastiche of Twitter. Hashtags make sense of groups of tweets by creating a searchable shortcut that can link people and ideas together. (Jackson xxviii)

On Instagram, hashtags exist as a “discursive and user-generated” space in which “collective thoughts, ideas, arguments, and experiences” are gathered as they are compiled in the captions to visual content. While Jackson, Bailey, and Welles describe Twitter hashtags, Instagram hashtags also create “a searchable shortcut that can link people and ideas together” (Jackson xxviii). The space that hashtags link to is interactive, both in user-to-content relation and in user-to-user relation. Hashtags encourage users on social media to become a part of a conversation, whether in reciprocating hashtags in their own posts or by way of observing and acting upon what these hashtags are doing. Hashtags create space in the fitness community for those within it to come together and share content with one another.

The hashtags I consider create counter-publics, which Jackson, Bailey, and Welles describe as:

...the alternative networks of debate created by marginalized members of the public, thus have always played the important role of highlighting and legitimizing the experiences of those on the margins even as they push for integration and change in mainstream spaces. (Jackson xxxiii)

In terms of fitness, these counterpublics are those that provide “the alternative networks” of information and space “created by marginalized members of the public,” or community. Thus, in using these hashtags, enthusiasts highlight and legitimize those in the fitness community who do not have space in the mainstream ideals that dominate the messages and images within it.

Building from both Solórzano and Yosso’s research as well as Jackson, Bailey, and Welles’, I will think of the hashtag within the fitness community to be a “counter-space.” Hashtags as a counter-space means that in its clickability, the hashtag is a segue into a space that otherwise does not exist in mainstream fitness.

In this chapter, I look closer into the multimedia aspects that correlate with the hashtags listed above: #HijadeCristo, #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, #DisabilityPride, and #LGBTFitness. In doing so, I provide a brief description of the caption and visuals that are partnered with them. Following each description, I analyze the use of the hashtag individually, with this question guiding those analyses:

- How can the use of hashtags in a fitness enthusiast's caption contribute to a counter-space that exercisers can engage with in their literacy relation?

I bring the hashtags together by way of separating them by those that are fitness specific in their names (#AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, and #LGBTFitness) and those that are more interdisciplinary in their nature (#HijadeCristo, #DisabilityPride). In doing so, I discuss how these hashtags speak to the larger Instagram community as well as the fitness community. Furthermore, I question what it means for these hashtags to exist in more mainstream literacy practices, like #FitnessMotivation and #FitnessJourney.

HASHTAGHIJADECRISTO

Four of Arias' six posts include content in both English and Spanish. Focusing specifically on hashtags, half of her posts use the hashtag, #HijadeCristo.⁵ These three posts vary in their content, two which are related to fitness while the third is about her divorce.

Within these posts, the first is on stretching, mobility, and recovery within the fitness community. Similar to a workout plan, she leads these movements of recovery in her video, describing how they are to be done in the caption (i.e. how long they should be held, how many sets to do). As mentioned prior, the caption provides context first in English, then in Spanish, in which these languages are separated by a horizontal line.

⁵ Hija de Cristo: Daughter of God

Nearly the entirety of the caption is provided in both languages, starting her introduction, “Weekly stretch routine”/“Rutina de estiramiento,” though she only promotes her brand, “Join the community 🖱️ WWW.MASVIDA.IO/links” using English. She ends her Spanish translation with a reminder of the weekend ahead, what the movements in the video are for, and the use of a hashtag: “Feliz viernes mi tribu, preparémonos para el fin de semana y pongamos a punto nuestros cuerpos doloridos. #HijadeCristo.” Alongside the caption, this post is a Reel of videos that show Arias doing stretches for mobility and recovery. These stretches remain unnamed both in the caption and the Reel.

Arias’ second use of #HijadeCristo appears in another fitness-related post, which features tips on building core muscles. Much like the last post, this post includes the caption both in English and Spanish, though unlike the first post, there is no promotion of her brand. In this post, Arias includes her daughter, Indi, whose name appears in the caption and image appears in the visual correlated with the caption. Arias’ use of emojis (🏋️ and 🏋️) stays consistent between both the English version of this caption and its Spanish counterpart, which again are separated with a horizontal line. She completes the entirety of the caption, again, with #HijadeCristo. The visual partnered with this caption is a Reel with video and written overtext. This video displays Arias and Indi doing core exercises—Indi correcting Arias in doing so—as the written text, like the caption, is in both English and Spanish.

Finally, Arias’ third use of #HijadeCristo appears under a caption that is provided only in English. In this, Arias is opening up about her divorce, noting “This is one of the most vulnerable and personal videos I’ve ever shared with everyone.” She connects her divorce to how she uses fitness as a coping mechanism, and how exercise helps her

physically feel strong to build mental strength over the years. Again, her daughter is brought up in this caption, but in a very different context; she mentions her daughter by saying: “Now I’m battling one of the biggest challenges of my life—my daughter’s safety and the decisions that will shape her life.” Through this, she notes how she refuses to feel or be broken in her life, despite the challenges that may arise. She writes: “You may admire my strength, consistency, or the shape of my body-I’d like you to see beyond the surface and recognize that the work I do goes beyond the body, but the mind.” Lastly, Arias connects the context of her post to the reason she started her brand, MA Warriors, and she invites exercisers to join her 45-day challenge, finishing the caption with #HijadeCristo. The visual that correlates with this caption is a Reel of videos with written text over it, which summarize what is said in the caption. The first video is of Arias crying in her home in her workout clothes. The next few are her working out, followed by videos of her and Indi, and finishing off with her doing work for her brand, with the words, “this is medicine.”

Arias’ use of #HijadeCristo appears in three different contexts, yet in each challenges the dominance of standardized English in the fitness community. Most interestingly, Arias always provides the promotion of her brand, MA Warriors, in English (see first and last post). I went to the link that she provides in these posts, and her website is all in English as well. Finding that MA Warriors is English-only, I question who her brand is for in the end. Arias’ use of Spanish, but more powerfully, this hashtag on her Instagram platform directly dismantles English-only ideologies. Steven Alvarez’s notion of “the myth of an English-only United States” speaks on the “narrow-minded[ness]” of English-only being “the only model for literacy learning” (Alvarez 96). In his piece,

“Official English American in Best,” in *Bad Ideas About Writing*, Alvarez writes: “English-only does not contribute to meaningful education on any grounds. Decades of research into bilingual learning strongly advocates for all students’ plurilingual learning” (Alvarez 96). Understanding the internationality of users on Instagram, English-only platforms, especially those with a large following, do not “contribute to meaningful” interactions. In the mentor/mentee literacy relation, Arias opposes the notion that the fitness community is an English-only space. She opens her space and its content to a wider audience, advocating for “[exercisers’] plurilingual learning” in a space that is otherwise largely English-only (Alvarez 96). The hashtag, #HijadeCristo, has 7,432 posts using it as of November 8, 2022 (see Figure 19). Therefore, Arias’ use of this hashtag along with other multimedia aspects provides a segue for exercisers to a larger community of Instagram outside of fitness.

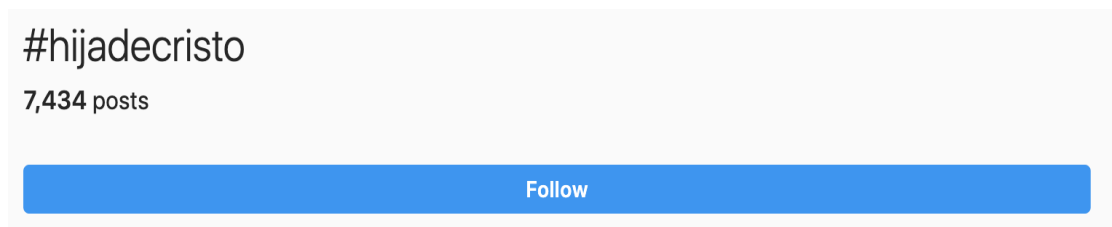


Figure 19: Screenshot of the space of #HijadeCristo on Instagram, November 8, 2022.

HASHTAGASIANFITNESS

Hicks utilizes the hashtag, #AsianFitness, in one of the six posts included in this research. In this post, she provides a very short caption: “Full body sesh to change things up for the one timeee 😊.” This short, one line caption is followed by a number of hashtags that relate back to the theme of the content as well as her identity—#FitnessMotivation, #StrongWomen, #HoustonFitness, #AsianFitness, etc. Partnered with this caption, Hicks made a Reel that consists of an array of videos of

herself doing the exercises in this workout. In the last video, she sped up the timing and has a workout partner doing the workout as well. Her workout partner is a Latinx woman-identifying exerciser. There is no written text over the video; therefore, the actual workout plan itself is not included in this post.

The hashtag #AsianFitness challenges mainstream fitness by way of centering a non-white body. Historically, white supremacy has been the root cause of Asian alienation in the U.S. As I articulated through defining mainstream fitness, white supremacy exists in the fitness community. White supremacy is present in the fitness community's tacit belief that the white body's most desirable. Hicks' use of #AsianFitness creates a counter-space both *within* this mainstream fitness, but also *outside* of this mainstream fitness. In the hashtag's existence *within*, it directly troubles the white supremacist ideologies present within the community; the hashtag's existence *outside* of mainstream fitness creates an alternative space that welcomes and celebrates Asian bodies.

I further articulate how #AsianFitness responds to the stereotypes that stem from white supremacy in the U.S. As Aki Uchida writes: "There is a consensus that the characteristics of a typical Oriental Woman include submissiveness, subservience, obedience, passivity and domesticity, and several other similar traits" (Uchida 162). In utilizing the hashtag #AsianFitness in relation to the hashtag #StrongWomen, Hicks is troubling the very assumption that the Asian woman is submissive, domestic, passive, and obedient to white men. The hashtag #AsianFitness troubles this American ideology that orientalizes the Asian woman.

Even in the visuals of the Reel, Hicks challenges this passivity of the Asian woman. Lifting is an act of strength, both physically and mentally. An exerciser claims a sense of agency in ‘doing’ strength training. The weight of the dumbbells and barbells that Hicks uses and the definition in her muscles in the act of lifting dismantles the stereotypes of the Oriental woman – “as exotic, submissive, and subservient” (Uchida 167). Hicks is (un)creating the “exotic, submissive, and subservient” image of the Asian women that typically appears in United States history and culture. In this act of (un)creating, Hicks utilizes #AsianFitness as a way to compile counter-narratives under one counter-space for other Asian folks in the fitness community to feel welcomed (see Figure 20). This counter-space “allow[s] the voices of Asian women to speak for themselves and be heard” (Uchida 173). Under #AsianFitness, Asian women-identifying exercisers are welcomed, have agency, and collectively build the strength to challenge the mainstream – both in fitness and U.S. stereotypes.

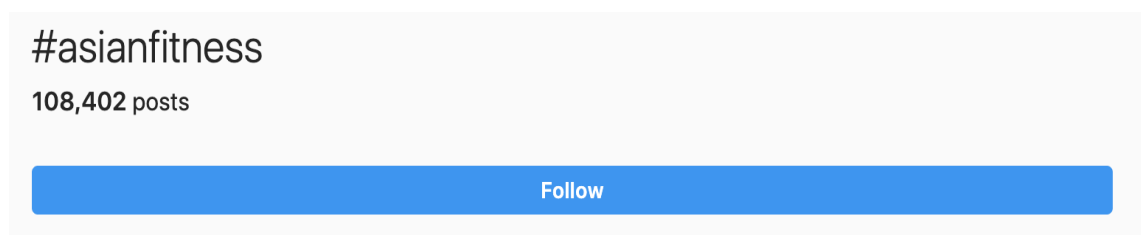


Figure 20: Screenshot of the space of #AsianFitness on Instagram, November 8, 2022.

HASHTAGBLACKFITNESS

Three of Holmes’ six posts within this research include the hashtag #BlackFitness. I examined two of these three posts closely in Chapter 2, as they included workout plans. As a reminder, these two posts included a longer paragraph before the workout plan which discussed Holmes’ routine to get back on track and the struggles that came with doing so. These posts were both Reels of Holmes doing the exercises as they

show in the workouts. The third post that uses #BlackFitness addresses Holmes' weight loss journey. She discusses how successful her journey has been: "In the beginning, the workouts just seem hard but then there is this little glimmer of light. You lost a couple of pounds. Now you're excited, motivated and you want to keep going." She then discusses the phase of plateauing, when the weight stops coming off, and exercisers have to make the decision on whether to keep trying or find comfort with where they are. Holmes notes the mental and emotional health and strength that goes into continuing her weight loss journey. She finishes her caption with the same saying that appears in the other two posts, "You Got This! We Got This! Let's Go 💪❤️." Similar to the first two posts, this third post has a Reel that consists of an array of pictures and videos with the song called *Self-Love* playing over them. This reel has written text over some of the videos and GIFs over one as well. The pictures and videos are of Holmes both posing to show her weight loss and working out, both in the gym and in her home.

Holmes' use of #BlackFitness not only troubles mainstream fitness ideals, but also challenges Western standards of body image ideals in the everyday. Like #BlackGirlMagic, which Paulette Parris describes as "the creation of a space for Black women by Black women, they are representing themselves when and where no one else will," #BlackFitness is a counter-space to mainstream fitness (Parris 61). In the space of the fitness community heavily driven by Western, white standards of beauty, #BlackFitness works as a counter-space because it is a place where folks of color can go to where they are welcomed and celebrated. The counter-space #BlackFitness "provide[s] exposure and promote discussions which can be useful steps towards empowerment and combating inequalities" (Parris 61). Holmes' use of this hashtag "steps towards

empowerment” for Black women-identifying exercisers. The hashtag’s empowerment is found not only in Holmes’ literal strength as a fitness enthusiast, but in its partnership with the Reels that show artwork of Black women hung on Homes’ walls. These collectively advocate for the space of #BlackFitness, and this space is a place for Black women-identifying folk (see Figure 21) to celebrate their bodies and confront Western, white standards of beauty.

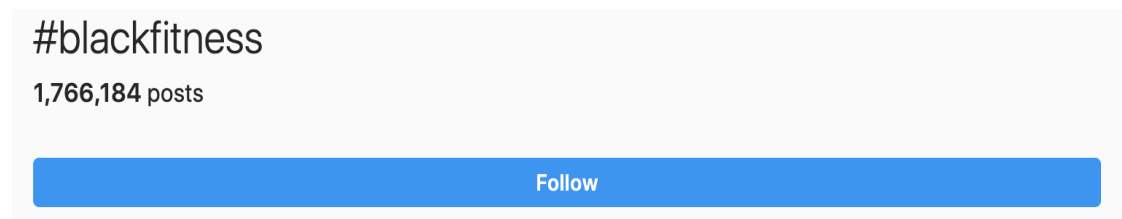


Figure 21: Screenshot of the space of #BlackFitness on Instagram, November 8, 2022.

HASHTAGDISABILITYPRIDE

Butler utilizes the hashtag #DisabilityPride in one of the six posts in this research. Though this post is not fitness related, it is such a powerful post for exercisers on her page who have a disability. She posts an array of photographs and infographics to remind users: “it’s ok to mourn your non-disabled body.” She notes that she has engaged in open conversation about this topic with many users through her Instagram story. The visuals include a side-by-side photo of Butler prior to her disability versus now. The infographics that follow this image are written text over rainbow backgrounds. They speak about the process of grieving and adjusting to a disabled body. She writes: “When living in a marginalized body, it’s not productive to perform positivity.” In this, she notes that it is not that easy to just “love yourself” all of the time.” Speaking directly to ideological beauty standards, she continues: “I even sometimes just miss how I fit the beauty standards more easily.” She ends her caption with the following hashtags, #DisabilityAwareness, #DisabilityRights, #disabilitypride, and #DisabledAndProud.

I choose #DisabilityPride over #DisabilityAwareness and #DisabilityRights because the term “pride” actively interjects the exclusion of folks with disabilities in the fitness community; in this, to have “pride” in one’s identity, the “awareness” is already there. Furthermore, the “pride” is necessary to build the power to dismantle the systems that deny folks with disabilities “rights.”

Prior research has linked the feeling of pride to the overcoming of a feeling of shame in the discussion of disability; for example, Ásta Jóhannsdóttir, Snaefríður Thóra Egilson, and Barbara E. Gibson write:

The pervasive powers of surveillance towards normality set the standards of what it means to be a proper person, woman or subject. What happens if people fail to attain such normality? What happens when their mere being causes rupture in the social script? (Jóhannsdóttir 348)

I think of surveillance in the fitness community similarly to the tacitly assumed heterosexual male gaze that users on Instagram undergo in posting content. One cannot separate surveillance from power, and surveillance on social media is a kind of supervision over folks. Thus, in bringing the idea of surveillance into the space of Instagram’s fitness community, there is commonly a pre-set “normality” and “standard” for exercisers, which includes a non-disabled body. Thinking of very similar questions as Jóhannsdóttir, Egilson, and Gibson, Butler reminds exercisers and Instagram users of the nature of grieving and, in turn, feeling shame. She confronts these feelings, noting that they are valid to feel. She even writes in an infographic, “Grief is a process of transition, not an end in itself,” which distinguishes the movement of shame into a feeling of pride.

I extend Butler’s use of #DisabilityPride to the enthusiast’s position as a teacher in the mentor/mentee literacy relation with exercisers. To do so, I think of Stephanie L. Kerschbaum’s notion of anecdotal relations. She defines anecdotal relations as “relations

to disability that are created and disseminated through the narratives people share about disability” (Kerschbaum 1). Butler openly shares her narratives about disability, as we see in the post that utilizes #DisabilityPride. Her anecdotal relations paired with #DisabilityPride not only open a counter-space, but also open a means of open communication about something so commonly situated as “something to fear,” which then leads to it being “avoided, instead of welcomed” (Kerschbaum 4). Kerschbaum writes of in person teaching spaces: “...if disability is going to be welcomed into a classroom, it needs to be open as a topic discussion, especially (but not exclusively) when it shapes students’ learning and involvement” (3). Butler welcomes disability and in doing so, she has it as a topic of discussion” on the platform. Thus, it is in her pedagogical practice as an enthusiast to implement it in her content for exercisers. For example, in her workout plan featured in Chapter 2, Butler is open to providing tips for the exercises for both folks with and without disabilities. In this, she is welcoming disability as something to learn from.

Butler’s use of #DisabilityPride dedicates a space (see Figure 22) for folks with disabilities to enter and collectively overcome ableism on Instagram. The hashtag #DisabilityPride is a counter-space in the fitness community, as it re-narrates and re-situates *who* fitness is for. This hashtag challenges the notion that fitness – and any movement-based hobby – is for able-bodied folks only. #DisabilityPride, of course, even speaks to the larger, broader community of Instagram altogether, accumulating stories, experiences, and visuals of folks with disabilities utilizing a count-space to challenge the “normality” and “standards” of life.

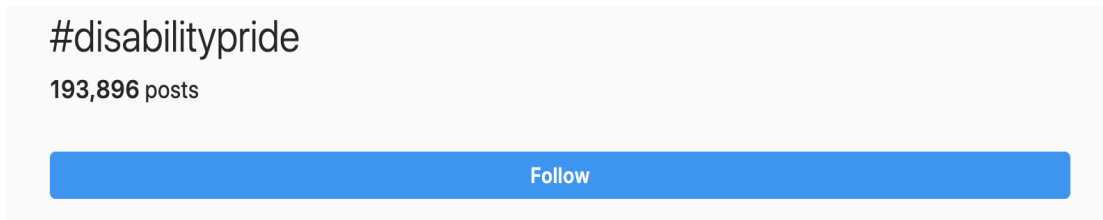


Figure 22: Screenshot of the space of #DisabilityPride on Instagram, November 8, 2022.

HASHTAGLGBTFITNESS

Douglas' use of the hashtag #LGBTFitness is seen in five of her six posts in this research. All five of these posts are fitness related, and four are those discussed in Chapter 2 because they include workout plans. These workouts were done in her home garage, and she kept her captions straight to the point of the exercises within the workout plan. The fifth post of Douglas' that uses #LGBTFitness is about putting in effort for transformation to one's fitness journey. She keeps her caption minimal, much like the ones partnered with her workout plans: "Its not about perfect, its about effort. When you bring that effort every single day, thats where transformation happens. Thats how change occurs, so its up to you." The visual partnered with this last post using #LGBTFitness is a Reel of Douglas working out. Douglas is again working out in her home garage, and *Public Service Announcement* by Jay-Z is playing over the videos. She has on a shirt with a rainbow mask with the words "Unmasked" written across it, black Adidas shorts, and high grey sock with white Vans.

Douglas' individual use of #LGBTFitness speaks to the intersections of her identities as a Black, queer woman-identifying person. Thus, her individual use of the hashtag speaks against heteronormative beauty standards, but also brings the construct of race into the coversation as well. I bring this counter-space (see Figure 23) back to the foundational work in Black queer theory. The Combahee River Collective was comprised

of a group of Black, queer women-identifying folks who used their experiences and voices to deconstruct the systems of oppression against them and other folks like them. Speaking from her reading and use of the *Combahee River Collective Statement*, Phyll Opokugyimah writes:

The Combahee River Collective Statement compels me to tell you to listen and to act, to call-in those left behind or silenced. And it compels me to remember that this new chapter of my life is an opportunity for radical, inclusive leadership. (Opokugyimah 25).

“To listen” and “to act” enacts the necessity of taking theory and experience and putting that theory to practice.

The Combahee River Collective is foundational to the interlocking identities that Douglas encompasses. The use of #LGBTFitness by Black women-identifying folks enacts “radical, inclusive leadership,” creating a linked space where other queer, Black women-identifying folks can go to and become a part of the larger conversation in the fitness community that challenges heteronormativity.

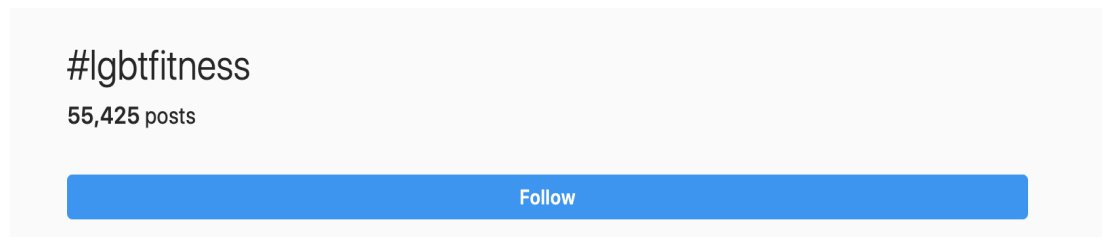


Figure 23: Screenshot of the space of #LGBTFitness on Instagram, November 8, 2022.

FITNESS IN ITS NAME

The complex question of who fitness is for forces folks to face the reality of the eurocentric ideals that fitness is built upon. Thus, the counter-spaces of #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, and #LGBTFitness exist within the fitness community to offer places for the bodies and folks who do not “fit” the standardized ideal. In speaking *to* the fitness community, these hashtags are a response *to* mainstream fitness and the historic

euro-central, heterosexual, and ableist nature of the fitness community. In speaking *within* the fitness community, these hashtags contribute to counter-spaces for exercisers with like identities to be both within that space of the hashtag as well as the space of the fitness community at large.

Mainstream fitness ideals normalize exercising for Western, heteronormative standards of beauty and the male gaze. Each of the three hashtags, #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, and #LGBTFitness, directly challenges this mainstreamed idea of what fitness and what the “fit” body is. These hashtags directly bring conversation, for enthusiasts and exercisers, back to three of Isaacs and Brennan’s four themes of fitness—equality, inclusivity, and empowerment. Equality exists in the hashtags’ availability within mainstream fitness. Inclusivity exists in the hashtags’ welcoming of identities that otherwise are erased from mainstream fitness. Empowerment exists in these hashtags’ spaces of collective challenges to mainstream fitness.

I am reminded of bell hooks’ response to Mulvey’s heteronormative male gaze when I think of what #BlackFitness and #LGBTFitness ‘do’ in challenging mainstream fitness. hooks coins the term “oppositional gaze” to reveal Mulvey’s ignorance of Black women and men in her film theory. hooks uses the awareness of theory rooted in eurocentrism and uses the oppositional gaze to reveal that Black women shouldn’t look at what is on the screen. Rather, Black women should focus on how they are looking at the screen. The heterosexual male gaze in the fitness community interpolates Black and queer women-identifying exercisers into performing *for* the white male gaze. In utilizing the hashtags #BlackFitness and #LGBTFitness, Holmes and Douglas focus on their positionality with mainstream fitness, rather than trying to find themselves within the

mainstream. These enthusiasts are opposingly hashtagging into a space where their identities are welcomed, fostered, and shared among exercisers.

These three fitness-centered hashtags – #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, and #LGBTFitness – bring forward conversations of intersectionality, stereotypes, white supremacy, and heteronormativity. In bringing awareness to these conversations, these hashtags and their accompanying counter-spaces bring to the forefront conversations that fitness is political, which will be discussed more in the section that follows.

INTERDISCIPLINARY IN ITS NATURE

The hashtags #HijadeCristo and #DisabilityPride exist interdisciplinarily in the fitness community, meaning they could exist within *any* community on the Instagram platform. So what does it mean for Arias and Butler to bring these hashtags into the fitness community? Arias' use of the hashtag connects the fitness community with language, religion, and familial topics. When I think of politics in terms of the fitness community, #HijadeCristo pushes back on language disparities within the fitness community and the U.S.'s typical mainstreaming of an English-only ideology. For Butler, the hashtag connects with activism and disability rights. Furthermore, Butler's use of #DisabilityPride speaks to the ableist nature of mainstream fitness ideals. The interdisciplinarity of these hashtags reveal the number of different places that the fitness community exists on Instagram through the multitude of identities that are present in enthusiasts and exercisers.

One of the places that fitness exists outside of itself is in politics. The fitness community *is* political. Politics in the fitness community exist both in elections for those in power as well as the literal act of policing bodies and folks from it. Politics are a type

of policing, as it appears right in its name. Arias and Butler are abolishing the policing of Spanish-speaking folks and folks with a disability in the fitness community. Many online spaces, even Arias' website for example, are offered in English only. Thus, this is completely erasing bodies from accessing these aspects of the fitness community altogether.

Oftentimes in fitness, folks with disabilities are policed from even accessing the space of the gym. For example, at my own institution, St. John's University, the fitness center in Carnesecca Arena requires the use of stairs, with no elevator access. The machines within the fitness center leave hardly any space between them (see Figure 24); therefore, anyone in a wheelchair would not even be able to get to and throughout its space.



Figure 24: Pictures from the St. John's University Fitness Center on September 28, 2022.

In using the hashtags #HijadeCristo and #DisabilityPride in their posts, Butler and Arias create interdisciplinarity between their identities and the fitness community. With their large platforms on Instagram, Arias (2.7M followers) and Butler (126K followers) both hold power on the application. Therefore, these counter-spaces are powerful in and of themselves, crafting equal and inclusive spaces for both exercisers and general users on Instagram alike.

CONCLUSION

This chapter looked closely at five hashtags used throughout the 36 posts in this research – #HijadeCristo, #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, #DisabilityPride, and #LGBTFitness. Though not all of the hashtags analyzed are directly connected to the fitness community (i.e. using the term “fitness” in them), each of them are powerful in and of themselves in the digital space of Instagram. As I focus briefly on the interdisciplinarity of hashtags within the fitness community, I want to show how many times the five hashtags appear on Instagram altogether. Each of these hashtags bring together not only enthusiasts and exercisers, but also many other users of Instagram. See the following table on how often they have appeared as of November 8, 2022:

Hashtag	Number of Posts	As of...
#HijadeCristo	7,434	November 8, 2022
#AsianFitness	108,402	November 8, 2022
#BlackFitness	1,766,184	November 8, 2022
#DisabilityPride	193,896	November 8, 2022
#LGBTFitness	55,425	November 8, 2022

Figure 25: Table showing the number of posts used with the analyzed hashtags as of November 8, 2022.

I think back to how Chapter 1 briefly discussed how the way that occupations appear in enthusiasts' biographies display *who* they are within the fitness community rather than focusing on *what* they do within the community; Chapter 3 builds from this thinking and revealed the power that can exist in a singular hashtag, according to *who* these enthusiasts are on and off their platforms. In utilizing powerful hashtags in their post as fitness enthusiasts, Arias, Hicks, Holmes, Butler, and Douglas open a space where “those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover they are not alone in their marginality” (Solórzano 27). This “marginality” is found at the intersections of oppression for some of these enthusiasts as well – Butler, queer and with a disability; Douglas, queer and Black.

These hashtags foster spaces in which exercisers, enthusiasts, and Instagram users alike feel empowered and empower one another. Solórzano and Yosso write, social justice research works along the agenda toward the following: “the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and the empowering of subordinated minority groups” (Solórzano 26). In counter-space's ability to eliminate inequalities and welcome inclusion, the hashtags used by enthusiasts and considered in this research create places for social justice. Solórzano and Yosso's listed agendas connect to three of the four themes of fitness – equality, inclusion, empowerment – that Isaacs and Brennan distinguish, as noted earlier in this chapter.

My research of counter-spaces reveals the social justice work that is being done within fitness enthusiasts' use of hashtags to create engagement with exercisers. The empowerment within these counter-spaces accounts for a kind of engagement between enthusiasts and exercisers. Seeing their own visuals in this space and seeking out others

assists in centering ignored and appropriated bodies in the fitness community. These hashtags speak directly to my reasons for choosing the group of enthusiasts that I did for this research. Each of them, in their own way, contribute to the fitness community in ways that counter mainstream fitness. Through the use of the hashtags analyzed above, these five enthusiasts create space in the fitness community that has historically been de-centered or even ignored due to eurocentric, heterosexual, and ableist ideals.

Though these counter-spaces introduce equality, inclusion, and empowerment in theory, I still want to pay close attention to the complexities that come with hashtags, even for the five explored in this research. The five hashtags analyzed in this chapter exist as one literacy practice amongst many more on an enthusiast's platform. Typically, these hashtags were placed within other, most commonly used ones, like #FitnessMotivation and #FitnessJourney. Given the close relationship that fitness enthusiasts have with the capitalist-driven fitness industry, these counter-spaced hashtags may be considered a kind of "fitness-washing."⁶ I think of fitness-washing as something similar to woke-washing: "where ethically problematic companies use social movements to increase sales without addressing how their business is complicit" (Pitcher). As chapters 1 and 2 discussed, enthusiasts are personal brands within the larger industry that is fitness. Utilizing counter-spaced hashtags amongst other literacies in a caption is both granting exercisers space for empowerment, and remains complicit in some other mainstreamed practices. This leads me to question: may these enthusiasts be including

⁶ "Fitness-washing" is a term that came up in conversation with my thesis advisor, Dr. Anne Ellen Geller, and second reader, Dr. LaToya Sawyer. Dr. Geller mentioned this term in relation to thinking of the hashtags in this research as a kind of "fitness-washing," similar to other "washings" – pinkwashing, greenwashing, carewashing, and woke-washing.

these single hashtags amongst more mainstream content as a way to check a box on liberalism and democracy? Where are their other efforts for these social movements?

Fitness *is* political, and it should be treated as such; therefore, there should be more attempts at challenging mainstream fitness ideals. I wonder though, what other attempts are the five fitness enthusiasts doing to support their use of the hashtags #HijadeCristo, #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, #DisabilityPride, and #LGBTFitness? In her work on crafting diverse pedagogies in the composition classroom, Danielle Mitchell writes: “the work of a single class is not enough to challenge the dominant heterosexist ethos of a campus” (Mitchell 24). I apply this thinking to the fitness community; King and Fried (who are discussed earlier in this chapter) are just two of many enthusiasts and advocates on Instagram. Though, it is also important to note that “the work of a single” hashtag is not enough to dominate mainstream fitness ideals. Despite this limitation, King’s and Fried’s attempts at naming and confronting mainstream fitness, along with the counter-spaces that a number of hashtags create, reveal that there are *possibilities* for a future of fitness that is more holistic, accessible, and inclusive for enthusiasts *and* exercisers alike.

CONCLUSION

After a couple of years of engaging with enthusiasts on my personal page, I began to realize that even in doing the workouts they put together, that ‘doing’ didn’t change anything that they would post daily. With this, I felt myself losing control of my *own* personal fitness journey because I felt I was *supposed* to be working out like the enthusiasts on my Instagram. I was *supposed* to be going to the gym everyday, no matter how busy my life outside of fitness was, and I was *supposed* to be following a specific workout routine. I was completely lost in the goal-driven mainstream fitness ideal that I *must* achieve a specific look, a specific style, by doing specific routines.

In the process of researching and writing, I became aware of the complexities that exist within the digital space of the fitness community. On the surface, fitness Instagram looks like/seems to be an interactive space where enthusiasts share with exercisers different exercises, tips, advice, etc. for their own individual fitness journeys. Though, when taking a closer look at the literacy practices, rhetorics, and spaces that enthusiasts enact between themselves and exercisers, this interaction becomes more apparently promotionally performative. Are fitness enthusiasts, and even exercisers, just performing self-promotion for the fitness industry? Is the fitness community just a way of shielding this capitalist mindset with community-building practices? What can the complications of the community-industry relationship in fitness tell us about the uses and limits of literacy practices utilized on Instagram?

Given my internal tension between living amongst/as an enthusiast(s) and my position as an exerciser in the fitness community, I came to this research with an idea of what I wanted to think. But, my research of the literacy practices and rhetoric of fitness

enthusiasts revealed both engagement with exercisers and the disengagement through the multimodal marketing that exists on their pages. While the attempts to engage with exercisers may be there in enthusiasts' literacy, rhetorical, and spatial practices, this does not mean that such engagement is followed through beyond just the biographies, captions, and hashtags.

Instagram has become far more than just posting pictures to a feed; it has become a platform that fosters communities all around the globe, morphing into a larger structure that all connects back to a capitalist structuring of communities. Of course, this research looks specifically to the fitness community within Instagram. To be a single exerciser observing or a part of the fitness community on Instagram means that you are just another number in an enthusiast's follower count.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Chapter 1 offers a look into the capitalism that casts over the fitness community. The community-side is naturally one built from guidance and participation, while the industry-side is one driven by branded identities and business. The community-industry relation in digital fitness becomes apparent in the enthusiasts' promotional practices. This chapter unravels the two-sidedness to the fitness community on Instagram – community-based and industry-driven. While enthusiasts invite exercisers into this community, they have more capitalist power to align with the capitalist-driven industry. The biographies, while introductory of the enthusiasts themselves, also are introductory to the tensions that exist between the fitness community and the fitness industry.

Exercisers continue to go to enthusiasts' pages because they are taking from enthusiasts' pages what they find meaningful to their own journeys. Chapter 2 develops

an analysis of the mentor/mentee literacy relation that becomes complicated for enthusiasts and exercisers when empty phrases of performance seem to merely align with self-promotion. As the attraction to a page grows – through number of likes, comments, followers, etc. – enthusiasts remain active in posting content like workout plans. May enthusiasts be asking for feedback to better their platforms' traction? Fitness is driven by branded capitalism, and that is evident in many of the six enthusiasts' biographies and workout plans in this research. Thus, though the fitness community and the mentor/mentee literacy relation may be present, capitalism covers this presence.

And, finally, I speculate in Chapter 3 the possibility that enthusiasts use particular hashtags, like #HijadeCristo, #AsianFitness, #BlackFitness, #DisabilityPride, and #LGBTFitness, to invite exercisers to counter-spaces away from mainstream fitness. With these hashtags existing amongst other, more mainstream hashtags, like #FitnessMotivation and #FitnessJourney, I question if these other hashtags promote a kind of fitness-washing. What other practices outside of these hashtags are the enthusiasts utilizing to further challenge mainstream fitness?

ENGAGING TO SELF-PERFORM

Though my research focused mainly on the enthusiasts, in the end, I still see my research from my experienced point of view also as an exerciser. Therefore, I understand the engagement with enthusiasts by hitting 'follow,' 'like,' and 'save' on their platforms. Is this engagement truly *engaging*, though? Are exercisers similarly at fault for 'following,' 'liking,' and 'saving' their way to their own empty phrases of performance? Certainly, there could be more research on whether or not engagement actually occurs, where, and how, perhaps by way of looking at the comments section of these posts and

reading whether or not there is reciprocated engagement. Is there actually a conversation present between an enthusiast and an exerciser? Furthermore, research could consider the legitimacy of engagement over social media. Can there be *true* engagement between an enthusiast and an exerciser over a digital platform where that exerciser is just one of thousand, even millions of exercisers in an enthusiasts' follower count?

I wonder if the fitness community on Instagram truly has the ability to develop a relationship between enthusiasts and exercisers. Are these relationships between an enthusiast and an exerciser or fitness and an exerciser? I am inspired by Sara Ahmed's work in *Queering Phenomenology* to think of the biographies, workout plans, and hashtags in this research as a kind of "orientation devices" between an enthusiast and exerciser. Ahmed writes:

The work of inhabitation involves orientation devices; ways of extending bodies into spaces that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call livable or inhabitable space. If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails. (Ahmed II)

A number of different folk make up the fitness community – enthusiasts, exercisers, and general users alike. Thus, in making this fitness community inhabitable for all, those in power, namely the enthusiasts, must do the work to orient exercisers within the community. Enthusiasts have the possibility to engage with exercisers through the literacy practices, rhetoric, and spaces they utilize; however, as I examined in the three chapters of this project, enthusiasts perpetuate self-promotion of their brands in these practices. Could this promotion and self-branding be failing the fitness community of the orientation needed to build a true community?

PRACTICING BOTH ROLES

I would be lying if I said that my rhetorical practices and literacies as a fitness enthusiast were not perpetuating many mainstream goals and ideals in the fitness community. In fact, I stopped posting on the page during the summer of 2022 during my research for this project, because I felt myself too focused on posting a workout daily for exercisers than really connecting with them and building relationships. My fitness page was far, *far* from being even close to perfect, and it took me a while to realize that I was playing a part in the mainstream-ness of the community. In this, I was failing exercisers of a fundamental aspect in the fitness community – connection to exercisers. I still question, looking back at my page, where this engagement could have happened? It is possible for me to imagine connecting with the small follower count I have now, which is primarily made up of family and friends. Though, a larger follower count means a larger stage to perform for, so where is the line in the digital fitness theater between community and industry?

I would also be lying if I said, as an exerciser, I also did not perform for the stage within the fitness theater. I fall for the literacy and rhetorical practices that enthusiasts post. Even just last spring, I found myself doing the 12-3-30 treadmill workout (12 incline, 3 speed, 30 minutes) after seeing Instagram posts of enthusiasts' before-and-after transformations. I also have found myself waiting for a paycheck to be a part of upcoming Gymshark releases. There are two fitness enthusiasts on my personal Instagram page – @miriamfried and @averyweiler – who actually reach out to me every now and then to catch up. Perhaps they do this with everyone, but, as an exerciser, these personal DMs speak volumes; I have connected peers with them, understanding the

feeling of someone with such a large platform (1) reaching out, (2) caring to ask how you are, and (3) responding in ways that show they pay attention.

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

Digital media engulfs much of our attention in the modern day; therefore, critical media literacy is essential to better understand the content that we are taking in as consumers. I believe that a critical approach to reading the fitness community calls for the need for more critical media literacy – for both enthusiasts and exercisers. Torrey Trust, Robert Maloy, Allison Butler, and Lauren Goodman define critical media literacy as the following:

Critical media literacy, more specifically, explores ownership, production, and the distribution of media, encourages inquiries about dominant ideology, and is rooted in social justice and making space for change-making [Kellner & Share, 2005]. Critical media literacy looks beyond the content of the media to better understand dynamics of power related to how and why that content came to be. (Trust 169).

This research project begins the work of looking “beyond the content” of fitness enthusiasts. In my findings, the “dynamics of power” became apparent in the literacy practices, rhetorics, and spaces that the six enthusiasts utilize. My findings also revealed the complexities that come with the content of fitness enthusiasts, though the qualitative research could not respond to “how and why that content came to be.” This requires further research, perhaps through interviewing enthusiasts and exercisers to gain more knowledge of the experiences going on over the Instagram fitness community.

THE NEED FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SITE OF RESEARCH

I also believe that there must be more attempts at dismantling the stigma around social media and its relationship with academia. Jacklynne M. Horne’s research on pole dancers within Instagram influenced my use of Instagram to look closer at the fitness community. Horne writes:

This thesis also serves as a counter narrative to a prominent idea that Instagram is, at most, frivolous...I argue that social media has decentralized storytelling, which allows people to share their stories to a larger audience than would be possible with traditional media. (Horne 84-85)

As Horne declares, there is an all-too-common idea that Instagram and social media are “frivolous.” I find that social media is the place that users are drawn to within the communities they are a part of. Given this draw to social media and the continuing rise in digital media around us, social media *should* be a site of research. My research validates Instagram as a site of research and reveals its necessity in studying spaces where storytelling has been ‘decentralized.’

Through Instagram, fitness enthusiasts *can* and *do* market themselves, interact with exercisers, and create space for what “traditional media” wouldn’t otherwise display. Exercisers have access to these enthusiasts and become a part of something larger – the fitness community. Despite this accessibility to decentralized storytelling, Instagram’s fitness community cannot fully separate itself from its industry-like motives; this is similar to Horne’s analysis of the stigma #NotAStripper used by many pole dancers on Instagram. Through Instagram, researchers have access to many layers of analysis through questioning, examining, and exploring the literacies, multimedia, rhetoric, and spaces utilized by the communities around us.

BUILDING YOUR BRAND

While this research adds both to critical fitness and media studies, I don’t want it to stop there. If this research does *anything*, I hope it inspires those in academia, especially fellow graduate students, who seek to question the world around them. I hope that it pushes something to *really* question the world, just as Dr. Geller and Wellman pushed me to do so. Question your hobbies. Question your habits. Question the everyday.

With every question, there is a plethora of research to explore. If you told me last year at this time that I would be researching the fitness community, I never would've believed you. Trust your advisor when they tell you to take risks, and trust yourself when those risks start to slip from you. A researcher is an explorer, and as my second reader, Dr. Sawyer said, "Research is Me-search." Every moment in this world is worth exploring. Be not only a researcher, but also an enthusiast in your interests – perhaps these questions might just be what leads you to your academic brand 😊.

APPENDIX A

Name	Instagram Handle	Number of Followers	Identifies as...
Massy Arias	@massy.arias	2.7M	Latina woman, Founder of MA Warriors, CEO of Tru Supplements, Mother, CPT
Belinda Hicks	@xoxobelinda_	105K	Asian woman
Erica Nangle	@ericananglefit	190K	White woman, Founder of Grow Strong App, ACE CPT
Janáe Michelle Holmes	@thiscurvygirlsfitness	75.3K	Black woman, Organizer of Curvy Community
Sophie Butler	@sophjbutler	126K	White woman with disability, queer, Cosmo's Influencer of the Year
Nkacy Douglas	@nkacyfitness	8,040	Black woman, queer, Founder of NKaCy Fitness, CPT, Nutritionist

Note: this table does not cover an extensive description of these women; if any of them identify as something that is not present, this is because it is not explicitly listed and/or described on their Instagram platform (via biographies, introduction posts, hashtags, external links, etc.).

APPENDIX B

Fitness Term	Meaning
Eccentric	AKA: negative training Slowing down an exercise in its muscle-lengthening portion of the movement
DB	Short for dumbbell
OHP	Short for overhead press
Sets	The number of rounds you do of a particular exercise
Reps	The number of times you do an exercise in one set
AMRAP	Short for “as many reps as possible” A type of workout in which an exerciser has a certain amount of time to do as many reps they can in that given time
Superset	A type of set in working out in which one set consists of two exercises done consecutively
Plyometric	A type of exercise training that focuses on speed to build strength
Lower body	A workout that focuses on an exerciser’s lower body, which consists of quads, hamstrings, calves, and glutes
Upper body	A workout that focuses on an exerciser’s upper body, which consists of back, chest, triceps, biceps, and shoulders

Note: these are just a few of the terms that are seen throughout this research. I chose to pull the ones that stuck out most to me as very unique to the fitness community without going into individual explanations of each exercise within the workout plans.

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