#Fitgirls & femininity

How female Millennials give meaning to fitness bloggers' representations of femininity on social media

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Master's Thesis
June 2018

#FITGIRLS & FEMININITY: HOW FEMALE MILLENNIALS GIVE MEANING TO FITNESS BLOGGERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMININITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

ABSTRACT

Fitness blogging seems to be a new social media phenomenon these days, as fitness bloggers excessively post pictures of their fit and toned bodies and write articles full of workout know-hows and recipes, to motivate others to live a healthy lifestyle as well. In this postfeminist, media-friendly, individualistic, consumer society, it is evident that fitness blogging becomes more and more prevalent, and that those who are often exposed to these images – female Millennials – might be influenced by fitness bloggers in their daily life, but perhaps also in their constructions of certain discourses, such as femininity. Nevertheless, discourses can change over time, and perhaps these fitness bloggers can portray themselves in such a way that challenges dominant discourses. Therefore, it would be interesting to see how dominant discourses surrounding femininity might be changing for female Millennials and if/how fitness bloggers can play a role in this sense. This research investigates how female Millennials give meaning to fitness bloggers' constructions of femininity on social media. Four qualitative focus group interviews have been conducted, with a total of 21 participants. It can be concluded that the participants could be divided into three distinct groups according to their level of involvement with fitness blogs: fitgirls, moderate fitgirls, and non-fitgirls. It became evident that these three 'types' of participants employed different readings, as they gave different meanings to social media constructions of femininity as presented by fitness bloggers. It can be claimed that fitgirls probably draw from different discourses – since they gained more knowledge about and through fitness blogs – than moderate and non-fitgirls. Nevertheless, all participants noted that fitness bloggers in general often focus on appearance, which suits the premise of postfeminism. It was also evident that the participants liked the 'ambiguous/negotiating' category of pictures the best, as fitness bloggers showed 'the real situation' of them working out, and thus also communicate a message about 'girlpower'. On top of that, it seems that the discourse surrounding femininity has changed among female Millennials, as muscularity is not necessarily associated with masculinity and is also seen as a preferred characteristic for women – being muscled looks beautiful and healthy. Lastly, it can be concluded that the very notion of 'fitgirl' has become a new stereotype in this postfeminist society.

KEYWORDS: *gender, femininity, fitness bloggers, fitgirls, social media, Millennials, discourse*

Voorwoord

Hier is ie dan, mijn masterscriptie, die tevens het einde van mijn studententijd markeert. Een moment dat veel te snel is gekomen. De afgelopen vier jaar zijn voorbij gevlogen. Maar na vier mooie jaren in Rotterdam, bomvol waardevolle ervaringen en levenslessen, is nu toch echt het moment gekomen om aan het volwassen leven te beginnen en een 'echte' baan te gaan zoeken. Na een superleuke bachelor tijd te hebben gehad bij IBCoM (International Bachelor Communication and Media), had ik gekozen voor de master Media & Journalistiek. Ondanks dat deze master wel in het Nederlands was, heb ik er toch voor gekozen om deze scriptie in het (voor mij) oude vertrouwde Engels te schrijven. Uiteraard wil ik mijn begeleider Jacco van Sterkenburg bedanken voor zijn uitstekende begeleiding tijdens dit proces. Bovendien wil ik ook in het bijzonder Nikkie Broekaart, Brigit van der Goes en Laura van Pottelberghe bedanken, voor het regelen van focusgroepjes voor mij. Zonder jullie was het mij niet gelukt! Ook de respondenten die hebben deelgenomen aan dit onderzoek, ben ik zeer dankbaar. En *last but not least*, wil ik ook graag mijn ouders en vriend bedanken voor de onvoorwaardelijke steun tijdens deze (af en toe toch wel zware) periode. Maar uiteindelijk heb ik het natuurlijk wel zelf gedaan, en mag ik best een beetje trots zijn op het eindresultaat! ☺

Veel leesplezier toegewenst!

Sofie Colleman
Rotterdam, juni 2018

Table of Contents

1. **<u>Introduction</u>**

Fitness blogging is a well-known phenomenon these days. Living a *happy healthy lifestyle* has become a popular trend, and people more and more feel the need to share their *fit journey* through social media, to motivate others to do the same. Gina Harney (a fitness blogger) defines fitness blogging as a way to "share some daily happenings, as well as quick, effective workouts and healthy recipes" (Stover, 2014, p. 1). For instance, Estrella van Toor, a Dutch female fitness blogger, writes: "I started to change my lifestyle with the goal to make the most out of myself. I became, fitter, happier and healthier than ever. I jumped into the world of weightlifting, made delicious oatmeal bowls, shared my exercises and recipes and discovered that not only I liked what I did, but a lot of you too! That motivates me to gain even more knowledge in the fields of food, fitness and photo editing to make the most out of my Instagram and help and inspire you with creating a fit, happy and healthy lifestyle as well." (Van Toor, 2017, 'About').

These blogs are often seen as so-called *fitspiration*, which can be defined as "a social media phenomenon that has recently emerged to inspire individuals to exercise. Inspirational fitness images and slogans are presented, ostensibly to motivate weight loss, healthy eating, and fitness" (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017, p. 561). So fitness bloggers motivate people to live a healthier lifestyle through exercising and/or healthy eating habits. Fitness blogs are known for their focus on the body. This focus on the body stems from postfeminism, according to Dejmanee (2016) and Stover (2014). Postfeminism is a result of a highly commercialized and individualized society revolving around consumption. It encourages women to take control of their lives, and thus also of their bodies – by consuming practices. This will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

But these blogs also represent a certain idea of femininity, as they implicitly refer to an ideal body and also mental state – being strong on the inside as well as the outside. So one could argue that these fitness bloggers also transmit a latent message about (their interpretation of) femininity and gender roles. It could be claimed that fitness blogging is a type of mediasport. Mediasport can be defined as any sport not experienced in the space where it happens but represented through media (Bruce, 2013). Fitness blogging can be seen as mediasport, because the notion of blogging itself already suggests that the sport (fitness) is only communicated through a medium (the blog). If fitness bloggers did not share their activities through blogs or other social media, the very notion of fitness blogging would not exist and it would have a far lesser impact on everyday lives, as it is not a 'normal' sport

event that fans can attend in real life. On the fitness blog there may be pictures and blogposts about a certain work out (sporting event), but that is usually posted afterwards, so it is not mediated live (in time). On top of that, it is also edited and framed by the fitness blogger him/herself, which differs from the notion of mediasport, where the sporting event is mediated and thus edited by a journalist (Bruce, 2013). But whereas mediasport is overwhelmingly male dominated according to Bruce (2013), this does not have to hold for fitness blogs, where mediasport is created by, about and for women. Bruce (2013) even adds that these kind of media could challenge the status quo of how women are represented.

Because of their ever-growing prominence (via social media), it is evident to think that these bloggers – also known as fitgirls - have an impact on their readers. I am an example of this myself. I have always been interested in sports, since I have played (a lot of) volleyball since I was seven years old. So a few years ago, I started following #fitgirlcode on Facebook, because I was interested in sport routines and workouts that could help me improve my volleyball skills. I became more interested, and started following other fitness blogs as well, like Jorellafit and Fit Dutchies. I learned a lot about exercising and eating healthy, and I gradually started to change my lifestyle, in the sense that I started to work out more and differently, and I also changed my eating habits. I also noticed that a lot of my peers (mostly girls) were also becoming aware of this *fitgirl* trend through blogs and other social media, that may or may not have influenced them to change their exercising and/or eating habits.

Previous research is mostly based on content analyses of fitness blogs. This research has outlined what kind of messages prevail on fitness blogs and how these create narratives about femininity and gender roles. For instance, Simpson and Mazzeo (2017) have analyzed the content of such fitness blogs, and they found that appearance is mainly emphasized, as to motivate the readers to engage in exercising and eating healthy. Thin, fit, slender and toned are presented as the criteria for beauty and physical attractiveness. According to Simpson and Mazzeo (2017), young adult women, who are more faced with appearance-targeted images online than through other media, will get the idea that the ideal healthy and attractive body is slender and toned. This can be explained by social cognitive theory, which holds that "humans learn by observing people's actions and their consequences" (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017, p. 561). And they will also be more likely to adopt the promoted behaviors by fitness bloggers when they see these are rewarded (by peers). Moreover, Andreasson and Johansson (2013) have identified three distinct ways of how fitness bloggers can display gender ideals, ranging from reproducing gender stereotyped images by emphasizing appearance to challenging the status quo by positioning women as strong.

Furthermore, Dejmanee (2016) found that food blogs – which are closely related to fitness blogs as they also promise a fit and healthy body – can serve as a platform for women to counter their stereotypical position as sexual objects and create their own narratives of empowerment, and also entrepreneurship as they share knowledge within a certain community. So this relates to Andreasson's and Johansson's (2013) third type of blogs, and reaffirms the notion that female fitness bloggers can challenge the status quo and present women more powerful (Bruce, 2013). In traditional sportmedia, sportswomen are still framed in a feminine (and thus heterosexual) context, which devalues their athletic competences (Heinecken, 2015; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003; Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). For now, most fitness blogs – which can also be seen as sportmedia – also seem to emphasize appearance and therefore meet normative expectations of heterosexual femininity and thus maintain the status quo.

Nevertheless, as fitness blogs are becoming more and more prevalent, and since these fitness blogs represent certain ideas about femininity and gender roles, it can be claimed that these messages can play a role in how the readers of these blogs construct their own meanings of femininity and gender. It is known that audiences refer to multiple resources and discourses to construct meanings, and how they interpret the represented ideas depends on the discourses they have at their disposal (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). There are a lot of different factors that come at play when giving meaning to media discourses, such as class, race and gender relations, but also social and economic factors, and so on. When we make meaning of a certain media message, we refer to certain frames of knowledge (things we have learned over time through education, experiences, culture, etcetera) that we have at our disposal (Hall, 1994). Therefore, it is thinkable that people with different backgrounds give different meanings to (media) messages. Yet, in the end, these notions of femininity become integrated in our culture, which illustrates the importance of investigating audience receptions – about femininity.

It seems evident that the so called 'Millennials' are the generation that is most likely (regularly) faced with these fitness blogs, as they are known as the generation that grew up with the Internet, and that distrusts the (traditional) media (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They are the generation born between 1982 and 2002, so they are either (college) students or starting their careers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials are claimed to be optimists, team players, rule followers, the most watched over children and family-oriented, confident, smarter (and better educated), more pressured, and they believe in the future (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Farrel's and Hurt's (2014) summary of Millennial characteristics mostly agree with Howe and

Strauss (2004). They state that Millennials are capable of multitasking, have a desire for structure, are focused on achievement, have high technological skills, are team-oriented, and seeking for attention and feedback (Farrel & Hurt, 2014). They grew up in this highly commercialized and individualized, and thus postfeminist, society. So they are more used to the idea of equality between men and women – a narrow gender-role gap, and 'girl power' in the media (Stark, 2015). Therefore, it is thinkable that they might recognize this rather ambiguous depiction of femininity on fitness blogs, which present women as more powerful, as the new status quo. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see how this generation perceives the created images of femininity on fitness blogs.

So it can be noticed that previous research has focused on the content of fitness blogs in relation to the gender images they present. Therefore, one could state that there is a gap in the literature regarding to the impact these blogs have on their audience – in terms of meaning making. Looking at my own experience, as described earlier, these fitness blogs changed my lifestyle in a way and I also regard women and the female body as strong, which could be what Bruce (2013) refers to with 'ambiguity'; strong and powerful on the one hand, but still emphasizing their appearance in a heterosexual context on the other hand. This 'ambiguity' could be the current dominant discourse among female Millennials, as they are used to 'girlpower' but also focus on appearance in the media (Stark, 2015). Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how young women make meaning of the presentation of femininity on fitness blogs. The following research question can be formulated:

RQ: How do female Millennials (18-30 years old) give meaning to social media constructions of femininity as presented by female fitness bloggers?

Societal relevance
Looking at some of the most well-known fitness blogs, it seems like they have expanded immensely in a short time frame. For example, Fitgirlcode holds the top position in the Netherlands, with over 200,000 followers of the Firgirlcode community (blog) and 93,000 followers on Instagram. FitDutchies comes second with over 65,000 followers. Jorellafit, which is my personal favorite, has over 23,400 'dedicated' followers of the community (blog) and on Instagram, and Estrella van Toor (one of the founders of Jorellafit) is followed by over 26,300 people. The largest and most famous fitness blogging community worldwide is the BBG community from Kayla Itsines, with over 388,000 members.

So these numbers show that these blogs have a rather far reach. Supposedly, most readers of these kind of blogs are young women (Van Rhee, 2015). Therefore, as these blogs thus have a huge amount of followers (within this group in society), it is thinkable that these females (Millennials) collectively construct their notions of femininity partly based on the gender ideas presented on fitness blogs. Nevertheless, discourses are flexible and can change over time (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). So it is important to know if and how this group can form new discourses that challenge or reaffirm previous hegemonic discourses about gender roles in general, but also if and how fitness blogs might play a role in changing dominant discourses in society. Nevertheless, discussions about gender (equality) are still relevant for society these days, as gender equality is still an important issue in society these days. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to see how fitness blogs – a new type of media – play a role in discussing gender roles and positioning women and how young females make meaning of these representations of femininity – that may or may not challenge dominant discourses about femininity – and in turn even adopt these notion into their own framework of knowledge about femininity and gender roles.

Scientific relevance

Most of the existing literature has focused on how femininity (or gender in general) is presented in sportmedia. Besides Andreasson and Johansson (2013) who investigated fitness blogs, basically all other research is focused on traditional media like newspapers. Therefore, there seems to be gap in the literature about fitness blogs – a type of sportmedia, which can be explained by the fact that this is a quite new social phenomenon that developed with Web 2.0, and has expanded very fast over the last couple of years. It is thus important to know how these fitness blogs could play a role in young women's notions and constructions of femininity today. Moreover, most research has focused on how gender is represented in sportmedia. So there seems to be a gap in the literature about how audiences interpret these messages. Therefore it is relevant to investigate how the audience – Millennial women – interpret notions of femininity as presented on fitness blogs, and how these ideas could in turn help form their constructions of femininity in general.

2. **Theoretical framework**

This chapter will outline the main concepts for this research. First, I look at the concept of gender, and how gender plays a role in the media. Second, I will discuss (the different types of) femininity and masculinity. Third, the concept of discourses and meaning making in relation to gender will be described. Then, the chapter will go more in-depth about femininity in sportmedia and/or fitness blogs. Lastly, I will discuss how audiences can interpret messages from sportmedia and fitness blogs about gender.

2.1 Gender

First of all, an understanding of the concept gender is needed. To define gender, the difference with sex needs to be made clear. Sex refers to biology, in the sense that it connotes with the genitalia that distinguishes men and women (Zimmerman & West, 1987). The concept of gender is much more complex, and therefore hard to define. According to Zimmerman and West (1987), "gender was an achieved status: that which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means" (p. 125). Generally, gender entails the ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman, constituted by interaction. So it can be concluded that sex refers to a category – 'man' or 'woman' – which is based on biological characteristics (genitalia) and is thus rather fixed, whereas gender is rather a category than can be acquired based on culturally constructed norms (Butler, 1990). However, Butler (1990) argues that sex can also be regarded as a cultural construction, as it also connotes with certain discourses – and cultural practices – that were produced over time. For the purpose of this research, I mainly draw on insights about gender as a social construct, as I believe and have experienced myself (by growing up in a rapid-changing society, being exposed to all kinds of media) that gender norms can change over time. Gender is dynamic, multidimensional and unstable (Dines & Lumez, 2003).

Zimmerman and West (1987) distinguish the concepts of sex, sex category, and gender. Referring to sex category, they state that "categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category" (Zimmerman & West, 1987, p. 127). So, simply put, if one conducts and therefore displays as one sex or the other, one will be placed in that category, regardless of whether they also belong in that category biologically. This concept is therefore already closer to gender as a social construct. Zimmerman and West (1987, p. 127) state that "gender, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of

attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category". So, in this light, gender seems to be a way of behavior dependent on the context and situation (time, place, culture, etcetera), which contradicts sex category, as that is rather fixed for all situations, as it is based on the socially constructed norms for each sex. One the one hand, gender is created through interaction in the sense that certain behaviors, physical conducts, ways of speaking, etcetera, contribute to or challenge certain discourses about gender ideals as we are complying (or not) to the agreed-upon gender norms, what Zimmerman and West (1987) refer to as "doing gender". But at the same time, gender also serves as a frame for interaction, therefore constantly reaffirming accepted gender behaviors.

Gauntlett (2008) also envisions gender rather as a social construct. Through interaction, people learn the preferred gender roles by modeling – copying gender behavior (from parents/peers) – and reinforcement – rewarding the socially desired male or female behavior (Gauntlett, 2008). Gender identity serves as a framework in which one has to define his/her own personal identity (Gauntlett, 2008). Similarly, Butler (1990) claims that gender identities are created by performance, which means that they are constructed by our repeated daily behaviors, and mentions the example of 'drags' who perform (the feminine) gender. She therefore defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 45). Butler (1990) hereby refers to Foucault's idea that gender marks the body (and not the other way around).

Goffman (1977), also cited in Zimmerman and West (1987), claims that every society develops its own beliefs about what is essential for masculinity and femininity. He agrees with Zimmerman and West, saying that gender is context dependent. According to Goffman (1977), every gender is seen as having its own characteristics that fit with their gender ideal. For example, playing sports are seen as a 'good' male activity, as it displays their physical strength (which is regarded as an ideal male characteristic), whereas householding activities are rather seen as feminine, and thus a 'bad' male activity, as it diminishes their 'ideal' male identity (Goffman, 1977). Goffman (1977) therefore refers to gender identity: "insofar as the individual builds up a sense of who and what he is by referring to his sex class and judging himself in terms of the ideals of masculinity (or femininity), one may speak of gender identity" (p. 304). Butler (1990) also emphasizes sexuality as an important aspect of gender identity, as heterosexuality is seen as a male characteristic – and thus the desired behavior – and homosexuality as rather feminine masculinity – and thus undesired/inferior behavior. So

the 'ideal feminine' and 'ideal male' behavior are always in line with heterosexuality and acknowledging the superior male gender. As a result, homosexuality is usually associated with alternative masculinities and femininities, as this is undesired gender behavior, which will be more thoroughly explained in the next section.

Furthermore, it is important to note the importance of media in creating gender discourses. As discussed earlier, ideas about gender are formed through interaction, and media are a central element in how people interact nowadays. The media also present certain preferred gender roles (Bruce, 2013). Gill (2007) states: "rather than there being a pre-existing reality to the meaning of the categories masculine and feminine, the media were involved in actively producing gender" (p. 12). So, she argues that media lie at the heart of creating the concept of gender. Hereby it should also be noted that, like the media, the concept of gender is always changing, adapting to newer generations. Hall (1997) argues that high culture can be regarded as masculine and mass entertainment (especially soap operas) as feminine, as mass entertainment is inferior to high culture in terms of media and quality richness. Although, this does not hold for all types of mass entertainment; sports is mass entertainment but often considered rather masculine. Nevertheless, this is an example of how the media internalize the dominant discourses and practices of society (*mediatization*). Gill (2007) claims that media representations of gender are rather contradictory today. On the one hand, there seems to be more 'girl power' in the media, but on the other hand, some traditional patterns of sexism are still evident (Gill, 2007), like power differences by sexualizing the female body. This is similar to what Bruce (2013) has noted as 'ambiguity' in sportmedia: women are portrayed as powerful but also heterosexually physically attractive. All in all, it remains rather unclear how (the feminine) gender is represented in the (sport)media. Therefore, it is important to find out how gender identities are depicted in the media, and fitness blogs in particular, and how these are in turn interpreted by the audience.

When looking at Millennials and gender roles, it can be remarked that they seem to think that men and women are more and more interchangeable; the gender role gap is narrowing (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In fact, most Millennial characteristics seem to be rather adhering to a dominant feminine discourse. For example, looking at Howe's and Strauss' (2000) and Farrel's and Hurt's (2014) Millennial characteristics, it can be argued that optimism, team-orientation, civic-deed doing, multitasking, desire for structure, seeking attention and feedback are female characteristics that are in line with the dominant discourse of femininity in society. Howe and Strauss (2000) even claim that girls are in fact leading the way for the Millennial generation (in terms of education and career success), and this 'girl

power' is also visible in the media. Although women are gaining (economic) power, gender separations still exist, also for Millennials, mostly in the work field – some areas are dominated by men (construction, business), and some by women (care, education), but also leader positions are often occupied by men (Howe & Strauss, 2000), which could be due to the fact that leadership is still rather associated with hegemonic masculinity instead of (hegemonic) femininity (Schippers, 2007). So it is clear that gender roles have changed over time although certain traditional gender roles still exist, and it is therefore important to uncover how this age cohort sees gender roles, and constructs notions of masculinity and femininity.

2.2 Femininity and masculinity

Butler (1990) and Hall (1997) agree that we only speak of gender when we want to mark the difference between men and women, and usually only the feminine gender is marked. Therefore, as femininity is often being regarded in the context of masculinity (Connell, 1987), we must define masculinity first. Schippers (2007) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and subordination of women" (p. 94). In general, the concept of femininity is shaped around discourses surrounding masculinity, as it reaffirms the dominant position of men. Therefore, Connell (1987) argues, there is no such thing as hegemonic femininity. But instead, Connell (1987) mentions *emphasized femininity* as the dominant and preferred femininity for society. Emphasized femininity is based on women's subordination to and the desires of men (Connell, 1987), and thus reaffirms the status quo. Other types of femininity are often centered around ignoring or resisting men's superiority (Connell, 1987). In practice, according to Adreasson and Johansson (2013), emphasized femininity is usually expressed in the way that women are stereotypically depicted as weak, sexual objects, and/or mother figures. Schippers' (2007) definition of femininity is quite similar: "femininity includes physical vulnerability, an inability to use violence effectively, and compliance" (p. 91). So it can be concluded that the dominant discourse surrounding femininity can be defined emphasized femininity, which is based on women's subordination and compliance to men whereby women are often presented as weak sexual objects and mother figures.

However, it can be argued that there is still a dominant and thus hegemonic form of femininity among other femininities. In this regard, Schippers (2007) does recognize the concept of hegemonic femininity: "hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics

defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 94). This notion of hegemonic femininity is very similar to emphasized femininity. So, as mentioned before, the dominant forms of femininity – hegemonic and emphasized femininity – serve the status quo and thus the dominance of men.

Moreover, some types of femininity are superior to others, which is often related to class and race (Connell, 1987), but also include those who revolt against the status quo (Schippers, 2007). Schippers (2007) defines these 'other' types of femininity as 'pariah femininities', "because they are deemed, not so much inferior, as contaminating to the relationship between masculinity and femininity" (p. 95). This deviant female behavior is sanctioned, with social exclusion for example. This relates to Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix, in which gender identities are framed. Simply stated, every behavior that does not involve a heterosexual relationship between men and women and whereby women are subordinated to men, is deviant and thus seen as an alternative masculinity/femininity. For instance, one kind of unwanted femininity is hegemonic masculinity performed by women, which means that women are executing behaviors that are connected to male characteristics. For example, in the dominant discourse surrounding masculinity – hegemonic masculinity – characteristics such as being physically strong and sexually attracted to women are considered preferred male behavior. Schippers (2007) claims that pariah femininities are in fact types of femininity that perform (discourses of) masculinity. For example, "desire for the feminine object (lesbian), authority (bitch), being physically violent ('badass' girl), taking charge and not being compliant (bitch, but also 'cock-teaser' and slut)" are regarded as 'ideal' male characteristics, but when women perform these male characteristics, they are defined as pariah (or in fact, male) femininities (Schippers, 2007, p. 95). This, in turn, also holds for men who perform (hegemonic) femininity – or in this case male femininity (Schippers, 2007), for example being gay. Furthermore, Schippers (2007) also identifies alternative masculinities and femininities. This entails behavior that does not establish a complementary relationship between men and women and does not recognize male domination. This type of femininity might correlate with what Andreasson and Johansson (2013) defined as the subversive position, which challenges the status quo, as it positions women as strong (like on fitness blogs) instead of weak.

2.3 Postfeminism

But femininity should also be placed in today's context of our neoliberal and consumer culture. In this light, the notion of postfemininity should be discussed. According to Genz (2015), postfeminism can be described as an ideology and practice that stands for the ideas of emancipation and empowerment, situated in a politically polarized, media-friendly and individualistic society. Genz (2015) states that "postfeminism is a "particularly rich context" for "self-branded girls" who are encouraged to be self-reliant and empowered within consumer culture" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 56 as cited in Genz, 2015, p. 547). So, postfeminism basically holds the idea of women empowerment through consuming practices. Press (2011) even distinguishes between women empowerment – in terms of equal rights and career prospects – and the focus on the female body. It can be argued that fitness blogs also 'sell' women empowerment by promising other women to become 'fitgirls' and get a toned body. Some fitness bloggers also promote products to achieve this. For example, Estrella van Toor often promotes protein powder and bars from *Women's Best* on her blog and Instagram. Fitness bloggers basically use their fit bodies to sell products to their followers. So they basically encourage consuming practices to get the best body and thus achieve women empowerment.

According to Press (2011), the postfeminist sensibility, what she defines as 'third-wave feminism', only relates to the sexualization of the female body and holds the premise that the body is something that can be improved and 'perfectioned' through consuming practices. Press (2011) found that, even though female college students (Millennials) find this sexualization of the female body "coercive and dominating" (p. 131), they do not reject the idea and still adopt it in their everyday lives. Dejmanee (2016) and Stover (2014) also note a focus on the female body: "the postfeminist sensibility is marked by (among other elements) a focus on the body, specifically the transformation and monitoring of the body, as well as personal empowerment through intensified consumption" (Gill, 2007 as cited in Stover, 2014, p. 2). So this postfeminism is a result of a highly commercialized and individualized society based on consumption.

Yet, Gill (2007) identifies some ambiguity in the postfeminist aspect of the focus in the body. Women are not necessarily portrayed as sexual objects, they can also be seen as agents who are in control of their body and who can express sexual desires (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) states that "sexual display has developed more positive connotations in a culture in which female celebrities routinely present their bodies as objects of spectacle which indicate success, confidence, assertive female sexuality and power" (p. 38). So in this regard,

sexualization of the female body can also be molded into an asset – rather than a constraint – to *embody* women empowerment. However, those who are not considered attractive, are also excluded from the sexualization: only the young, fit, and beautiful bodies are being sexualized (Gill, 2007).

It can be argued that this type of femininity is an alternative femininity according to Schippers (2007), since it strives for women empowerment and thus challenges male domination. Moreover, there also seems to be a subfemininity within the realm of postfemininity, namely fake – or 'plastic' femininity, which refers to commodifying the female body, 'to make the most of oneself', as to result in women empowerment (Genz, 2015). Plastic femininity seems to differ from postfeminism in the sense that it only focuses on enhancing the physical appearance and thus not the mental or emotional state, although the purpose is still women empowerment, as women feel more self-assured when they have the perfect body. Nevertheless, there seems to be some ambiguity in postfemininity, as on the one hand it strives for women empowerment, and thus revolts against ideas of hegemonic and emphasized femininity that reaffirm male domination, but on the other hand, it does emphasize sexual objectification of the female body and thus fits the more traditional gender ideals in which women bodies should be heterosexually attractive (for men).

Millennials are very familiar with the postfeminist ideas of women empowerment, as they grew up surrounded with 'girl power' in the media (Stark, 2015). On top of that, they are known to place high emphasis on their careers; entrepreneurialism is their brand. They are the generation that grew up with the Internet, and Web 2.0. Media are thus to a high extent integrated into their everyday lives. According to Howe and Strauss (2000), "Milennials are a consumer behemoth, riding atop a new youth economy of astounding scale and extravagance" (p. 265). In this highly individualized neoliberal consuming society, where postfeminism has stemmed from, it is evident that Millennials adhere to the postfeminist ideas of women empowerment, entrepreneurialism, a focus on the body, and the belief of enhancing the self (physically and mentally) through consumption practices.

2.4 Discourses and meaning-making

In the previous sections, I have already occasionally used the term *discourse*, often referring to certain beliefs in society about characteristics and behavior that are connected to notions of femininity and masculinity, for instance. Therefore, the previously discussed gender ideals are in fact at the same time hegemonic gender *discourses*, since these are the dominant beliefs about what it means to be a man/woman in society – for example, men are physically strong,

women are weak. The concept *discourse* can be defined as "the constructions or significations of some domain of social practice from a particular perspective" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 94 as cited in Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004, p. 302). Hall (1997) defines discourses as "ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provides ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society" (p. 6). Discourses are in fact certain knowledge frameworks, integrated into our culture, that we (subconsciously) use to make meaning and make assumptions about what is 'true' or 'preferred'. In the context of this research, discourse refers to the constructed meanings given to gender in a specific type of sportmedia, namely fitness blogs. As mentioned earlier, sportmedia are an important site for presenting gender discourses, although they can also present alternative discourses that are less popular (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004) found that the discourses used in sportmedia are not necessarily the same discourses used by the audience. According to Bruce (2013), there is no consensus on this matter, but she mentions that most people tend to adopt the same (dominant) discourses in their meaning making.

Yet, little is known about how audiences perceive and give meaning to these constructed ideas about gender. According to Hall (1997), two concepts lie at the heart of meaning-making processes: representation and meaning. Representation refers to how we communicate ideas, through words or images, that are meaningful to other people (Hall, 1997). Meanings, in fact, form cultural and social life, as they determine what is 'true' and not. As we fix meanings, these become natural and inevitable over time, as they are so ingrained in society and thus regarded as 'the truth' (Hall, 1997). Hall (1997) also refers to Fouceault's idea that "nothing has any meaning outside of discourse" (p. 45). So one gives meaning to a particular word/object/image by drawing on the existing discourses in society. There are a lot of factors that play a role when giving meaning to media discourses. As audiences draw on their frameworks of knowledge to give meaning to media messages for instance, it is logical to think that people with different background can interpret these media discourses differently. Therefore, factors such as class, race and gender relations, but also social and economic factors, and so on can play a role when making meaning (of media messages). Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model is a model that tries to grasp the relationship between how messages are enacted by the sender(s) of the message and how they are perceived by the receiver(s) of the message spread by a medium (Croteau & Hoynes, 2012, p. 263-264). He defines decoding as "the act of assigning meaning to (non)verbal

symbols" and encoding as "the act of using (non)verbal symbols to convey meaning" (Duck & McMahan, 2014, p. 90-91). In this model, we can distinguish three readings: the dominant/preferred reading, the negotiated reading, and the oppositional reading. The dominant or preferred reading is the most likely interpretation following from the media message after decoding it. This is the assigned meaning that the media producers encoded and therefore the perception the media producers intended to be obtained by receivers. The negotiated reading can be defined as an assigned meaning partly consisting of the dominant/preferred reading and partly consisting of (a kind of) oppositional reading based on, for instance, ideology, life experiences, etcetera of the receiver. The oppositional reading is an assigned meaning by receivers that rejects the meaning that producers intended for the audience to assign to the media message, in contrast with the dominant/preferred reading (Croteau & Hoynes, 2012, p. 264).

2.5 Femininity in sportmedia

The media play an important role in shaping and reinforcing ideologies (Park, 2014), and particularly the sportmedia are claimed to be a powerful domain to maintain existing beliefs about gender ideals (Bruce, 2013; Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). Drawing on the above-mentioned conclusions about gender hegemony, sports seems to be a male dominated space, as hegemonic masculinity is associated with physical strength and, thus, with the physical domain of sports while femininity is not. Therefore, female athletes are often devalued in the mainstream media, and their performances are often framed in a sexual context (Heinecken, 2015; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). At the same time, media present sportswomen as possessing masculine characteristics (Christopherson, Janning, & Diaz McConnel, 2002; Shugart, 2003 as cited in Heinecken, 2015). Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004) also found that female sports are underrepresented in the media and are often claimed to be less popular and newsworthy than male sports.

Moreover, even in sportmedia targeted to women, female athletes are still portrayed in a stereotypical manner (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Fink and Kensicki (2002) analyzed two types of sport magazines, one for men and one for women. They found that sportswomen were often depicted in non-sportive ways and portrayed in relation to topics that highlighted their feminine identity over their athletic identity, even in the magazines for women (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). This suggests that fitness blogs, which could be regarded as kinds of online sport magazines, that are also targeted towards women, may also still emphasize hegemonic feminine behaviors over athletic behaviors.

2.6 Participants'/bloggers' meaning-making in sportmedia

However, new media, such as social networking sites, offer new opportunities for female athletes to portray themselves, and thus contest the stereotypes presented by mainstream media (Bruce, 2013). Moreover, according to Heinecken (2015), "blogs by female athletes reject notions of sports as a male domain" (p. 1035). She argues that female athletes are able to negotiate their constant internal conflict between being feminine on the one hand, and being an athlete on the other hand, which is perceived to be rather masculine (Heinecken, 2015). It seems that the online community of soccer girls under scrutiny mainly uses humor, and mock themselves in their struggle to be a woman and a soccer player at the same time (Heinecken, 2015). Heinecken (2015) concludes that "girl athletes advocate a kind of female masculinity and focus on physical performance rather than appearance". But one could argue that this probably only holds for sportswomen who practice 'men's sports' like soccer, as other sports that are more regarded to be 'also for women' (than soccer) – like volleyball, or fitness in the case of this research – can result in other presentations of femininity.

Andreasson and Johansson (2013) have investigated how fitness bloggers construct ideals of gender and femininity. They found three different positions to categorize blogs in relation to gender. The first type reaffirms the status quo. Adreasson and Johansson (2013) define this as "emphasized femininity and compliance to hegemonic masculinity" (p. 8), meaning that women are stereotypically presented as weak, sexual objects, and/or mother figures. The second type somewhat counters this perspective, what Adreasson and Johansson (2013) define as the negotiating position, as it "extends the notion of femininity in alternative directions" (p. 8). For example, women can also do weight lifting, something that is considered for men only within the hegemonic discourse about masculinity and femininity. The third, subversive position, challenges the status quo, as it positions women as strong, but it goes even further by challenging the normative gender roles: "This blog creates its own ways of approaching muscularity, fitness, and bodylines, by using humor and irony as a means of questioning normative gender constructions and empowering female athletics" (Andreasson & Johansson, 2013, p. 8). So, this subversive position would fall under what Schippers (2007) defines as alternative or pariah femininity, as it challenges superiority of men over women and positions women as strong and thus masculine in that sense. Nevertheless, fitness blogs and the way they are shaped by women themselves can be categorized according to these three types.

2.7 Audience receptions of gender in sportmedia

In the previous section, it was discussed how bloggers and female athletes themselves give meaning to their representation in (sport)media and how they sometimes try to challenge the normative gender discourses by constructing alternative approaches to femininity via their own media (blogs). However, the question still remains how others, the big audience – not female athletes and bloggers – give meaning to femininity in (sport)media. To answer the question of how female Millennials give meaning to femininity on fitness blogs, some general understandings of audience reception is needed. Gerbner (1998) claims that the (latent) media messages are *cultivated* in our social reality: social institutions decide what and how messages are mediated which in turn influence society and become integrated into culture. In the context of this specific research, cultivation theory holds that depictions of femininity on fitness blogs can shape the perception of femininity and how the ideal women should look/behave like, of those who are exposed to fitness blogs. So media discourses shape the discourses in the social world, in this case about gender. But, as mentioned earlier, audiences do not necessarily interpret media messages as intended, as Hall identified a negotiated and oppositional reading. Therefore, audiences are rather active when constructing meaning of images and texts.

Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004) have studied how consumers of sportmedia make meaning of depictions of gender and ethnicity. They claim that the audience of sportmedia tend to draw from multiple discourses they have at their disposal (often from their social background), to make sense of the sportmedia discourses. With regards to gender, Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004) found two types of discourses, of which the physicality discourse was the most predominant one. Consumers of sportmedia justify the separation of gender in sports by the fact or belief that men are physically stronger than women, and therefore men competing with and against women would be unfair for those women. The second discourse is in fact a result of the physicality discourse – the cultural tradition discourse – which refers to the fact that in society sports is traditionally been structured according to separating gender by the belief that men are stronger (Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). In other words, audiences of sportmedia do not know better than that men and women are mostly separated when playing sports, as this is the existing structure in society.

Moreover, Kane, LaVoi, and Fink (2013) have investigated how female millennial athletes receive and reflect upon images that portray sportswomen, ranging from sexual (basically nude) images to more athletic images. They found that the female athletes under

scrutiny prefer the image that showcase their physical competence over sexual appearance, but still belief that 'sex sells', so these images are also necessary to promote their sport, they say, especially for a male audience. So depending on the audience, the female athletes choose either the athletic image or the sexualized image to promote their sport – meaning the sexual image for men and physical competence image for women and/or parents (Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013). Relating this to fitness blogs by and for women, it is evident to assume that athletic images are preferred, since there is no purpose of attracting a male audience, so sexualized images to attract a male audience would be unnecessary. So, based on Kane's LaVoi's and Fink's (2013) research, the audience of fitness bloggers would prefer images that focus on physical competence, which seems similar to what Andreasson and Johansson (2013) noted as the negotiating and subversive positions. Yet, as described above, with regards to postfeminism, it could be argued that sexualized images of women could also stand for women empowerment (Press, 2011; Gill, 2007) and it seems that bloggers themselves sometimes still use such images (Adreasson and Johansson, 2013). So perhaps, the audience fitness bloggers also appreciate the sexualized images of women on fitness blogs, and therefore it still remains somewhat unclear what portrayals of femininity are portrayed by the main audience of fitness blogs – female Millennials.

Moreover, the perception of Millennials seems to be related to the postfeminist context they grew up in. During their childhood, they were surrounded with media messages that promoted women empowerment – 'girl power' (Stark, 2015). They grew up in a neoliberal consuming society that highlights individual achievements, working hard and taking care for yourself, although with a growing sense of community (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Therefore, Stark (2015) argues that Millennials are relatively 'blind' for the existing power relations between men and women, as they are brought up with the ideal of equal rights for men and women and a narrow gender-role gap. So relating this to Kane, LaVoi, and Fink (2013), one could argue that Millennials would prefer the athletic images that symbolizes physical competence and thus women empowerment. However, Millennials also grew up in the postfeminism period (Stark, 2015), which is marked by a focus on the (sexualization of) the female body (Gill, 2007; Press, 2011). In that regard, it could be claimed that Millennials are used to and therefore numb for these sexualized images, on fitness blogs for instance. So it is rather unclear how Millennials perceive notions of gender in sportmedia, with fitness blogs in particular, and there seems to be a gap in the literature here.

As evident from this chapter, most literature has focused on how gender roles are portrayed in (sport)media, or how people themselves produce gender discourses in sport participation or in their mediated communication like in fitness blogs. Andreasson and Johansson (2013) even found three distinct ways in how femininity is depicted on fitness blogs. On top of that, other research has focused on how gender discourses presented by the (sport)media (including fitness blogs) can be interpreted by the audiences of these media. But there seems to be little or no literature that specifically looks at how the audience interprets social media messages of femininity on fitness blogs. Therefore, this research will contribute to this field in the sense that it will look specifically at how portrayals of femininity on fitness blogs play a role in the audience's – female Millennials – construction of femininity. The next chapter will provide more details about the research design.

3. **Method**

3.1 Methodological approach

As the concept of femininity is rather abstract and ideas related to it often rather implicit, in depth research is needed in order to uncover how female Millennials interpret discourses of femininity on fitness blogs, and thus suggesting a qualitative study. To understand how Millennials make meaning of femininity as presented by fitness bloggers, the method best suitable is focus group interviews. Through interviews the researcher can obtain the social actor's perspective/experience of the social action going on. It can clarify things or provide new insights on a certain topic, but it could also provide a researcher with information that was not observable in the first place (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Focus groups are defined as "small groups of people with particular characteristics convened for a focused discussion of a particular topic" (Hollander, 2004, p. 606). Krueger and Casey (2000) state that a "focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (p. 5).

But the main advantage of focus groups is the group effect, whereby meanings can be constructed collaboratively. Group members can complement each other, bring each other to certain ideas, and thus enrich the discussion with different viewpoints (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Also because the concept of femininity can be difficult, a group could help each other get a sense of what it entails, which could result in a rich discussion for analysis. And the age cohort under scrutiny – Millennials – are known for their team-orientation (Howe & Strauss, 2000), so group interviews will feel natural and comfortable for them. On top of that, it can also be argued that, as fitness bloggers create a certain community with their followers and other fitness bloggers, the discussions they have online also happens in a group. Therefore, it would be quite logical to hold this discussion with those who are part of these communities offline as well, for the purpose of this research. Such focus groups reflect the group discussions that take place among bloggers.

Moreover, most literature in the field is based on (qualitative and quantitative) content analysis of sportmedia. Therefore, there seems to be a gap in the literature about audience receptions of femininity (and gender in general) in sportmedia, and especially fitness blogs. So, as evident from the theoretical framework, there is a sufficient amount of research that note how femininity is constructed in sportmedia and fitness blogs, but there is basically no research conducted that measured how these messages are in turn interpreted by the audience. Therefore, this aspect could be answered with qualitative focus groups, which will lead to in-depth and detailed accounts of how female Millennials construct meanings of femininity together.

Yet, one should be aware of the danger of 'groupthink', which happens when participants of the focus group give socially desirable answers to fit into the group and thus do not express their true thoughts and feelings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2001; Bowen, 2006). When power relations come at play in group discussion, strong group members will speak and weak group members remain silent or conform to group norms, which results in giving socially desirable answers (Parcker, 2009). MacDougall and Baum (1997) suggest that focus groups, therefore, should be homogenous, so that group members feel comfortable to express their true thoughts and feelings. Another reason to have homogenous groups, is that it will result in a good reflection of social reality, and groups can be compared with each other in the analysis phase (Boeije, 2014). Furthermore, Krueger and Casey (2000) mention two reasons to have homogeneous groups. The first reason is for analysis purposes; it is easier to compare (different) homogenous groups. And the second reason is that participants feel more comfortable to share their true thoughts and feelings when being surrounded by people who they perceive as being similar to themselves, which also holds for the moderator (Krueger & Casey, 2000). So being Millennial, female, and a 'fitgirl' myself, as a moderator, I can make the participants more comfortable to share, and I might also be better able to understand their underlying thoughts.

In addition, as the research is approached from a rather exploratory angle, since the topic is rather broad and can go in many different directions, I used insights from grounded theory. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011) and Corbin and Strauss (1990), grounded theory seeks to approach phenomena from a 'blank slate', without any presumptions, whereby theory will be built from the data collected and analyzed. After analyzing the data, the aim is for new concepts to have emerged. This will be the guideline for conducting and analyzing the interview data. However, it is not possible to be completely 'blank' in the present study, as I am already informed about the topic and have expectations with regard to possible outcomes of the data based on previous research. Boeije (2014) refers to this as theoretical sensitivity. She argues that this is important aspect of qualitative research analysis, as it gives the research a certain focus and makes the researcher aware of certain patterns that might come out of the data (Boeije, 2014). How these theoretical concepts were translated into interview questions will be explained later on in the following section.

3.2 Research site

Since the main concept of this research is femininity, and since mainly women are active on fitness blogs, it was evident to only recruit females, as they are more likely to be susceptible

to images of femininity on fitness blogs. Furthermore, because the focus of the research lies on Millennials, that suggests that the participants should be aged between 18 and 30 years old. On top of that, it is also important that they are regularly exposed to fitness blogs, or at least have an idea of how these blogs look like and how these bloggers represent femininity. Therefore, the participants have been recruited though criterion sampling, the criteria being gender (female), age (between 18 and 30 years old) and the (at least) weekly exposure to fitness bloggers (on websites or social media), so that they have an idea of what fitness blogs look like without necessarily using the blogs very often and having them ingrained into their lives. Participants led me to other possible participants, which refers to snowball sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), through the online community of fitness blogs for instance.

As data collection and data analysis are interrelated processes (Boeije, 2014), conducting focus groups can end when data saturation is achieved (Flick, 1998), which means that the analysis of new focus group interview data does not provide new insights anymore (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). According to MacDougall and Fudge (2001), it is impossible to determine how many focus groups have to be conducted to reach this point. So there are no strict guidelines formulated with regards to how many focus group interviews have to be conducted, although it seems that most researches are based on at least two focus groups and a maximum of four focus groups (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). According to Krueger and Casey (2000), the rule of thumb is to conduct 3 or 4 focus groups at least, and then decide if data saturation has occurred or not. If there is no data saturation after 3 or 4 focus groups, more focus groups are needed. For this research, the aim was to get at least 20 participants in total; at least four focus groups with a minimum of 5 participants per group. According to Boeije (2014), the amount of participants per group should range between six and ten. Four focus groups have been conducted, and a total of 21 participants were recruited. All participants were Dutch, and thus the focus group interviews were also conducted in Dutch, as participants probably felt more comfortable to share their thoughts in their own language. Three focus groups were conducted with five participants per group, and one had six participants. Most of the participants (13 out of 21) are college students, the others are employed. The participants are aged between 18 and 28 years old, but on average most participants are in the beginning of their twenties. All of the participants had at least occasionally been exposed to fitness bloggers on social media.

To conduct the focus group interviews properly, to make sure all groups are exposed to the same research environment, and to have structured (but not too strict) order of questions, a moderator guide was employed, as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2000).

The moderator guide has been structured as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2000); the first part is to start of easy with introductions and general questions about participants' use of fitness blogs, the next part moved from general to more specific questions about the core content (fitness bloggers and femininity), and in the end the focus group interview will be concluded by summarizing what was said and if something should be added and/or highlighted (see Appendix B). The goal was to get participants' answers about personal experiences, so therefore the questions should be open-ended and carefully phrased in such a way that they are not leading in a certain direction, which Lindlof and Taylor (2011) define as non-directive questions. Furthermore, during the focus group interviews, stimuli such as photos from fitness blogs/bloggers were shown to the participants, to spark the discussion. This way, specific ideas could be discussed, such as sexualized images or more athletic images. But these stimuli were shown in the last part of the core discussion, so that participants were not led by these photos for the entire interview (especially in the beginning) as that could have led to other results. In this sense, 'sexualization of the female body', 'women empowerment', 'masculine femininity', etcetera, can serve as so-called *sensitizing concepts* that serve as themes for the interview (Bowen, 2006) So here, the sensitizing concepts serve rather as guidelines to structure the focus group interviews.

For instance, participants' level of involvement with fitness blogs was captured by asking the participants what they already knew about fitness bloggers and what role these blogs play in their lives (Appendix B, part 2.1). And the concept of femininity and hegemonic gender discourses in society, was aimed to be captured with questions such as 'how do you see women in today's society/in the media?' (Appendix B, part 2.2). Lastly, the pictures that were shown during the last part of the focus group interviews, all fell into three distinct categories as defined by Andreasson and Johansson (2013): emphasized femininity, negotiating, and subversive position (Appendix, part 2.3). The photos that were chosen to be shown for the category emphasized femininity, were assessed to be in that category as I found these focusing on heterosexual attractiveness and motherhood – which are aspects of emphasized femininity, according to Connell (1987) and Schippers (2007) (Appendix B, part 2.3, pictures 1-4). For the negotiating category, I chose pictures that showed some dumbbells, weights, or other fitness equipment, and displayed physical strength, as these are characteristics of a negotiating position, according to Andreasson and Johansson (2013) (Appendix B, part 2.3, pictures 5-6). Lastly, for the subversive position, I chose a picture from Krista Scott-Dixon (Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 7). This is the fitness blogger Andreasson and Johansson (2013) have found to be communication a subversive position. Therefore, I

chose to use the same picture for this research, as it is hard to find any other pictures on social media that can be called subversive.

3.3 Analyzing the data

After the focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed, they have been coded. Boeije (2014) mentions that qualitative analysis is based on three principles: constant comparison, analytic induction, and theoretical sensitivity. The first principle, constant comparison, holds that data segments should be constantly compared to one another in the coding process, as new data can foster new insights (Boeije, 2014). Constantly comparing the interview data can end when saturation occurs (Boeije, 2014). The second principle, analytic induction, entails that hypotheses (in the sense of expectations) – formulated based on the literature and previous research – are tested and adapted if necessary according to the findings (Boeije, 2014). And the third principle, theoretical sensitivity, means that the literature gives the research a certain focus toward the topic and makes the researcher aware of possible outcomes (Boeije, 2014), as discussed above. This principle is important for this research, since I have certain concepts in mind, like 'postfeminism' and 'subversive position' that provide me with certain ideas about what to expect from the focus groups, although these are only broad ideas and I do not know how participants might approach these concepts.

According, to Corbin and Strauss (1990), grounded theory research data should be coded in a three-step process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Since the research is rather exploratory and the interviews are semi-structured, the first round of open coding was based solely on the data. This might include vivo coding, meaning that some attributes or themes (codes) consist of terms that participants used in the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). And other open codes reflect my interpretation of what the participants said. Corbin and Strauss (1990) and Boeije (2014) describe how data collection and analysis are interrelated process, it is hard to separate data collection from data analysis. Krueger and Casey (2000) even mention that it improves the moderator, when doing analysis in the process of data collection, since it sensitizes the researcher towards certain parts of interview (where more or less time should be spent). So after one or two focus groups, I had a better idea of what sections of the interview were important and should be given more attention. Therefore, after transcribing two focus group interviews, the first round of analysis was conducted. It is important to constantly compare the data, especially when the researcher strives to find latent meanings as these are often not immediately evident (at first sight) (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), which could be the case with ideas about gender roles. The themes

that emerge from analyzing two interviews, served as a basis for a analyzing the other two focus group interviews. After the first round of coding – open coding – the next step in the process is axial coding, according to Corbin and Strauss (1990). For example, themes such as 'impact on daily life' and 'focus on appearance' emerged. After axial coding, there should be more of a clear overview of what (broader) themes emerged from the data, which makes it easier to make (preliminary) conclusions. So in the process of axial coding, open codes are brought together in a more broad category, such as 'impact' and 'message'. The last step in the data analysis was selective coding, which Corbin and Strauss (1990) define as "the process by which all categories are unified around a "core" category, and categories that need further explication are filled-in with descriptive detail" (p. 14). So the broader codes that were found in the process of axial coding, are now merged together and placed in several overarching core categories. Therefore, in this case, the selective codes were quite similar to the themes that were already assigned to the subthemes of the interview guide, namely general involvement with fitness bloggers, femininity in society/media, audience receptions of pictures of fitness bloggers. As a final step in the analysis process, I decided to also count the number of same opinions or same recurring patterns among the participants, as to make it easier to make general conclusions about how many participants felt or acted a certain way. The coding process ends when 'saturation' occurs; the data does not provide new insights anymore (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Bowen, 2006). Ideally, after this three-step-analysis some new concepts have emerged from the data that offer new insight in how female Millennials construct meanings of femininity as presented by fitness bloggers. Nevertheless, I was still open and attentive to aspects of the data that could contradict the overall trend.

4. <u>Results</u>

This chapter will discuss the findings of this research. After analyzing all interview data, several themes have emerged. The first part of this chapter is rather general, and serves as a

context for the main findings. It was necessary to establish how involved participants were with fitness bloggers, first, as this involvement impacted the rest of the discussion outcomes. Then, the concept of representations of femininity in the media and fitness blogs is discussed. And after that, it will be discussed how participants make meaning of fitness bloggers on social media. Lastly, pictures of several fitness bloggers were shown and served to illustrate how participants make meaning of such pictures, and which (kind of) pictures they liked the most and for what reasons.

4.1 General involvement with fitness blogs

First of all, it was necessary to assess how often the participants are exposed to fitness bloggers on social media and how big of a role these fitness blogs play in their lives. All participants declared to have been exposed to fitness bloggers on Instagram. However, not all participants also visited the blogs or websites of these fitness bloggers, which already indicates a certain level of involvement with fitness blogs. For example, some consistently followed one or more fitness bloggers on a daily basis, while others only encountered them on the explorer function of Instagram. It seemed that only three or four participants out of 21 also read articles on fitness blogs, while also being exposed to fitness bloggers on Instagram daily. For example, one said that she occasionally encountered an article on Facebook from fitgirls.nl and when she clicked on the link, it directed her to the website: *"Sometimes I see an article on my timeline, and sometimes I click on it. Then I end up on the website [fitgirls.nl]. The articles are usually about working out tips and healthy recipes. Like this was an article about whether you should do cardio or weight lifting."* (communication advisor, 25). Other interviewees declared that they occasionally used something from fitness blogs and applied it in their daily life, such as workouts (4 out of 21 participants) or recipes (7 out of 21). Yet, most participants stated that fitness bloggers did not affect them mentally. They believed they felt mentally stronger because of exercising itself, which could have been indirectly influenced by fitness bloggers who promote exercising. Although all participants claim it does not affect them mentally, some are aware that fitness blogs do have an impact that we might not be aware of. Furthermore, all participants mostly encountered fitness bloggers via their mobile phone, and some, who for example searched for a recipe, also used their laptop to visit a fitness blogger's website.

Moreover, when introducing the topic of fitness blogs, all participants did not initially made a distinction between food- and fitness blogs. When asking them for examples of fitness blogs, they also mentioned food bloggers like Rens Kroes. This shows that for these

participants, these blogs all fall under the same category – healthy lifestyle blogs. However, fitness blogs often also have a food section with healthy recipes, like jorellafit for example, so that could confuse participants and is probably the reason why they do not really distinct food blogs and fitness blogs.

So it was evident that participants differed in their level of involvement with fitness blogs. For the purpose of this research, I defined the ones who were actively engaged with fitness blogs on a daily basis and applied things like workouts and eating habits from these blogs into their daily life, as 'real fitgirls', which were 3 out of 21 participants. Others, were in my point of view rather moderate, as they were still exposed to fitness bloggers on Instagram daily (by following) and sometimes read an article on a fitness blog or made a healthy recipe from a (food- or) fitness blog. This category accounted for 6 participants (out of 21). The remaining 12 participants could be defined as not really involved with and fitness blogs, although still occasionally exposed to fitness bloggers on Instagram but not actively following. However, the participants that were defined as non-fitgirls were often still sporty in the sense that they exercised regularly. These are, however, not fixed categories and based on my own perception of what a true fitgirl is. On top of that, the amount of fitgirls versus moderate and non-fitgirls is really low, so these groups are not quite equal to each other in terms of numbers, which could have impacted the results of this research.

Furthermore, it seemed that the higher the level of one's involvement with fitness blogs, the more she also talked about it with friends. For all participants, looking at fitness bloggers (on Instagram or on their website) was in essence an individual activity. But for those who also integrated (things they learned from) the blogs in their daily lives, and are thus in my point of view moderate or real fitgirls, it also became a social activity. For instance, one fitgirl told that she had a Whatsapp group with two other friends, in which they talk about fitness routines and share healthy recipes: *"Me and [names of friends] have a kind of fitness group with the three of us. And there we talk about fitness exercises and healthy food."* (nurse, 24). Another, slightly moderate, fitgirl told that she sometimes did some of the exercises from fitness bloggers together with friends, when they had no coach and had to practice on their own: *"Sometimes there are things you do together, like exercises. I remember from last year, when we had to do something on our own, there was always someone who said 'oh we should do this, I have seen it in a video'."* (student, 20). And another moderate fitgirl said she sometimes talks about fitness bloggers' pictures on Instagram with her friends: *"In the group, we often talk about.. not necessarily fitness posts, but about Instagram, about their bodies or.. things."* (student, 21). So this illustrates how

involvement with fitness bloggers on social media, could become a social activity as well on top of an individual activity in the first place. However, it differs for the above mentioned participants how it is a social activity. Nevertheless, it is evident that the more engaged one is with fitness blogs (individually), the more likely she is to also engage in social discussions about (things that come from) those fitness blogs.

4.2 Femininity in media and fitness blogs

In the second part of the interview, the participants were asked about how they thought about women in general in today's society. All participants somehow agreed that women today are relatively equal to men nowadays. Some immediately say that women are strong, perhaps even stronger than men as women are very busy: they have to balance a career with a household and taking care of their children and also exercising regularly. So women are very busy, according to all participants. However, some participants state that there is still some room for improvement when it comes to equality between men and women, especially in the work sphere, as women still earn lesser than men for the same job. This was brought up in two focus groups. One participants even calls it the 'glass ceiling': *"I am truly convinced that women are really limited because of the fact that they can get pregnant and because of that start to work part-time, and that they have always been seen as lesser than men, especially in terms of careers, in higher jobs."* (student, 21). So one the one hand, all participants believe that women are independent and strong, but on the other hand, there is still a gender gap in the work sphere. This is similar to what Howe and Strauss (2000) have claimed, namely that Millennials believe that men and women are becoming more and more interchangeable and that the gender role gap is narrowing, although still clearly present on the workplace.

When talking about the portrayal of women in the media in general, half of the participants immediately talked about 'girlpower' and strong women in the media. They agreed that nowadays you often see strong women in the media, and that they sometimes overshine their men, like Michelle Obama and queen Maximá for example. But there are also movies and series (on Netflix for example) with strong female characters that have a big role. This seems to support Stark's (2015) claim that Millennials are surrounded with 'girl power' in the media. However, in two focus groups, the participants immediately talked about how women are still portrayed in a stereotypical way, often by focusing on appearance: *"I think that the TV world and stuff, that it brings up the old image of men and women. There, women are really like Barbie dolls, with a lot of make-up and skinny, and are all being portrayed as.. really like women. I think you still see that old-fashioned image rather on TV than in real*

life." (student, 21). Also, when asking if there were still some stereotypes surrounding femininity in the media, all participants agreed that women are sometimes still portrayed as sex objects, and this sexualizing of the female body is also evident in fitness blogs. Other stereotypes that came out of the focus groups, were that women are weak and fragile, or that women are stupid and not intelligent ('the dumb blonde'). What was striking, was that in all focus groups, they mentioned the popular reality TV show *Temptation Island* as an example, as that show only contains sexually attractive women who are also presented as sex objects and stupid. So on the one hand, the participants noted that there is some 'girlpower' evident in the media, however, on the other hand, some stereotypes are still present, namely that women are weak, dumb, and sex objects. Therefore, these findings seem to agree with Gill (2007), saying that media representations of gender are rather contradictory these days, as on the one hand, there is more 'girlpower' evident in the media, although on the other hand, traditional patterns of sexism still exist in the media, by sexualizing the female body.

Moreover, another striking finding, when talking about stereotypes in the media, was that participants believed that 'fitgirl' is actually a stereotype by itself. In three out of the four focus groups, this was mentioned immediately when asking about stereotypes. These participants think that nowadays this 'fit trend' has become so popular on social media, that fitness bloggers and those who follow them by adopting the same lifestyle have become a separate social group in society that can be identified and put in a box, and thus a stereotype: *"Being a fitgirl or whatever that is, has become such a hype now that the phenomenon has become a stereotype by itself."* (psychologist, 28). The participants who also talked about fitgirls as a new stereotype did obviously not fell under the category 'fitgirls', as they perceive this group of females as 'the others'. This stereotyping of fitgirls was therefore mainly done by the moderate and non-fitgirls among the participants.

Nevertheless, this new stereotype seems to have changed the dominant discourse in society surrounding femininity. All participants agreed that, although fitness bloggers focus on appearance, they show that women can be physically strong, as one participant states: *"it is a little bit of a counter reaction like oh we can be strong as women"* (student, 19). Another participant illustrates how the discourse surrounding femininity has changed over time: *"I think it is definitely something new, because in the past, the sign of muscularity.. people still say like 'oh she looks like a man if she is very muscled', for example. But you don't see that [kind of reactions] so often with fitness bloggers. So there it is normal."* (student, 20). Other participants also state that they think it is cool and beautiful when a women is muscled. So this shows that the discourse about femininity has changed among the audience of fitness

bloggers, the participants in this case, and that muscularity is not necessarily only associated with masculinity anymore. In fact, muscularity is also seen as a preferred characteristic for women. This will also be evident in the section where participants discuss pictures of fitness bloggers. Yet, all participants agree that fitness bloggers still focus on appearance, and are still very feminine in the sense that they still wear make-up, tight clothes and show a lot of skin. So on the one hand, they seem to adhere to the discourse of emphasized femininity, by being heterosexually attractive. But on the other hand, the participants also acknowledge that fitness bloggers show that women are strong by showing off their muscles. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants sense this kind of 'ambiguity' as noted by Bruce (2013); focusing on heterosexual attractiveness and appearance on the one hand, but also positioning women as strong.

4.3 Meaning-making of fitness bloggers' on social media

When asking the participants what a fitness blog looks like, they often immediately talked about the pictures they often see themselves on social media. But this could also be due to the fact that not all participants in a focus group looked on the actual fitness blogs, and were only exposed to fitness bloggers on Instagram, which is a medium that focuses on pictures. In the first place, they mostly saw so called *before/after* pictures. These are pictures of someone's progress; one before he or she started his or her *fitjourney* and one after (s)he completed the *fitjourney* and is physically in shape. Besides these kind of pictures, the participants mentioned they also often saw pictures of fitness bloggers quite nude, for example in bikini, or wearing tight leggings and a sports bra, and always in a good position that highlighted their bodies. Besides pictures, they also talked about the text on fitness blogs. According to the participants, these are often articles about working out and healthy recipes. And on Instagram, the text that goes with a picture is often (what participants called) 'life stories', inspirational quotes, or information about a workout routine. But sometimes fitness bloggers also try to interact with their audience by using catchy phrases: *"And often there is a phrase at the end of the post, very annoying, like 'and tag your buddy', 'and what did you do today', 'and how did your week go', 'how much weight did you lose', 'I want reactions'."* (student, 20). As evident here, this aim for interaction was not appreciated, but only for those participants who did not fall under categories real fitgirl or moderate fitgirl, and who even disliked fitness bloggers. On top of the pictures and text, some participants also notice advertising by fitness bloggers. When asking how fitness blogs looked like, some participants immediately mentioned advertising of fitness clothing or other healthy products like protein shakes. One

participant said: *"You also often see "I have made this and this, and you can order it here, with a link to the website."* (nurse, 24). Five participants, of which two fall under the category 'true fitgirls', even bought something they saw on fitness blogs.

However, the general message these fitness bloggers communicate, is that as a women you need to have a toned body, eat healthy and exercise a lot. According to almost all participants it is often too much and over the top, as it is not realistic for 'us' normal Millennial girls who are occupied with studies or work and who have a normal social life: *"It's their job. They are paid to do this 24/7. But for people like us, who have a career or have to go to school and want to have a social life, it is not doable to live such a lifestyle."* (student, 24). Therefore, according to most participants, these blogs create a *"false picture"* (student, 19) by portraying women as perfect and even *"sex objects"* (nurse, 24). It is also unrealistic in the sense that most women in society do not look like that and often do not live such a lifestyle. One participant talked about the effect of this unrealistic portrayal on society as a whole: *"Because this is so promoted on Instagram and other social media, people look at you that way, unconsciously. And often you are getting judged based on that image"* (student, 19). Another participant agrees that men also look at women that way, and that men also get the idea that women should be toned and slender, have a big butt and big boobs. So these participants are aware of the impact fitness bloggers can have with their portrayal of the female body and their message.

Some state they would rather follow someone who has a job and has other things in life besides this healthy lifestyle, and then for example shares recipes or exercises for people who do not have much time. But even though this message of being perfect all the time can be rather overwhelming, some participants say that you can get some good things out of it that you can apply to your own life. These were the identified 'fitgirls'; they turn a rather overwhelming and negative message of being perfect and living a healthy lifestyle 24/7 into something positive – namely try to live as healthy as possible for you and your lifestyle: *"To me it comes across as if you really want it, looking like they do, you really have to do it daily and consciously all the time. And that seems overwhelming, but sometimes you can get some good aspects out of it, but then you have to apply it into your own lifestyle."* (nurse, 24). Moreover, some also note a positive message, as fitness bloggers often claim that everyone can do it: *"I feel like regular models, who also show that they exercise a lot, have a vibe of 'oh I can do this and you can't', that they present it like that, while fitness bloggers rather do it in a way.. like everyone can do this"*. (student, 19). So, based on these findings, it can be claimed that the overall message on fitness blogs is that a women should have a toned slender

body and live a healthy lifestyle, and this is doable for everyone they say, although the participants agree that it is not really doable to live the exact same lifestyle as these fitness bloggers, however one could apply a few aspects into their own lifestyle.

Yet, some participants, who rather dislike fitness bloggers, state that popular fitness bloggers only want to show off their toned bodies to earn likes and money: *"They obviously all start as.. 'I like it to show it to people', but at a certain moment they notice they can earn a lot of money and then it's gone. Then the authenticity immediately disappears."* (21, student). Other participants also agree that seeing sponsored content on fitness blogs or on their Instagram, immediately comes across as 'fake', and then they often tend to reject the message. Another issue that came up during the focus groups, was that some participants made a distinction between female athletes and fitness bloggers. Fitness bloggers are not regarded as equal to female athletes, as for fitness bloggers the main purpose of exercising is looking good and having a toned body, while for female athletes it is more about the sport itself and how it makes them feel. This seemed to be the case for the 'non-fitgirl' participants, who were female athletes themselves. These participants disliked fitness bloggers, because they only care about appearance, not sports. Therefore, fitness bloggers are not considered real athletes: *"Those are the chicks that go to the gym only to look good, but that are not really sportive"* (student, 20).

But this perception that fitness bloggers only post pictures of their perfect bodies and thus communicate that women should be toned and slender, depends on which fitness bloggers one follows. In all focus groups, at a certain point someone mentioned that nowadays, you also see 'real' pictures on Instagram from 'behind the scenes'; pictures that are not manipulated, or without good lighting and a good position. As one participants states: *"Those who I follow from those fitgirls also do that.. They also show 'look, this is how I pose on those posts and everything looks great'. They know exactly how they should stand, but for example also show, 'flex' is how they call it, just relaxed, and then you see they are just like anyone else."* (physical therapist, 24). Other participants also talk about curvy models and how that has become a 'thing' lately. All in all, all participants recognized that these 'real' pictures or pictures of curvy models or fitness bloggers are also currently trending, especially on Instagram.

Nevertheless, according to all participants, there seems to be a clear focus on appearance by fitness bloggers. In their content analyses of fitness blogs, Simpson and Mazzeo (2017) also found that appearance is mainly emphasized, and that women who are exposed to these images will also get the idea that the ideal healthy and attractive body is

slender and toned. These findings provide evidence for Simpson and Mazzeo's (2017) claim, as the participants also notice that everything revolves around appearance on fitness blogs, and the participants also think that fitness bloggers communicate that women should look fit and thin. And thus, this finding is contrary to what Heinecken (2015) claims, namely that female athletes – as far as fitness bloggers fall under that category – advocate a kind of female masculinity and focus on physical performance rather than appearance. Although, this could indicate that fitness bloggers differ in that sense from 'regular' female athletes.

4.4 Meaning-making of fitness bloggers' pictures

In the last part of the focus group interview, the respondents were confronted with several pictures from fitness bloggers, that could be divided into three categories previously established by Andreasson and Johansson (2013): emphasized femininity, ambiguous/negotiating position, and subversive position. The first four photos could be placed in the emphasized femininity, as they focused on appearance by showing a lot of skin and thus sexualizing the female body, and there were also two photos referring to women as mother figures. After these four pictures, two pictures were shown of fitness bloggers who were exercising with weights and other fitness equipment and emphasized their muscularity and power. The last picture was a picture from a fitness blogger who is older (around 40 years old) and does not look like the typical 'fitgirl', as her posture was not toned and slender and she had shorter hair.

   Overall, it was evident that the participants liked the 'ambiguous/negotiating' category of pictures the best. These were the pictures of fitness bloggers exercising in the gym. This kind of pictures is immediately recognized as different from the previous one (that fell under the category of emphasized femininity), as participants immediately start talking about power training and weight lifting. They like these pictures the best, since these show 'the real situation': *"I think, with those workout pictures, I rather look at that than those bikini pictures, because you can see that women.. that you actually have to do something for it. And that is more important to show than 'look I am on the beach in my bikini'."* (student, 24). Besides that it shows the 'real situation', it also is liked better by the participants because there it is 'tougher' and it focuses on being strong, instead of focusing on appearance. Especially the picture from Estrella van Toor (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 5) is really liked by the participants, as she does not show so much skin, and she does not have (much) make-up on and she tied her hair, so the focus really lies on her working out. Some participants can even identify with her: *"This could have been us"* (student, 19). In another

focus group, they also mention the informative value of workout pictures, as fitness bloggers show how to do a certain exercise. So, all in all, of all pictures, the participants seem to like this picture the best. This seems to be in line with Kane's, LaVoi's and Fink's (2013) finding that the audience of fitness bloggers would prefer images that focus on physical competence, as the participants appreciate that this fitness blogger shows that she is working out. All in all, the participants seem to appreciate these working out pictures, especially Estrella van Toor, as it shows the 'real situation', has some informative value in it, and focus more on women as strong instead of focusing on appearance.

Moreover, when discussing these 'ambiguous/negotiating' pictures, the participants address the topic of muscularity. All participants seem to appreciate muscularity and do not necessarily link this to masculinity; being muscled looks better and healthier than being very skinny. Showing a lot of muscles is rather perceived as fake and unrealistic instead of looking like a man: *I think it's beautiful, but no matter the sex, I think it's show-off if you only post pictures of your muscles. But if you see it coincidentally, because someone is wearing a dress with a nice split, that is just nice."* (student, 20). Nevertheless, women showing their physical power is appreciated: *"I always think that is a little.. girlpower like."* (student, 24). However, in one focus group, they mention that women who are like bodybuilders are too masculine: *"I think that women can just be muscled and look feminine, but I think there is a difference with bodybuilding. A bodybuilder is too masculine."* (student, 21). But the reason that these participants dislike bodybuilders is also because it looks fake again. So being too muscled is rather associated with fakeness. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, it seems that the discourse surrounding femininity might be slightly changed in the sense that muscularity is no longer directly linked to masculinity, but is also beautiful to be muscled for women.

Although in general the 'ambiguous' pictures are liked the best, Kayla's picture from the 'ambiguous/negotiating' category is not liked as much as Estrella's picture in the gym. All participants immediately recognize Kayla, as she is a quite famous fitness blogger and has her own app 'sweat' with workouts from her 'BBG program'. All participants seem to rather dislike Kayla's picture(s), except for the one Kayla fan. Some think her muscles look nice, but others think that she is too skinny and too muscled, which is thus unrealistic. *"Kayla obviously wants to show off her muscles."* (student, 20). She also displays more nudity than Estrella, as she is only wearing a sports bra and shorts. Therefore, it could be argued that she might be focusing more on appearance than Estrella, as participants sense that Kayla's focus rather lies on showing off her body and less on showing how to do the exercise, which is why participants like Estrella better than Kayla. Yet, Kayla's working out

('ambiguous/negotiating') picture (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 6) was still liked better than her other picture that fell under the emphasized femininity category of pictures. This picture of Kayla was a mirror selfie in the gym, wearing a sports bra and shorts (see Appendix B, part 2.3 picture 2). Even though in one focus group, that contained two of the three fitgirls, the participants think that this picture of Kayla is also realistic since she is obviously in the middle of a workout session, in the other focus groups, the participants did not really like this picture. She is too skinny and too muscled, which comes across as fake and not realistic. Also because she is recognized from her exercising program, most people think she is 'too commercial' as she is just trying to sell her fitness program. However, those that actually follow her, and do her workouts, and like her, say she actually communicates another message than most people think at first sight, namely that she wants everyone to feel good about themselves during the process rather than focusing on the end result – being skinny and toned like she looks. So this also shows that fitgirls, who are actually acquainted with this fitness bloggers and know her very good, have other discourses at their disposal than non-fitgirls, and thus make meaning of this fitness blogger's picture differently.

Nevertheless, no matter the category of the pictures – ambiguous or emphasized femininity, most participants seem to like Estrella van Toor better than Kayla Itsines, as she looks more 'normal' and 'like us' and therefore also 'healthier', whereas Kayla just wants to 'show off' her muscles and skinny body. When comparing these two pictures, participants come to the conclusion that these fitness bloggers show a lot of skin, and they look (too) perfect. Yet, with regards to their nudity on the pictures, it seems that participant find it more acceptable to show so much skin of the beach than in the gym, which also causes them to like Estrella better. Most participants liked Estrella's 'emphasized femininity' picture of her in her bikini on the beach (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 1) as well, because they can identify with her again – 'that could have been me/us'. And she looks rather 'normal'; even though she has a toned body, she is not too skinny and not too muscled, and therefore this is realistic, according to the participants. Most participants also agree that this is 'a typical picture' for fitness bloggers, and they see such pictures very often on social media. However, those participants who immediately recognize the branded content in the picture – the protein shake cup – do not like the picture, as it is fake and not spontaneous because she is advertising for Women's Best: *"Without the shake cup, I would have liked the picture."* (student, 20). Especially the fitgirls in the focus groups, recognize the brand Women's Best, perhaps because they have bought something from this brand and therefore recognize the logo. Others, non-fitgirls, are mainly bothered by the fact that she is holding a protein shake cup in a setting

(on the beach) where you usually do not use that. However, in the other picture of Estrella, the ambiguous one in the gym, there is also the protein shake cup of Women's Best, but there, it does not seem to bother the participants as much, as it fits better in this context as opposed to the picture on the beach – it is normal to have a protein shake cup in the gym. So, as noted earlier, when participants see advertising, the picture kind of loses its likeableness, as it does not seem authentic and sincere anymore. Overall, all participants quite liked the picture of Estrella in her bikini on the beach. So even though this picture displays sexualization of the female body (a lot of nudity), the participants do not reject it, which affirms Press' (2011) finding that even though female Millennials believe sexualization of the female body is not acceptable – "coercive and dominating" (p. 31) – they do not reject the idea and still adopt it in their everyday lives, and this seems to hold even more for the fitgirls among the participants.

However, the pictures in the category of emphasized femininity that referred to motherhood, were interpreted in two distinct ways; some find it empowering for women again, while others see it as sexualization of the female body in the sense that women should look perfect all the time. Both of these pictures are from Kelsey Wells, one is a *before/after* picture (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 3); on the left side, she is pregnant with her son, and on the right picture she is toned and slender again. And the other picture (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 4). is a mirror picture from her and three-years old son. She is wearing a tight sports legging and a sports bra, so you can see her belly, and she has (quite a lot of) make-up on. The participants immediately talk about her as a 'fit mom'. The latter picture of the two is accepted better than the third, by the participants, as in the third it is not clear how long it took her to get such a body again, whereas on the picture with her son, it is evident that it took her several years. Overall, participants have seen pictures like these before on social media, but not as much as the previous two. Nevertheless, participants differ in their meaning-making of fitness bloggers referring to motherhood. One focus group is very positive, and think that she shows that it is possible to live this fit lifestyle while also raising a child, and that mothers should also think about themselves and have time for themselves. This focus group accounted for two of the three fitgirls among all participants, which could again indicate that fitgirls draw from different discourses than other participants and thus make meaning differently. But in two focus groups, the participants are rather negative and claim that she communicates that women should be back in shape again as soon as possible after their pregnancy, and thus doubt if this is even healthy. *"I feel like it's been so pushed that after your pregnancy, you should fit in your old jeans again within two weeks, that I think.. just enjoy your child."*

(student, 21). One participant even shows another Instagram account, of Tammy Heabrow, who is toned and slender again just within one month after her pregnancy. So that is not realistic and thus not liked by the participants.

Another striking finding was that the subversive position was not immediately rejected. Yet, it was evident that the participants had never seen something like that before on social media or fitness blogs, as they initially did not really know how to make meaning of a picture that fell within that category. As an illustration, I showed the participants a picture of Krista Scott-Dixon. She falls under the subversive category, as her blog only contains articles with information about workouts and healthy food, and hardly has any pictures. She is also older than the regular 'fitgirls', she is around 40 years old. Andreasson and Johansson (2013) state that: "this is a noncommercial blog/website aiming to offer an alternative representation of female athleticism, bringing a feminist perspective into the realm of fitness culture" (p. 4). The picture of her that is shown in the focus group interviews, is clearly taken by a professional photographer, which is also visible by the setting she is in: you see a dark background – a kind of canvas that is often used by photographers in their studios, and you can also see the lighting that photographers use. And on the foreground, there are some weights and kettlebells on the floor. Krista is standing in the middle, with a black sports short and a grey sports top. She has short hair (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 7). When participants see this picture, initially they are kind of shocked and do not really know what to say about it. They think it is weird, and the total opposite of the previous pictures. All participants think such a picture is rather boring and unattractive; they would not like this on Instagram and probably not even look at it. However, when explaining them what this blogger is about, all participants are rather enthusiastic. They really like her idea of having a blog that is about information instead of appearance. Therefore, this fitness blogger seems more genuine and authentic, according to the participants. Some participants also think that she has more knowledge about things. Therefore, some participants would rather follow her or another fitness blogger like her, instead of Estrella van Toor or Kayla Itsines: *"I would follow this, rather than someone like Kayla. Me personally. Because I.. I exercise pretty intensively since a year now and I just know that you cannot, like those Instagram people claim, get the result that they show within two months. So I would rather follow sincere accounts like this."* (student, 24). And as another participants states: *"I would definitely choose this woman of forty years old. At least, they have knowledge about what the exercises do with your body and how you should do it and what the result will be like. Then you are not so focused on what it looks like. I prefer just focusing on the sport itself."* (student, 20). But most participants think

that she will never has so much followers like Kayla for example, because you need to have these perfect pictures (like most fitness bloggers have) in order to gain a lot of followers, according to participants. Nevertheless, these findings show that the subversive position is not necessarily rejected by the audience of fitness bloggers.

However, most participants still think that identification with the fitness blogger – 'being like her' – is more important. So most participants would rather follow (someone like) Estrella van Toor, for example, as she looks relatively 'normal' – not too skinny and not too muscled – and she also seems to have a life besides her healthy lifestyle; she has school, work, and a social life as well. So most participants can identify with her, and thus would rather follow someone who is similar to themselves: *"I would rather look at someone who is similar to me in terms of lifestyle and body, but is just a little bit more slender, than someone who is older."* (student, 21). So identification with the fitness blogger also seems to be very important for the audience in order to like them.

5. <u>Conclusion</u>

So, this research was aimed to find out how female Millennials construct notions of femininity and how fitness bloggers on social media can play a role in that process. The following research question was formulated: How do female Millennials give meaning to social media constructions of femininity as presented by fitness bloggers? This chapter will go back to the theoretical concepts discussed earlier, and how these relate to the findings from

the previous chapter. It was evident that the participants could be divided into different categories – ranging from 'real fitgirls' to 'non-fitgirls' – and that this also played a role in how they interpreted messages from fitness bloggers. Therefore, the chapter will be structured according to how the participants of this research interpreted fitness bloggers and their constructions of femininity. And lastly, it will also be addressed how all this relates to and meet the standards of postfeminism.

First of all, it was evident that, overall, fitgirls had different viewpoints towards fitness bloggers – they were more positive – and thus gave different meanings to social media constructions of femininity as presented by fitness bloggers than the other non-fitgirl participants. It can be claimed that fitgirls probably draw from different discourses – as they gained more knowledge about and through fitness blogs – than non-fitgirls. For instance, one fitgirl, who really liked Kayla Itsines and did her workouts, advocated that Kayla's message was that everyone can do it, while the others (non-fitgirls) thought she just wants to show off. Also with the pictures of Kelsey Wells, that referred to motherhood, only the fitgirls were rather positive; they interpreted the message as 'mothers should also think about themselves', whereas other participants were more negative as they believed it is communicating a message that women should look fit and skinny again after their pregnancy as soon as possible. So this shows a difference in interpretation between fitgirls and non-fitgirls. It can be concluded that fitgirls, in general, are more positive towards fitness bloggers. Moreover, it also became evident that the more one was involved with fitness blogs, the more likely it was that it also was a social activity (on top of an individual activity). For example, participants talked with their friends about workout routines and healthy recipes. One's social environment can also serve as a framework of knowledge and thus also impact discourses (Hall, 1997). Thus, the more one is stimulated by his/her social environment to get involved with fitness blogs, the more one is likely to do that. Therefore, as Hall (1997) and Van Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2007) also noted, it seems that different social groups draw from different discourses to make meaning of (sport)media messages. On top of that, besides the fact that fitgirls were in general more positive towards fitness bloggers, they also seem to interpret fitness bloggers' messages as how they were intended. Some fitgirls described how fitness bloggers communicate that they want to help other people to live healthy as well, and that everyone can do it, and everyone is beautiful and has to love his/herself no matter how he/she looks, and that you have to enjoy the process of becoming healthy (*fitjourney*). So, it can be concluded that fitgirls employ what Hall (1997) defined as the dominant/preferred reading. In Hall's encoding-decoding model, the dominant/preferred reading means that the

audience interprets the message exactly as how it was intended by the producers – fitness bloggers in this case – and this interpretation is thus also the most likely one (Croteau & Hoynes, 2012). However, it is important to note that there were very few fitgirls among the participants in relation to moderate or non-fitgirls. There were three fitgirls, six moderate fitgirls, and 12 non-fitgirls. Therefore, as a result, the findings could be skewed and not reflecting a realistic outcome, as these numbers are not really equal.

Second, it seemed that most participants employed a negotiated reading, as they noted that fitness bloggers mainly focus on appearance and thus communicate that women should be toned and slender, but also promote 'girlpower'. The negotiated reading, as defined by Hall, entails that the message is partly interpreted as intended (dominant/preferred reading) but also partly consisting of an oppositional reading, based on, for instance, ideology, life experiences, geographical and social environment, etcetera (Croteau & Hoynes, 2012). Especially moderate and non-fitgirls among the participants employed this negotiated reading, which shows that the less involved with fitness blogs one is, the more he/she is likely to adopt a negotiated (or even oppositional) reading. Overall, all participants believed that fitness bloggers try to communicate a positive message of motivating others to live a healthy lifestyle too and thus become strong women. In general, this is on the one hand perceived as these fitness bloggers communicate a positive message, as they want other people to become fit and healthy as well, but on the other hand, it is rather negative in the sense this creates 'a false image' because not all women will look like those fitness bloggers and it is not realistic in the sense that is not doable to live that lifestyle 24/7, if one also has a job or school and a social life. Some participants indicated that they would rather follow someone who is also very occupied with work and other things, and shares recipes and workouts for people who do not have a lot of time, for example. This group also stated that one should not look too often at fitness bloggers' pictures, as it could affect women's mental state rather negatively since they will get the idea that all women should look toned and slender, and that men will also get this idea. But, nevertheless, they show how one can live healthy, and perhaps one could even apply some of their tips and tricks (such as workout routines or healthy recipes) into his/her lifestyle. This group of participants also indicated that they occasionally had used (mostly) a recipe or a workout routine. Furthermore, it was evident that this group of participants, but also other participants, seem to like the pictures from the 'ambiguous/negotiating category' the best, as it shows the 'real situation' and it also displays girlpower – fitness bloggers are working out with weight and dumbbells and show their muscles. This reaffirms Kane's, LaVoi's and Fink's (2013) claim that the audience of fitness blogs prefers images that display

physical competence. However, this group of participants did also not immediately reject pictures from the emphasized femininity category – fitness bloggers showing off their bodies. So, this is in line with Press' (2011) finding that, although these pictures display sexualization of the female body, most participants (especially real and moderate fitgirls, but also some non-fitgirls) do not reject it. Perhaps this could be due to the fact that, according to Stark (2015), Millennials have become so ingrained and overwhelmed with images that sexualize the female body, that they are so used to it and thus have become numb for these sexualized images that, in fact, might degrade women and thus serve the traditional gender role patterns. Moreover, when the participants noted advertising in fitness bloggers' pictures, in general, they often immediately disliked the picture and the fitness blogger. The participants who employed a negotiated reading mostly declared that advertising comes across as 'fake'; as if fitness bloggers only promote their healthy lifestyle to earn money. Yet, when discussing fitness bloggers' pictures that contained some advertising, it was evident that this group of participants – that employed a negotiated reading – were more accepting towards advertising in the negotiating 'working out' pictures. For instance, with Estrella van Toor's pictures, the participants disliked her protein shake cup from Women's Best when she was on the beach, but it did not bother them when she had the same cup in the gym, as it is more 'normal and natural' to have a protein shake cup in the gym.

Third, there were also participants that employed an oppositional reading. These were mostly the non-fitgirls among the participants. The oppositional reading basically holds that the audience rejects the intended message of the producer – fitness bloggers in this case – and their meaning or interpretation of the message is often contrary to the dominant/preferred reading (Croteau & Hoynes, 2012). The non-fitgirls in this research were often still sportive, and they compared fitness bloggers to 'real athletes' and their own experience as a female athlete. This group of participants talked about how fitness bloggers differ from 'real athletes', in the sense that real athletes exercise because they like sports and it makes them feel good, whereas fitness bloggers only seem to exercise to achieve their end goal which is looking good. This was then also a reason for non-fitgirls why they disliked fitness bloggers in general. So, it can be concluded that the participants who employed an oppositional reading, non-fitgirls, do not recognize fitness bloggers as female athletes, or see them as a different category of female athletes, because of their focus on the end result – appearance – instead of physical competence. Therefore, it is also thinkable that this group of participants also like the pictures from the negotiating category the best – that show fitness bloggers who are working out – since they like it that fitness bloggers show the 'real situation' and

emphasize physical strength in these pictures. But overall, all (kinds of) participants seem to appreciate these pictures the best, whether they employ a preferred, negotiating or oppositional reading, as noted earlier, which again reaffirms Kane's, LaVoi's and Fink's (2013) finding that the audience of fitness blogs prefer an emphasis on physical competence. They also talked about how they would prefer pictures of fitness bloggers looking al sweaty and dirty (which is reality when working out) instead of wearing make-up and looking perfect. So this seems to be in line with Heinecken's (2015) claim that girl athletes advocate a kind of female masculinity and focus on physical performance rather than appearance. Moreover, participants that employed an oppositional reading also liked the picture from the subversive category, the one from Krista (see Appendix B, part 2.3, picture 7). Although, they were obviously not used to these kind of pictures, they really liked this fitness blogger's message, and these non-fitgirl participants even declared that they would rather follow someone like her as she is really informative and sincere, whereas for other participants, identification with the fitness blogger was more important in order to follow them. So this shows that the participants that employ an oppositional reading differ from the other participants, in the sense that they appreciate the subversive picture and perhaps rather follow someone like that instead of 'the usual fitness bloggers'. Furthermore, another striking finding was that the non-fitgirls (and also some moderate fitgirls) among the participants, labeled *fitgirls* as a stereotype by itself. Because of the fact that living a healthy lifestyle has become such a popular trend on social media, it seems that those who follow people promoting a healthy lifestyle (e.g. fitness bloggers) and adopting that lifestyle are often immediately labeled as a *fitgirl* nowadays. This stereotyping of *fitgirls* was thus mostly done by those who did not identify themselves with that category and perhaps even dislike fitgirls by portraying them as the 'other', and those that I find fitgirls were also hesitant to label themselves as a *fitgirl*. So, it can be concluded that, in this postfeminist society we live in today, fitgirl has become a new stereotype, and this category basically entails people who are obsessed to live a healthy and fit lifestyle, who are 24/7 occupied by this, and also overtly promote this to other people through social media. This is a rather extreme and negative definition of *fitgirl*, but this usually happens with stereotyping, as Hall (1997) noted that stereotyping is a practice that reduces persons to a few exaggerated and simplified characteristics. But this is how the 'stereotypical fitgirl' is often perceived (by the participants), which is probably the reason why some participants are hesitant to label themselves as a fitgirl. So, it can be claimed that those who employ an oppositional reading also have the tendency to label 'fitgirls' and fitness bloggers as 'the others', and thereby also stereotype them.

Lastly, it seems that fitness bloggers on social media fit right in the postfeminist society we live in today, as they basically promote women empowerment through enhancing the body by consuming practices. They 'sell' their healthy lifestyle by showing off their toned bodies on their platforms. All participants agreed that fitness bloggers mainly focus on appearance, which is an important aspect of postfeminism, according to Dejmanee (2016), Stover (2014) and Gill (2007). However, according to Gill (2007), this focus on appearance and sexualizing of the female body does not necessarily portray women as sex objects, they can also be seen as agents who are in control of their body and who can express sexual desires. In this way sexualizing the female body can empower women. This also seems what fitness bloggers try to communicate on their platforms; they want women to become strong and in control of their own bodies. However, when talking about women in the media, participants noted that they see more *girlpower* on the one hand, but also still women portrayed as sex objects on the other hand. Therefore, it can be concluded, as Gill (2007) has already claimed, that media representations of gender are rather contradictory these days; *girlpower* but also sexualization of the female body. On top of that, the very notion of 'fitgirls' has become a new stereotype in this postfeminist society. Nevertheless, because of this new stereotype that is all over social media, it seems that the dominant discourse surrounding femininity has changed for female Millennials, as the participants indicate that women are represented as strong and they even think muscularity is a preferred characteristic for women too – thus no longer only associated with masculinity – to some extent though. As long as it seems natural and realistic, the participants think that muscles are beautiful, also for women. Yet, fitness bloggers' focus on appearance is still evident as well, as they often post pictures wearing make-up, tight clothes accentuating their perfect bodies. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants seem to have grasped what Bruce (2013) has called 'ambiguity'; meaning that female athletes – fitness bloggers in this case – still adhere to the discourse of emphasized femininity by focusing on heterosexual attractiveness but at the same time also positioning women as strong.

Qualitative focus group interviews seemed to be a good method to answer this research question, as rich data emerged, even more than originally aimed at, such as the new stereotype of fitgirls and how participants deal with advertising by fitness bloggers for example, and it provided some insight into how female Millennials make meaning of fitness bloggers' social media constructions of femininity. Therefore, this research could be useful for the academic field of sportmedia audience reception and gender studies, as it shows that the level of involvement with fitness blogs impacts how one makes meaning of and employs

different readings towards fitness bloggers' constructions of femininity on social media, and that the dominant discourse surrounding femininity might have changed for female Millennials. However, there are some limitations to this research. First of all, there were only three fitgirls among the 21 participants. It would have been better to have an equal amount of fitgirls and non-fitgirls, in order to find a real difference between these two groups. Second, the fitgirls were also spread over the focus groups. This was due to geographical reasons. Perhaps, it would have been better to cluster all fitgirls in the same focus groups, so that focus groups would have also been homogenous in terms of participants' involvement with fitness blogs. In that way, it would have been easier to make comparisons between the (groups of) fitgirls and non-fitgirls. So, future research should do this, or only focus on fitgirls or only non-fitgirls, as that might result in more and richer data. And lastly, further quantitative research is needed to investigate to what extent these findings hold for the audience of fitness blogs and female Millennials in general. In that way conclusions can be made that are representative for the whole group.

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Appendix A: Participant overview

Focusgroup	Name	Age	Occupation
1	Martine Rademakers	27	Radiodiagnostic laboratory worker
	Marli Jansen	23	Pharmaceutical assistant
	Maaike de Nijs	28	Nurse
	Stephanie de Schepper	25	Communication advisor

	Suzanne Vermuë	28	Psychologist
2	Julie Colleman	19	Student
	Aniek Boënne	24	Nurse
	Nikkie Broekaart	24	Physical therapist
	Siene de Bodt	22	Student
	Natasja Praet	23	Warehouse planning and administration responsible
3	Marit de Jonge	20	Student
	Jik Hagoort	19	Student
	Anne Tolsma	19	Student
	Emma Meijer	19	Student
	Madelon Eissem	21	Student
	Charlotte de Ruiter	20	Student
4	Joyce Oudman	18	Student
	Desiree van Nunen	24	Student
	Laura van Pottelberghe	21	Student
	Laura Luijk	22	Student
	Jessie Eulink	21	Student

Appendix B: topic list

1. **Introductie**

   - Ik ben Sofie.. (mezelf introduceren)
   - Onderwerp: hoe fitnessblogs een beeld van vrouwelijkheid neerzetten, en hoe dat dat van invloed kan zijn op ons (degenen die fitnessblogs lezen) beeld van vrouwelijkheid
   - Het interview zal worden opgenomen (audio)
   - Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden, het is belangrijk om zo eerlijk mogelijk te zijn
   - Het interview zal ongeveer een uur duren
   - Consent forms doorlezen en ondertekenen

2. Middenstuk

2.1 Algemeen: fitnessblogs

Het eerste gedeelte gaat over de deelnemers' kennis over fitnessblogs, hoe vaak zij hiermee in aanraking komen en hoe dit doorwerkt op hun dagelijks leven.

- Kom je weleens in aanraking met fitnessblogs of Instagram accounts van fitnessbloggers?
  - Hoe vaak ongeveer?
  - Hoe kom je ermee in aanraking? (bijv. telefoon, laptop)
  - Heb je het erover met vriendinnen? Is het een sociale activiteit?
  - Heb je een favoriete fitnessblogger? Door welke eigenschappen?
- Kunnen jullie een paar voorbeelden geven van die fitnessbloggers?
- Kan je vertellen hoe die fitnessblogs er ongeveer uit zien?
  - Tekst over?
  - Wat voor foto's?
- Wat voor algemene boodschap brengen die tekst en foto's over?
  - Over hoe je moet leven?
  - Over vrouwelijkheid?
  - Waar / op welke aspecten leggen de fitnessblogs de nadruk?
    - Wat is de rol van uiterlijk, kan je dat beschrijven?
- Hoe / In hoeverre hebben deze blogs invloed op jullie dagelijks leven?
  - Neem je bijvoorbeeld recepten over, of doe je bepaalde workouts van fitnessblogs?
- Hoe / In hoeverre hebben deze blogs je mentaal beïnvloed?
  - Voel je je sterker? Is je instelling veranderd?
- Hebben deze blogs invloed gehad op je zelfbeeld? Kun je voorbeelden geven?
- Hoe denk je dat fitnessblogs vrouwen neerzetten? Positief/negatief? Op welke manier? Waarom?
- Hoe denk je dat dat beeld van vrouwen op fitnessblogs invloed heeft op vrouwen van onze leeftijd (tussen 18 en 30) die hiermee in aanraking komen?
 - Wat doet het met je eigen beeld van vrouwelijkheid?

2.2 Algemeen: vrouwelijkheid

Dit gedeelte gaat over de positie van de vrouw in onze maatschappij tegenwoordig en hoe wij (Millennials) onszelf zien als vrouw zijnde deze tijden.

- Hoe denken jullie over de positie van de vrouw in de maatschappij tegenwoordig? *Kort houden*
- Hoe worden vrouwen afgebeeld in de media?
- Zijn er (nog steeds) bepaalde stereotypes rond vrouwen en vrouwelijkheid? Welke? Hoe uit zich dat?
- Zie je deze stereotypes ook terug op fitnessblogs?

2.3 Voorbeelden/foto's fitnessblogs

Emphasized femininity
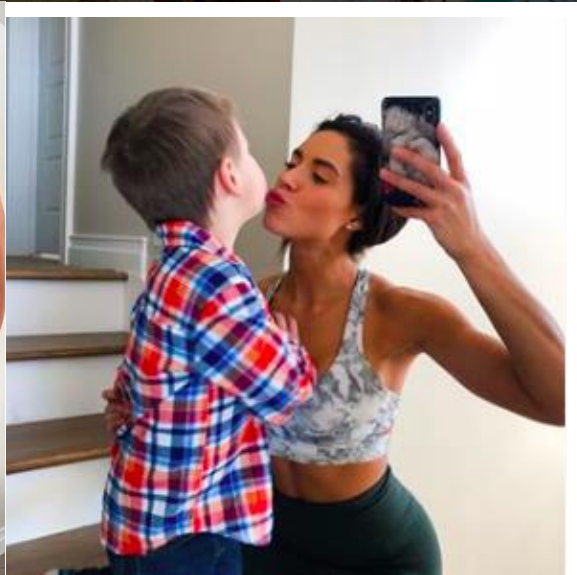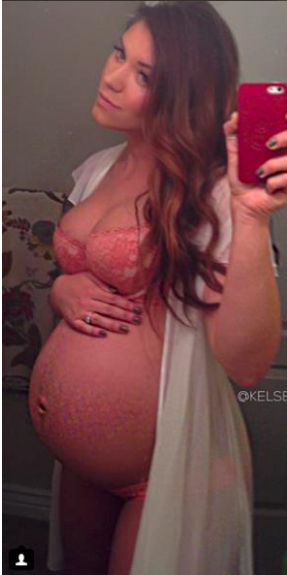
Negotiating position

Subversive position

https://stumptuous.com/stumptuous-faq

Per afbeelding
- – Wat zie je? Hoe denk je hierover?
- – Welk beeld van vrouwelijkheid wordt hier neergezet?
- – Hoe denk je dat deze afbeelding invloed kan hebben op jonge vrouwen die dit zien?
- – Hoe heeft dit invloed op jou zelf?

Welke soort afbeelding zie je het vaakst voorbijkomen op fitnessblogs (en sociale media)?
Kunnen jullie de verschillen uitleggen tussen deze drie afbeeldingen?
Wat voor soort afbeelding zou je het liefste zien / voel je je het beste bij? Waarom?

3. Afronden

Heel erg bedankt. Vandaag hebben we geleerd dat X, X, X. Zijn jullie het daar mee eens? Is er nog iets dat je zou willen toevoegen?

Appendix C: Codebook

Selective	Axial	Open/in-vivo
General involvement with fitness bloggers	Fitgirls? Yes/no?	Impact on daily life Taking over workouts/recipes
	Impact	Daily life Mentally Unconsciously more impact than we are aware of
	Social activity	Whatsapp group doing exercises together talking about Instagram pictures
	How often	Daily; regularly; occassionally
	Medium	Phone; laptop
	Examples fitness bloggers	Fitgirls.nl, Rens Kroes, chickslovefood, jorellafit, Hanna Öberg, Kayla Itsines, Girlslovetorun, the green happiness, fashionfitnessfoodie, Fajah Lourens, Tammy Heabrow
Meaning-making of fitness bloggers on social media	How do blogs look like	Pictures Text Advertising
	Message	Fake, 'false image', too perfect Focus on appearance Sport vs. appearance
	'mockery'	Showing the real picture Showing flaws 'flex'
Femininity in media and fitness blogs	Equality	Women are equal/independent Women are busy Inequality on the workplace Strong women

	Media	Strong women (ex. Michelle Obama)
		Sex object
		Weak/fragile
		Dumb
	Stereotypes	Sex object, dumb
		Fitgirl
Meaning-making of fitness bloggers' pictures	Picture 1	Nice; identification, most realistic/authentic
		Fake; brand is recognized
		Protein shake cup is noted
		Looks 'normal'
		Typical picture
		'doable'
	Picture 2	A lot of muscles = fake
		More realistic because of exercising
		Too skinny
		Muscled
		Too commercial
		Too perfect
		Nudity
	Picture 3	'fit moms'
		Not too bad
		Pregnancy picture
		Before/after picture
		Message: looking skinny as soon as possible
	Picture 4	With kid more realistic
		Positive message: think about yourself
	Picture 5	The 'real situation'
		More tough

		Focus on being strong
		Informative value
		Realistic
		Not too skinny
		Identification
		Like a video
		Power, weightlifting
		Advertising
		Not too much skin
	Picture 6	Too skinny
		Too muscled → unrealistic
		Showing off
	Picture 7	Weird, boring, does not attract
		Contradictory, extreme
		More realistic
		Good, nice, more substantive
		The picture is not the message
		Sincere account
	Most on social media	Mirror selfies
		Before/after pictures
		Perfect pictures are need for a huge amount of followers