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# Imagery Matters: The Role of Fitness Influencers in the Reproduction of Socio-Cultural Gender Norms

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## ▌ABSTRACT▐

### Introduction

This research explored Instagram 'Fitness Influencers', to develop an understanding of the content they post online, the level of objectification and gender differences in the extent of this objectification. The media previously has presented gendered representations of women and men, with women subjected to greater objectification than males, with similar findings in social media research. Fitness Influencers are online micro-celebrities influential on young people, thus knowledge of the images being consumed is beneficial due to the associated detrimental effects of unconsciously internalising objectified media and that promoting unattainable beauty standards.

### Methods

A content analysis of 90 influencer images was conducted to provide an understanding of the type of images shared, followed by a Chi square ($\chi^2$) to determine gender differences; the qualitative content analysis phase identified four main themes, lifestyle, brand endorsements, engaged in activity and objectification.

### Results

There were no significant gender differences found ($p>0.05$) however, objectification sub-themes found significant differences in muscularity between males and females and in sultry poses ($p<0.001$), in line with gender stereotypes and norms in society.

### Conclusion

The identification of greater objectification of males highlights the need for greater consideration for male's body image, and greater consideration for the content being shared online more generally, due to the associated detrimental effects of consuming certain types of imagery.

### Keywords

Social media; Gender stereotypes; Imagery; Influencers; Objectification.

## INTRODUCTION▐

Modern society has been defined by continuous technological advancements, generating a societal shift from traditional media to the online sphere of social media (SM). This supremacy of digital media is demonstrated by the time spent using it compared with traditional media, for example, in 2021, 470 minutes daily were spent with digital media compared with 347 for traditional media in the US.[1] In contrast to medias before, SM as identified by Lamba et al,[2] and Sylvester[3] provides an arena for autonomous self-portrayal and construction of identity, as individuals have the agency to present oneself as desired. Despite these freedoms, research[4,5] has suggested that individuals' SM content is replicative of the societal norms and stereotypes omnipresent offline, thus provides a new arena for gendered norms to be established and perpetuated.[6,7] The gendered representations of female and male bodies in society are pervasive; identified in advertisements by Signoretti,[8] sports coverage by Sherry et al,[9] and the music industry by Rasmussen et al.[10]

Female bodies within these different mediums can be overly sexualised and objectified appealing to hegemonic ideologies, thereby suggesting the gender stereotypes that position women as domestic beings, exuding passivity, and feminine physical attri-

butes.[11,12] The objectification of a person as defined by Choi et al[13] is degrading them into a mere object, while sexualisation is the separation of sexual body parts from the whole person, hence self-sexualisation is the voluntary imposition of sexualization on oneself. The discussion surrounding females' experiences of objectification and sexualisation in the media is omnipresent with males often excluded from the discussion. Yet they may also be barraged with objectified images and standards of beauty to attain, in-line with the pressure to exhibit masculinity and 'be a man' through muscularity and physicality[14,15] without consideration of a continuum of femininities and masculinities appropriate for the progressivism in modern society.

This dominance of social networking sites (SNS) makes its use inescapable in daily life with the possible associated risks attracting researchers in various fields to investigate this online sphere.[16] The imagery consumed online is internalised by those engaging with it, leading to attempts to achieve what is observed, as identified by Graff et al[16] with thin ideal internalisation and objectified body consciousness, significantly associated ($p<0.05$) with time spent on SM. The detrimental impacts because of continuous consumption, society is presented with an epidemic of body dissatisfaction and the desire to emulate unattainable standards of beauty.[17,18] Un-like previous generations who idolised traditional celebrities, Generation Z instead typically admire these online Instagram celebrities according to Gómez,[19] therefore, understanding the content produced by these individuals enables a greater awareness of the potential threats engaging with this population of online community may have. Previous research conducted by Ey,[20] Roberts et al[21] Vadenbosch et al[22] identified that following the observation of thin and muscular ideals, individuals body dissatisfaction increased with further mental health effects. Therefore, this empirical evidence suggests that fitness influencers sharing images of this nature to thousands of followers has potentially adverse effects on users. Conversely, images that depict body positivity have the opposing effect, Cohen et al,[23] analysed Instagram images using #bodypositivity, which demonstrated an appreciation of 'flaws' such as cellulite, stomach rolls and skin blemishes. Additionally, this content enhanced body satisfaction and appreciation as suggested by Cohen et al,[24] provided a different narrative than media has before, with positive intervention opportunities utilising body positive images.

Social media research has increased alongside SNS popularity, with online micro-celebrities known as 'influencers' becoming imperative to the landscape, creating new job opportunities through brand relationships. Hence, business and marketing fields have greatly explored influencer's role in the landscape, changing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.[25,26] However, less consideration has been given to the type of content influencers share; whether as is the case in mainstream media, this imagery is objectified or sexualised, and if so, are there gender differences. Therefore, the main aims for this current study were to establish the type of imagery that was posted, the association of self-sexualisation or objectification and the frequency of such images between gender.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants and Recruitment

The participants for this research were selected *via* purposive sam-

pling and recruited a niche population of the online community fitness influencers. The sample selected consisted of n=3 male and n=3 female fitness influencers, gathered from the top articles yielded from an internet search for 'Fitness Influencers to Follow on Instagram'. Additionally, the influencers within these articles had to meet the pre-selected criterion, including being UK based, over 18, active on Instagram, present a fitness lifestyle, have more than 100,000 followers and promote brand endorsements on their platform (Figure 1).

Ethics approval was granted by University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Committee. As SM research is still relatively novel a particularly prominent area of dispute is the private *vs* public nature of individuals data online, because of the inconsistent guidelines provided it has become difficult to determine what is public data and what is private and when is consent required with much considered on case-by-case basis leading to a lack of consistency.[27] As this research was based upon individuals with micro-celebrity status, of whom were inaccessible to gain informed consent, therefore implied consent for the use of individual's shared SM images was utilised in this study. Additionally, the names of the selected influencers were not included within this study but rather pseudonyms applied such as Influencer 1 or 2, to differentiate between individuals.

### Procedure

Data collection for this research utilised desk-based methods, initially Instagram was accessed via the main website. Data collection firstly involved searching each of the selected fitness influencers Instagram feeds, next screenshots were taken of each participants' last 15 images posted, 90 images in total for analysis. Screenshots were only taken of single photo posts and excluded videos, and multi-photo posts from the data sample, additionally only images including people will be captured e.g, no food or landscape images. Due to the contemporary nature of SM research the data collection techniques are yet to be standardised allowing for exploration of methods, with the screenshotting and copy and pasting of online information often utilised.[28] The data collected consists of a small sample size in comparison to the 'big data' typical of SM research, providing generalisable findings. However, due to this research's dominant qualitative aspect, the opportunity smaller data affords to gain in-depth understandings of imagery, while avoiding the loss of details amongst large-scale data is prioritised over generalisability.[29] The gathered screenshots were each saved onto the same document and converted into an encrypted PDF and stored on a password protected laptop only accessible to the researcher.

Broad categories were created based upon existing literature to provide guidance (Box 1) however these were not directly applied in the final codes, rather open coding was initially conducted following multiple observations of the images, with Neuman[30] suggesting this allows themes to be brought to the surface from deep within the data. An inductive approach was adopted over a pre-existing framework as aspects of the content may be disregarded if it does not fit within the framework, however this information may benefit the research.[31] From the data, many initial codes were applied to illustrate the manifest content, later linking,

**Figure 1.** *Participant Selection Process*
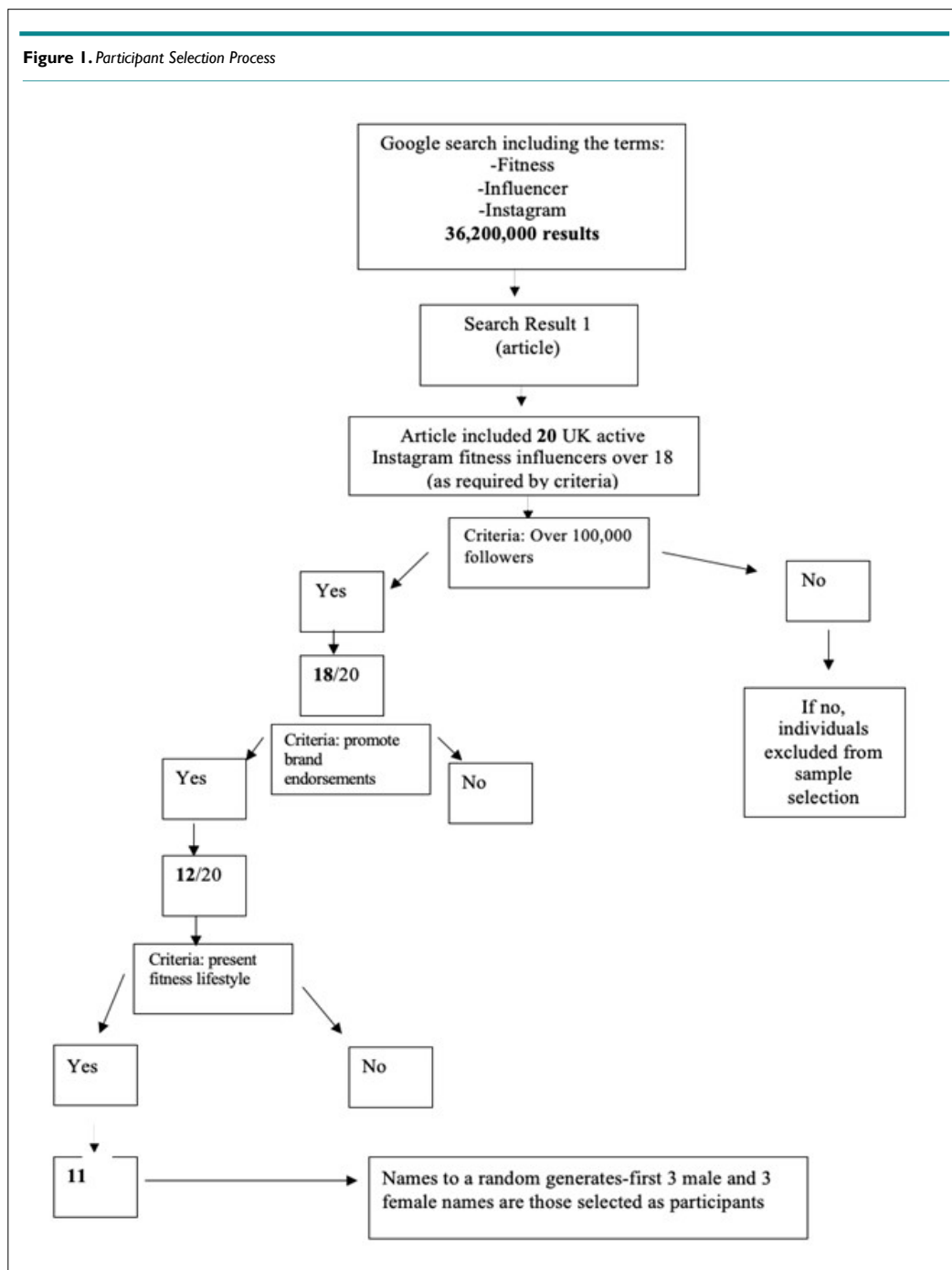
and merging those interrelated to form broader encompassing categories. This was not a linear process as suggested by Erlingsson et al,[32] but rather repetitions of the coding processes occurred as greater familiarity with the data was developed. Following this, the broader categories displaying relatedness were further combined into overarching themes, providing an overview of the data, these were defined to enhance reliability in the coding process.

**Data Analysis**

To analyse the quantitative data that sought to establish gender differences, initially quantitative content analysis occurred to provide frequency counts for each of the qualitatively determined themes,

separating each into male and female. The numerical data from each theme were inputted into Microsoft Excel and inferential statistics via Chi square ($\chi^2$) statistical analysis were used to identify whether significant differences between gender and the number of objectified and sexualised images existed.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results gathered to achieve these aims were obtained from the content analysis from the 90 images, through a five-stage coding process outlined by Erlingsson et al[32] initially extracting the latent content, later refining codes into four main themes, objectification, brand endorsement, lifestyle, and engagement inactivity. Objectifi-

**Box 1.** *Broad Initial Categories for Content Analysis*

1. Gender Display- (male/female)
2. Photo Location: (Where this photo was taken, the setting)
   - Gym
   - Studio
   - Sport Facilities
   - Home
   - Scenery
3. Facial Expression: (What emotions is being conveyed by the subject)
   - Faceless Portrayal (No face included in photo)
   - Withdrawing gaze (Looking away from camera or squinted eyes)
   - Loss of control (Laughing or crying)
   - Smiling
   - Pout
4. Body Position/Posture: (How the body is presented/posed)
   - Sitting/kneeling
   - Lying
   - Upright
   - Athletic position (running, jumping)
   - Imbalance (tilting, arched or leaning)
5. Hand Display: (are the subjects hands involved in the image)
   - Touching oneself
   - Touching another
   - Covering breasts (for females)
6. Focus of Photo: (Who is the main focus)
   - The influencer participant
   - Other individual
   - Group shot
7. Focus of the body: (Emphasis on which body part or section)
   - Whole body
   - Buttocks
   - Breasts
   - Stomach/abdomen
   - Muscle presentation (Tensing of biceps)
8. Clothing: (What type of clothing is being worn)
   - Revealing (Sparse amounts showing lots of skin, e.g., sports bra and shorts)
   - Unrevealing (Covering)
   - Bathing suit/Lingerie
9. Type of shot: (The composition of the image)
   - Full body
   - Half body
   - Headshot
   - Mirror picture
   - Selfie

Adapted from: Goffman[33]; Kang[34]; Kim et al[35] and Döring et al[6]

**Table 1.** *Frequencies, Percentages and Significance Values from the Images Analysed*

| Categorical Variables | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable Name | Male (n) | Female (n) | Difference | Total | % |
| Lifestyle | 14 | 18 | 4 | 32 | 35.5 |
| Engaged in Activity# | 5 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 7.8 |
| Brand Endorsements | 6 | 9 | 3 | 15 | 16.7 |
| Objectified: | 21 | 15 | 6 | 36 | 40.0 |
| Sexualised objectification | 18 | 11 | 7 | 29 | 32.2 |
| Sexual/Sultry poses | - | 12 | 12** | 12 | 13.3 |
| Body Parts Focus: | 10 | 8 | 2 | 18 | 20.0 |
| i) Stomach# | - | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2.2 |
| ii) Buttocks# | - | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5.6 |
| iii) Pectorals | 19 | - | 19** | 19 | 21.1 |
| iv) Arms# | 5 | - | 5 | 5 | 5.6 |
| v) Cleavage# | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1.1 |
| Muscularity | 23 | 1 | 22** | 24 | 26.6 |

Key: *$p<0.05$ **$p<0.001$
#Reflects the expected values in these cells were less than 5 for the $\chi^2$ calculation

cation consisted of sub-categories due to the varying ways it can be presented, providing a greater understanding of the nature of this objectification to answer RQ2. Frequencies were then gathered for males and females to prepare for statistical analysis to determine gender differences in these categories (Figure 2).

## Content Description

The qualitative content analysis process yielded four overarching themes from the latent content of the images: the process evident in Box 1. These themes and codes emerged from the analytical process of the images, with guidance from the broad initial categories. However, the coding process was not a priority, with the following themes, objectification, brand endorsements, lifestyle and engagement in activity emerging from the data. This analysis demonstrated the variety of images posted by influencers and the willingness to share personal endeavours online to unknown individuals.

## Objectification

This theme encompasses those images where the subject is observed to be self-objectifying, whereby a specific body part may be the emphasis of the image such as a half body shot of a bare torso, or a sultry pose such as reclining on a sofa appearing alluring, other forms of objectification highlighted in the sub-themes in Box 1. The type expressed was greatly varied but was the most observed theme with 40% (Table 1) of the images coded as objectified with a continuum to the level of such, from a mirror picture of Influencer 6 in boxer shorts taking a mirror selfie with a naked torso, to Influencer 2's pouting selfie. The gender differences in the type of objectification were evident with female's adopting sultry, submissive poses while male's objectification typically a result of displayed unclothed muscular torsos.[33-35]

The overarching concept that permits and promotes

**Figure 2.** *Coding Process to Generate Final Themes*
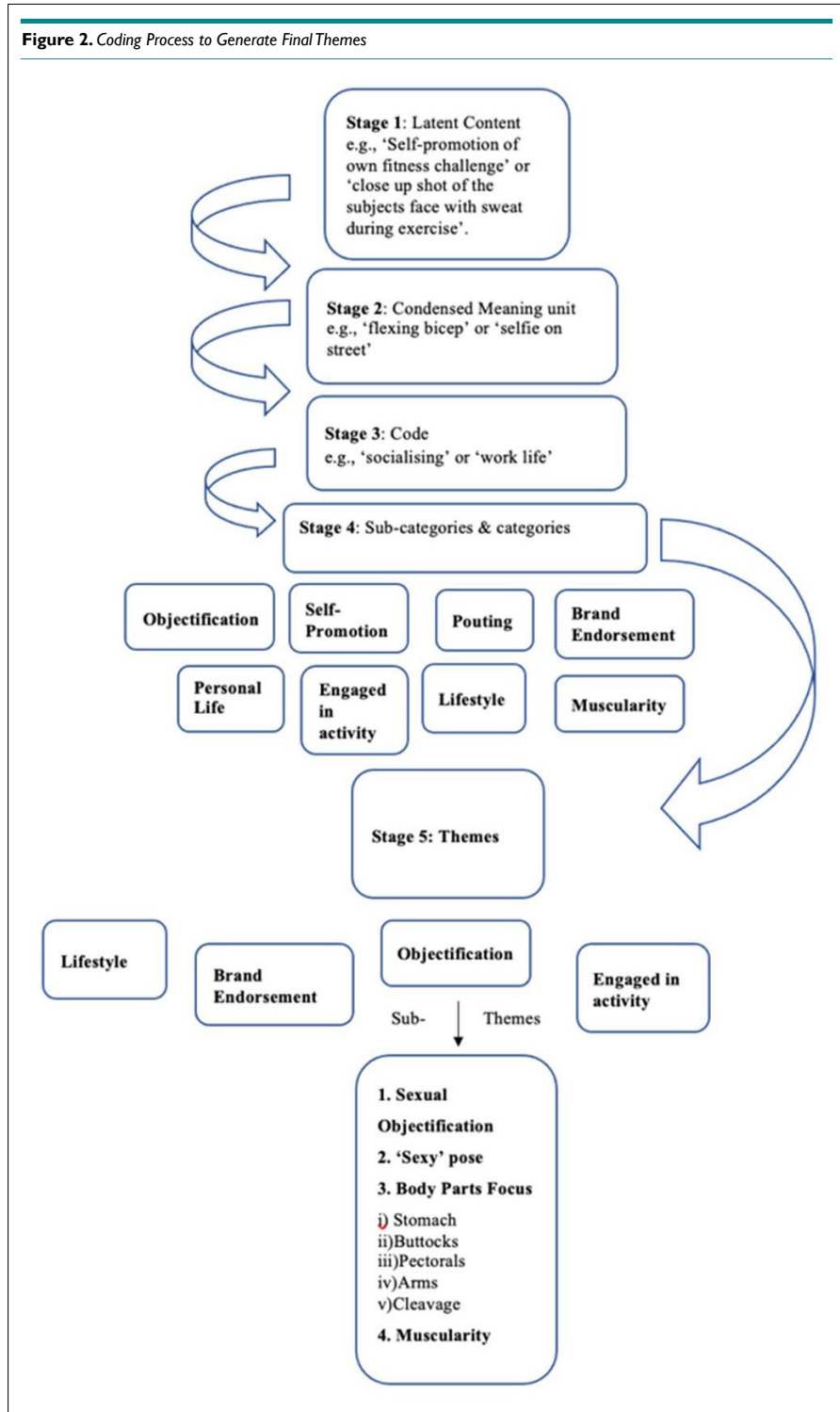


practices toward women is hegemonic masculinity, a key aspect of which according to Donaldson[36] is the existence of women to be sexually objectified by men. This emphasizes the deep-rooted nature of sexualisation of the female body and may explain the sexual objectification by female fitness influencers in these submissive ways, such as arching their back, lying down or pouting, to appeal to a male hegemonic audience. This objectification as a method to preserve hegemonic masculinity and subordination of women is still practiced in modern society albeit on new platforms like SM highlighted by Rodriguez et al[37] by male college students. For instance, treatment of women on Instagram, is evident in comments and captions such as 'dibs on that sexy piece of ass'. The current study however, (despite the low sample size) aimed to understand the extent of the objectification in influencers imagery, with 40% of the 90 images identified as displaying objectification of the subject. Although, existing literature explored highlighted female objectification at significantly higher rates than their male counter parts in both the media[4,6,35] and SM.[38,39] Deighton-Smith et al[39] analysis found female posts in fitspiration images were significantly more sexually objectified. Similarly, Carrotte et al,[38] identified in

fitspiration that males and females were both subjected to objectification, in agreement with these results yet, females to a significantly greater extent. This contradicts the findings of this study as presented subsequently but maybe explained through these studies larger sample, analysing 1,000 images in the former and 415 in the latter, in comparison to the 90 in the current study which produced a contrasting narrative. Additionally, they analysed images posted on the meta data tag fitspiration rather than individuals feeds, this may be as general content differs from those used on hashtags, a larger sample size may find alternative results and provide greater accuracy in Chi square ($\chi^2$).

Conversely, males also self-objectify and are objectified, evidenced in this data with males observed to be objectified in more images (46.6%) than females (33.3%), however no significant differences were presented ($p>0.05$). Male body image receives limited attention in comparison with females, despite identical detrimental impacts, as Galioto et al[40] identified, with significant increases in body dissatisfaction following observations of muscular male bodies in advertisements ($p<0.05$). More specifically, Gültzow et al,[41] found Instagram users to reproduce this expected muscularity; Thus, in support of the current results, with these images garner greater popularity in terms of likes and followers compared with images low in muscularity and high in body fat ($p<0.01$). Consequently, male Instagram users may intentionally post content of this nature to gain popularity, with follower count integral in the saturated influencer market. Toffoletti et al[29] on Instagram and Ramsey et al[42] on Facebook identified sexualised images received significantly greater likes and more followers than those who did not. Hence, there is an incentive to post sexualised content online, with followers rewarding the very element of content that has potential to cause personal detriment.[22] Supported by these findings whereby, 51.1 % (n=23) of males' objectified images displayed muscularity, this being the emphasis of one's high levels of musculature, consisting of flexing, contrastingly only one female demonstrated muscularity, a significant difference ($p<0.001$). Further significant differences were identified between male and female influencers in the frequency of sultry poses (n=0: n=12) included within the content ($p<0.001$). Further similarities between previous literature and the current research are present as identified by Bell et al,[43] with the most common form of objectification for a sample of young girls being sultry poses, with 25% of images consisting of this pose, as similarly found in this research whereby 26.6% of female's imagery included these poses. Therefore, it appears males and females not only differ in the amount of objectification but more critically differ in the type of objectification they engage in, even the objectification is gendered to support gender roles and stereotypes. Detrimental, as this ubiquitous and subtle perpetuation creates a society unconscious to these 'normal' everyday practices,[44] thus this critical paradigm seeks to bring consciousness. However, no significant differences were found in the main four themes ($p>0.05$), although observable differences were identified (Table 1).

Overall, many of the findings support the existing literature on gendered representations in the media and SM. These influencers present a broad range of imagery online, with 40% of the images objectified, but this objectification occurred in a variety of gendered ways in accordance with societal expectations for men and women. Although, significant differences were not found in the level of objectification; the greater frequency of male objectification opposes the dominant discourse identifiable in Cranmer et al,[4] and Carrotte et al,[38] with greater objectification of female subjects. SM is typically presented as a landscape for individual agency, but this appears to be an illusion with these images gathered from the online sphere, a mirror of wider societal expectations, with females presented as passive, appearance focused, while men exhibit masculinity and muscularity in their images as promoted in masculine ideologies.

## Influencers

Influencers demonstrated a tendency to share elements of their private life in this public sphere with 35.5 % (n=32) (Table 1) of total images including elements of 'lifestyle'. An image was classified as lifestyle if it involved elements of the influencer's personal lives, such as family members, friends, social occasions, or work life, in various setting such as the home, garden and public settings. Images within this category included Influencer 1's child cooking, or Influencer 4 on what appears to be holiday with a female subject and two dogs. Some influencers shared more of these types of images than others, with Influencer 1 displaying greater frequency of this type of content (n=9) in comparison to Influencer 3 (n=2) as displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Frequency of Categorical Variables per Influencer*

| Theme | I1 | I2 | I3 | I4 | I5 | I6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Objectification | 3 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 14 |
| Engaged in Activity | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Lifestyle | 9 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 1 |
| Brand Endorsements | 0 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 0 |

Note. I 1,2,3,4,5,6 Is referring to Influencer 1 etc.

## Brand Endorsement

As aforementioned, for one to be termed an influencer they are required to endorse brands and products within their online content, aiming to enhance sales from followers.[45-47] Images labelled as brand endorsement involved a product central to the image or promotion of a personal endeavour by the influencer. Each influencer demonstrated brand endorsements on their feed as required in the participant criteria, but not all in the last 15 images, however, 3 of the 6 influencers presented multiple brand endorsements and self-promotion of personal projects onto Instagram. Many of these brands were products associated with health and fitness such as protein supplements, healthy organic foods, and promotion fitness challenges designed by the influencer themselves.

The brand endorsements incorporated by the selected influencers aligned with traditional gender roles, male influencers endorsed protein and supplementations associated with muscularity, while Influencer 2 (female) promoted cooking subscriptions and perfume products consistent with domestic roles and femininity. These sponsorships and partnership allow entrepreneurial opportunities and income for influencers; however, the way products

are endorsed may have adverse effects on followers, with the image misrepresenting the products ability through its framing. Influencer's[5] brand endorsement pictured two male subjects with torsos exposed demonstrating high levels of muscularity who were promoting protein bars. Upon observation of this image, one may assume that consumption of this product in their diet will allow them to look like these two male subjects, although this is not explicitly said, the image implies it. Jin et al,[48] identified a technique utilised by influencers to increase their success of selling products, this is to develop self-discrepancy in followers, leading to greater motivation for self-improvement through purchases of the products on display to emulate the subject of the image. The concern for the way these products is marketed by influencers is due to the pervasive power these influencers have over their followers, considered more trustworthy than traditional celebrities.[48] This trust according to Breves et al,[49] develops through seemingly intimate and authentic presentation of self, achieved through sharing personal aspects of their lives, of which many of these influencers did share, coded in this research as lifestyle. Within this category individuals share their family life and update followers on life events sharing personal details and the people close to them. This vulnerability and intimacy that is attributed as the success of influencers is observed in this data, suggesting this may be the reason for the replacement of traditional advertisements with SM personnel adopted as promoters instead.

## Activity versus Passivity

Images whereby the influencer appears to be actively engaged in physical activity were coded within the theme 'Engaged in Activity'. Only 7.8% of the images observed influencers undertaking activity, despite the term 'fitness influencer' suggesting a particularly active lifestyle. Images within this theme involved observable physical exertion expressed or sweat visible, active involvement with fitness equipment such as ropes and weights or action shots of running. Male fitness influencers displaying more of these themes in their images (n=5), than female counterparts (n=2), despite being part of the same online fitness community. The lack of athleticism identified in female fitness influencers content, predictably mirrors previous findings, of Cranmer et al.[4] This research examined the representation of males and females in sports media, where female's athleticism was deemphasised and were framed as significantly less athletic than males ($p<0.001$), consistent with femininity and masculinity characteristics laid out by society. Similarly, twitter posts of female and male athletes found males presented in active images related to their sporting endeavours while female athletes were infantilised 'a great bunch of girls' reducing their athletic abilities.[50] Consistent with Influencers self-presentation on Instagram with males presented as more athletically capable in workouts or presenting their physicality while women appeared passive and inactive. Thus, the images shared by influencers may not be authentic or intimate at all, but rather an illusion presented to gain followers and lucrative endorsements.

## Gender Analysis

Gender differences were observed in each theme however not all demonstrating significance as identified in Table 1. Females posted more lifestyle images (n=18) compared with male counterparts

(n=14). Similarly, females shared more brand related content, also endorsing different 'products' than male influencers, with males typically promoting protein supplementation, while females advocated healthy food options. Whereas males engaged in physical activity within these images at greater amounts (n=5) than females (n=2), furthermore, objectification as a theme yielded greater codes for male images (n=21) than female (n=15). However, the sub-themes differed in the distribution between males and females, with some forms of objectification such as sultry poses, stomach, and buttocks emphasis more utilised by females, with cleavage displayed in one image. While males were more greatly self-sexually objectifying with emphasis on their pectorals and arms, such as flexing the biceps or crossing arms across the body creating a masculine and dominant stance.

Explicit gender boundaries and expectations are placed upon males and females in society, each provided with differing behaviours and attributes appropriate to display based on gender norms and stereotypes as suggested by Heise et al,[51] and Saewyc.[52] When an individual identifies as female, they are expected to embody characteristics associated with femininity, such as passivity and display of emotion. In contrast, males are expected to express masculinity through behaviours of independence or assertiveness, as identified by Timke et al.[53] Masculinity and femininity set boundaries for females' participation in activity, as the latter is associated with stillness, and the former synonymous with activity and physicality as identified by Energici et al.[54] This provides an explanation for the greater number (n=5) of male influencers engaging in activity within the content they shared, compared to female influencers (n=2), who in contrast were presented as sedentary, corresponding to traditional gender roles in society. The reproduction of these gender expectations online by female influencers further reinforces the gender socialisation offline.[12] Followers of these female influencers would observe passivity as the 'acceptable' behaviours to present in correspondence with their status as a woman.

As highlighted in the current study, these findings are constant with the portrayal in this sample of fitness influencers, consistent with the stereotypical dichotomy of independence versus passivity for males and females. The utilisation of 'sexy', sultry, submissive poses was significantly different ($p<0.001$) across genders, with females adopting such to a greater extent, whereas males were depicted as dominant and emphasised their masculinity through the flexing of biceps and folding arms across chest in a power-pose. In addition, significant gender differences were identified for muscularity ($p<0.001$) with 23 male images coded as such and only one of females. The adoption of 'submissive' poses by females (i.e, lying, or leaning on an object) portrays subordination according to Goffman,[33] reflecting Golden et al[55] findings whereby 33% of young girls in the study expressed the need for princes (boys) to protect princesses (girls), based on the internalisation of gender roles in Disney media. Evidently the media perpetuates societal gender order through the presentation of dominant imagery that reinforces masculinity and femininity, the latter appealing to the hegemonic male gaze, enforcing these ideologies rather than challenging them with an alternative narrative, so the cycle continues. As identified by Steinfeldt et al,[56] and Stockard[57] not only does the media provide a vessel for socialisation, but also displays

the standards of femininity and beauty for male and females to attain,[5] with individuals observing and internalising these to replicate themselves. Women and men have different standards of beauty with women desiring a thin, lean, and toned body while, men aim for muscularity dictated by society's standards as can be observed in these findings. The female influencers embodied this lean physique, as evident in Influencer 2's content which depicted her in workout leggings and a sports bra, exposing her toned stomach, while avoiding hyper-muscularity of the abdominals, associated with masculinity. Whereas male influencers sought to emphasise their muscularity with 53.3% of images featuring high levels of muscularity particularly of the abdomen, pectorals, and arms, although this muscularity coded as objectification, the subjects still illude dominance, while female's objectification is submissive. This demonstration of muscularity supports Bazzini et al,[5] findings from analysis on Men's health (MH) and Women's health (WH) publications, with WH promoting thin feminine ideals, with significantly ($p$<0.001) more appearance related captions (fitness for appearance improvement) than those of body competence (emphasising body's fitness abilities), and MH muscularity constructing societal standards for men's body's to be reproduced by readers. Therefore, females are expected to focus on their appearance and maintain their feminine beauty standards, while men can improve their physical abilities associated with power and masculinity.

## CONCLUSION

SM's rapid rise to dominance has changed the landscape of media consumption, with imagery consumption incessant, and pervasive, with the type of images impactful on users. This study was designed to explore the nature of influencers' imagery on Instagram and the objectification and sexualisation present within it while establishing any existent gender differences. The previous literature illustrated the excessive objectification and sexualisation of females in the media[58] and on SM,[39] at significantly ($p$<0.001) greater levels than males, leading to a vast amount of research in this area. In addition, within this existent literature, it was identified that males and females were presented in ways consistent with the gender norms, roles and stereotypes set out by society for them.[53] Results from this study revealed that the imagery shared online varied in its contents however, 40% of the 90 images were objectified in accordance with academic's findings, yet contrastingly male influencers in this sample shared more objectifying images (n=21) than the females (n=15) opposing the dominant landscape previously suggested as not significant ($p$>0.05). On the other hand, images still displayed frequency of sexualised or objectified images for women in ways aligned with sultry femininity and males with masculinity consistent with previous results, these gender norms are pervasive and span the entirety of society.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study has been ethical approval was granted by University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Committee.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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