

Unhealthy gymming, a terrible lifestyle

By Twan Tjoa (1042665), Vera Verhoef (1161644) and Lisanne de Jonge (1171771)

Course: CHL-20306

Group Number: 4

Date: 24/11/2021

Word count: 1514

The fitness industry has increased significantly since the introduction of social media. Social media has revolutionized accessibility to subcultures such as fitness. In the last 10 years, the amount of fitness club members worldwide has seen an increase of 55%, to a total of almost 185 million members (Ablondi, J. 2020). The largest fitness influencer, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson has a following of 279 million people on Instagram (Instagram, 2021), a staggering amount that gives him the 5th place on the world ranking of most followers. This shows that the social media fitness world is huge!

With the increase of the fitness industry some problems also come along. This pitch write-up about healthy lifestyles addresses the problem that nowadays, young adults might be insecure about their bodies as a result of exposure to fitness influencers on social media. If they follow fitness influencers, they get exposed to the perfect bodies in the pictures. Although pictures on social media could be motivating for some, they could also cause mental problems instead of a motivational drive. Especially when one cannot meet the standards of the perfect body as displayed on these Instagram accounts (Naslund et al, 2020), and they fail to relativize and are not able to overlook the consequences of never being satisfied with their achieved results. To tackle this problem in this write-up a plan to educate the target group is explained. Our target group consist of women and men of any race or ethnic background and who are between the age of 18 to 25. Furthermore, the people in this target group go to the gym three times or more a week and are actively engaged in the 'Gym-life' culture. By 'Gym-life' in this write up is meant that the person follows fitness-influencers on social media platforms such as Instagram, has an eating schedule and keeps track of his or her meals and snacks.

The images on social media often display young, thin, in-shape women. This can be seen as a way of cutting women down to size, because the influencer only shares pictures of her body looking thin and muscular. A muscular thin body is represented as being healthy and good looking. Often the influencer shows no signs, or even hides acne or fat body parts. Even though the Modern Girl used to be portrayed as skinny for a long time now, currently the muscular feature adds up to the Modern Girl image together with the fact that she sports regularly. Formerly, it was suggested that the modern girl felt the obligation to compare herself to the beauty and social standards as presented in the advertisements. She would predict the opinions and standards of others and adjust her body accordingly (Weinbaum et al., 2008). In the present day, comparison to advertisements has shifted to comparison to social media images whereas the adjusting of the body to these expectations remained the same. From a survey taken in 2017, when asked the question "*I feel bad about my body when I look at fitness related content on social media*", almost 75% of the woman answered "Agree" or "Neutral" (Norton, M. 2017).

Moreover, people are being educated by social media influencers. For example, the pictures of influencers show people how the perfect body might look so that people want to look like the bodies in these pictures. Different emotions come into play while being influenced by pictures on social media. For example, people can feel ashamed, sad or frustrated if their body doesn't look like the perfect body on social media. Also, in real life experiences emotions play a role. If people see that someone can lift a heavier weight, this can cause feelings of shame, frustration and even competitiveness. What also contributes to the problem is the fact that the government isn't much involved in social media literacy. The main problem with insecurity is that people fail to critically view these perfect images, and when our target group gets educated about the dangers of social media (on all levels) there might be a decrease in dissatisfaction of one's one body.

A reason why so many people are influenced by images on social media can be found in the naturalization of ideologies. Berger (2006) states that dominant ideas appear to be natural and

universal if they are accepted by (almost) all. In this way, the ideology not only changes what we see, but also the way we perceive. Individual choices might be limited by the dominant structure and social ideology. In this case, the gym-life can be seen as the dominant ideology which is accepted by a lot of young people. The way in which images on social media about the gym-life effect a person depends on the way a person sees these images. A thin and muscular body might appear natural and universal because it fits within the accepted ideology of the gym-life.

Nowadays there is the issue that young adults might be insecure about their body, are influenced by social media, and that they become even more insecure when all they see is perfect bodies on those platforms. This can lead to mental problems, like depression (Nesi, 2015) instead of motivation. Since the rise of social media, there is a real fitness-culture, there are a lot of products available to get that 'perfect' body. Especially women compare themselves with those bodies (Nesi, 2015). The media, advertising, tries to show how we as persons become happy and promotes images what the audience conceives the "the good life" (Jhally, 2018). Becoming happy by controlling our lives, our bodies and giving us self-esteem for friendships and relationships (Jhally, 2018).

A possible solution includes education for the target group, so giving lectures to teenagers in middle/high school about social media. This method is there to prevent those teenagers from insecurity in the age level of our target group. The education will exist out of how to use social media, giving examples of how social media content is created and secondly, educating them how to cope with these pictures and how to be happy with your own body. This will create awareness that the image about the perfect body and lifestyle portrayed on social media is often unreal and not achievable in real life. The program will exist out of two lectures that can be given during a 'mentor' lecture. Meaning a lecture where normally the class teacher gives some advice and feedback to his tutor class. Both lectures exist out of information telling, watching short videos, example pictures, discussions and exercises. The lecturer will present his or her email address to the class, for children that want some more help with their already existing insecurity. Lecture one exists of information about the working of social media. How can you edit photos, what is highlighted by social media influencers for more viewers and what kind of poses are good for the best pictures. Asking the children at the start if they already know how to edit photos. Doing exercises with the children like photographing posed and unposed and editing the photo taken. The second interactive lecture will support them in their body confidence. Giving them insights in the different bodies and that there is no 'perfect' body as well as no perfect eating and sports habit. Discussing with them that you can eat whatever you want, even the 'bad' foods, but that you should keep in mind that you need some vitamins and minerals (Watson, 2010) and that your body gets this from fueling it with 'good' and 'bad' foods. As well as that your week doesn't have to exist out of heavy training every day, but that you must do the sports you like whenever you're feeling into it. Inspiring them to overcome their body insecurity.

Another strategy is aimed at the government, especially the department of health, welfare and sport, to start a national campaign to create awareness, and encourage celebration of diversity (Low, 2020) and how they can stay healthy by telling them what a good way is to eat or keep your body moving. This campaign will also include fitness influencers that are willing to show that they can also be insecure about their body, and that, for instance, they admit to using substances to enhance their sporting abilities. The underlying message that is being conveyed is that basically, social media is further from reality than most people think. This can be done by showing off their body how it is, not in perfect lighting, without holding your breath, etc.

The introduction stated the problem young adults might be insecure about their bodies as a result of exposure to fitness influencers on social media and will develop an unhealthy 'gym-life' accordingly. In this write-up we have tried to solve this problem by stating two solutions. The final best solution, the first one mentioned, educating teenagers in middle/high school on the topic of social media literacy might prevent the target group from developing insecurities. This is considered to be best solution, because this can prevent teenagers from developing mental and/or physical problems in the future.

Literature

- Ablondi, J., Walsh, K., & International Health, R. S. A. (2020). IHRSA Global Report 2020. IHRSA.
- Baccarella, C.V., Wagner, T.F., Kietzmann, J.H. & McCarthy, I.P. (2018). Social media? It's serious! Understanding the dark side of social media. *European Management Journal*, 36(4), 431-438. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2018.07.002>
- Berger, J. (2006). Excerpt from ways of seeing. In I. Grewal & C. Kaplan (Eds.), *An Introduction to women's studies: Gender in a transnational world*, 2, 269-273.
- Carrotte, E. R., Vella, A. M., & Lim, M. S. (2015). Predictors of "Liking" Three Types of Health and Fitness-Related Content on Social Media: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 17(8), e205. <https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.4803>
- Jhally, S. (2018). Image-based culture: Advertising and popular culture. In G. Dines, J. M. Humez, W. E. Yousman & L. B. Bindig (Eds.), *Gender, race, and class in media: A critical reader* (5th ed., pp. 229-233). Sage Publications.
- Low, J. (2020). Stigma management as celebration: Disability, difference, and the marketing of diversity. *Visual Studies*, 35(4), 347-358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2020.1763194>
- Modern Girl Around the World Research Group. (2008) The Modern Girl around the world: Cosmetics advertising and the politics of race and style. In A. E. Weinbaum, L. M. Thomas, P. Ramamurthy, U. G. Poiger & M. Y. Dong (Eds.), *The Modern Girls around the world: Consumption, modernity and globalization* (pp. 5-54). Duke University Press.
- Naslund, J.A., Bondre, A., Torous, J. et al. Social Media and Mental Health: Benefits, Risks, and Opportunities for Research and Practice (2020). *Journal of technology in behavioral science*, 5, 245–257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-020-00134-x>
- Nesi, J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2015, April 23). Using social media for social comparison and feedback-seeking: Gender and popularity moderate associations with depressive symptoms. *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology*. Retrieved November 24, 2021, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10802-015-0020-0>.
- Norton, M. (2017). Fitspiration: Social media's fitness culture and its effect on body Image. *California State University, Monterey Bay*, 1–36. https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1138&context=caps_thes_all
- The Rock [@the rock]. (n.d.). Instagram profile. Retrieved november 24, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/therock/>
- Uithoven, J.M.E. (2019). I transform, so I can perform. Onderzoek naar het lichamelijke schoonheidsideaal vertolkt door drie transformatiefoto's van fitgirls op Instagram. *Faculty of Humanities theses (bachelor thesis)*, Utrecht University. <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/380007>
- Watson, S. (2011). *Vitamins and minerals*. Google Boeken. Retrieved November 24, 2021, from https://books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=rby7N67Xe6YC&oi=fnd&pg=PA4&dq=vitamins%2Band%2Bminerals%2Byour%2Bbody%2Bneeds&ots=OvwXfO1YNa&sig=2IqCXBWJy7n42UrQOkvL7gjlKg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=vitamins%20and%20minerals%20your%20body%20needs&f=false