Who "Fits" the Template?:

Unveiling the Restrictions of Inclusivity on Gymshark's Website

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Capstone in Communication Studies

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April 29, 2022

Abstract

In this research, my objective is to dive into the recent addition of plus-size women models on the popular gym apparel brand Gymshark's website and analyze the commodification and tokenization of the plus-size female body particularly on the website. I will be discussing what Gymshark is, how it recently sky-rocketed to popularity, and how it has engaged in being an inclusive brand and participated in the Body Positivity movement. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms have become more popular than ever before, and because of this, the Body Positivity movement, specifically directed towards the female body, has increased awareness, acceptance, and inclusivity of any and all bodies that may not perfectly fall into the 21st century western societal expectations. In communication studies, there have been many recent conversations regarding inclusivity of all bodies, and the Body Positivity movement and, conversely, about the negative stigma surrounding plus-size women. I will be discussing inclusivity and body positivity in relation to post-feminism to show how Gymshark, although claims to be inclusive of everyone, has many flaws in the linguistic and visual rhetoric on their website that does not support their claim of inclusivity.

Introduction

I was 18 years old in 2018 when I ordered my first matching workout set from Gymshark, and not only did I order one set, I ordered two: a dark pink set of matching leggings and a sports bra, and a blue-gray set of matching leggings and a sports bra. At that point I had been lifting for about two years, but as a high school student, although the outfits were cute, Gymshark was not the most affordable and practical option to wear in the gym at the time. I remember saving up half of my paycheck from my job at Coldstone Creamery to spend on these

two new matching sets because I finally wanted to look like a real gym girl. Even though I had already been going to the gym and was able to prove my dedication in my physical strength, buying and wearing Gymshark at the gym for the first time felt like the initiation of me being able to actually call myself a "gym rat." I was glued to the YouTube videos of girls opening their new Gymshark packages and trying them on, and I thought "If I buy Gymshark, I will work even harder in the gym and finally get my dream body," which happened to be the body of the girls in the YouTube videos, and the girls on the Gymshark website. I knew I did not actually look like those models at the time, but at the same time, I had some kind of unrealistic expectation that once I put the matching set on, it would automatically give me that body and that the clothes would fit me in the exact same way they fit those models. After a week of waiting for my package to come in, I tried on my matching sets, and not only was I met with disappointment, disappointment slapped me in the face. Twice. I did not automatically look like girls who modeled the clothes, and the size medium sports bra and leggings (the size I wore in every other article of clothing I owned) were not even the least bit flattering on my body. The way the leggings hugged my love handles, made me look like I had cankles, and the sports bra making my back fat bulge, all made it look like the progress I had made in the gym in two years just disappeared in two seconds.

What is Gymshark?

Gymshark is a British fitness brand that sells apparel and accessories, founded in 2012 by 19 year old college student Ben Francis. It is currently one of the fastest growing and most recognizable fitness brands around the world, with over 5.6 million followers on Instagram. It has a valuation of over $1 billion (Forbes). Gymshark started out as a dropship website that

people could order their gym supplements from, and easily have products drop shipped to their house without having to click through a multitude of websites to find all the supplements they needed. From there, Francis decided to start creating his own gym clothes because the clothing other brands were selling were not as in-style or they did not fit right (McKeever, 2021). He began learning how to design and sew his own clothes, and hot press the logo onto the clothing. After about a year of this, he held a convention and invited all of his favorite weight-lifter YouTube influencers to attend for publicity of the brand (McKeever, 2021). This created a lot of attention for Gymshark, as the Youtube influencers began wearing his clothing in their Youtube videos. From there, with the addition of women's clothing and the opening of the Gymshark production facility in Solihull, England, Gymshark began rising to popularity at a massive speed and soon became the big-name brand it is today.

You can find Gymshark's website at gymshark.com. There, they sell an array of fitness and gym products, ranging from men and women's workout apparel, loungewear, undergarments, equipment, water bottles, bags, and more. When you are on the homepage, there are three different tabs that direct you to different groups of items on their website: "Women's," "Men's," and "Accessories." When you click on the "Women's" tab, there is a drop down menu of more specific product categories labeled "trending," "products," "collections," and "accessories." The "trending" tab includes items like new products and best sellers, to direct the customer to options that are currently at high demand and are very popular or recommended by Gymshark. Different types of clothing that Gymshark sells for women are leggings/bottoms, crop tops, hoodies/jackets, shorts, sports bras, underwear, tank tops, and t-shirts/tops. When looking through the different items of clothing, you will notice that they use a few of the same women to model different clothing items. For example, the same woman that models a sports bra is the

same woman you will find modeling a pair of leggings. Even within the same category of clothing, you can see the same woman modeling maybe three or four different styles of sports bras. Although many of the female models vary in race, the majority of these models have the same body type: small but toned shoulders, small waist and flat stomach, and muscular legs with a big toned butt.

Recently, Gymshark has been widening their range of different body types for the female models on their website. When scrolling through different categories of products, you can still see the original women that have been on the website for a while, but you can also see some new models that are easy to distinguish and recognize because they have a different body type and are plus-size. You can find plus-size women in all categories of Gymshark's products and similar to how they use some of the same slim women to model different products, they do the same with some of the plus-size models.

Social media has become a new platform for everyday average Joes and Janes to become celebrities and become famous. With the rise of popularity of different social media platforms, and more specifically Instagram, we find that many companies have been using different people with a lot of followers to promote their products on their pages. Social media influencers have become a new category of celebrity, and have blended right in with movie stars, music artists, and other celebrities in regards to being idolized and aspirational. Similar to how people look up to celebrities, people, and specifically young women have begun looking up to social media influencers.

Many female Instagram influencers, such as Kylie Jenner, Tana Mongeau, or Addison Rae, have made their rise to fame on Instagram through other media outlets first. For example, Kylie Jenner got social recognition through the show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Tana

Mongeau became widely known from the content and videos she put on YouTube. And Addison Rae gained a lot of attention and fans by doing TikTok dance trends. Because there are many third-wave media platforms that allow people to be seen on the internet worldwide, someone could have one TikTok video or one Instagram post or one Tweet that goes viral and completely changes their life. As mentioned, social media influencers are simply another category of celebrity, and now we see many influencers who got their claim to fame through TikTok and Instagram walking the red carpet at many different music or movie award shows throughout the year.

People have posted fitness and workout content on YouTube and Instagram for years, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, working out began to trend widely on social media for people who could no longer go to the gym because of COVID restrictions as well as for people who started working out to counteract the effects of working virtually all day, which then created the "fitness influencer." Gymshark began choosing men and women who have an established following on Instagram, and who have the current western societal ideal of a "fit" looking body, (which as I mentioned before for women is small but toned shoulders, small waist and flat stomach, and muscular legs with a big toned butt) to model and become ambassadors for their products. Becoming an ambassador means you get free products from Gymshark and wear them or post about them on Instagram for all of your followers to see. Because other gym-going, Instagram-using women began seeing there was a possibility for them to become a Gymshark ambassador by building a large following on Instagram or Tiktok and posting their workouts and their bodies, it inspired many people to become fitness influencers hoping for the chance of getting to work with Gymshark. Now with the plethora of fitness influencers on social media who do not have a partnership with Gymshark, many other gym apparel companies,such as Inaka

Power, NVGTN, and Alphalete, began picking out those fitness influencers to become ambassadors for their brand. And as you can probably guess, because people started noticing those fitness influencers as brand ambassadors, it influenced even more people to become fitness influencers. And it has now just become one big cycle that all began with Gymshark.

The Body Positivity movement is a movement that challenges the societal expectations that women and men are supposed to look a certain way by critiquing established body image ideals while encouraging people to love the body they are in. Journalist Kendra Cherry describes it as "the assertion that all people deserve to have a positive body image, regardless of how society and popular culture view ideal shape, size, and appearance" (Cherry, 2020). It also promotes the acceptance of all bodies, helps people build confidence in their bodies the way they are, and addresses and exposes unrealistic body standards. Not only does it acknowledge and challenge how society views people based on their physical size and shape, but also recognizes race, gender, sexuality, and disability. It aims to help people understand that the media portrays bodies in a way that they think is attractive by photoshopping women's bodies and removing all blemishes and "flaws." By exposing the way the media alters real bodies, it aims to help people have a healthier and more realistic relationship with their bodies, including how they feel about food, exercise, clothes, health, and identity.

The body positivity movement in our current society has become very popular, particularly with Gen Z, and social media platforms like TikTok help spread acceptance of all bodies, and especially plus-size bodies, that may not fit into the template of what women are expected to look like. Many content creators have begun sharing their bodies without shame and with confidence to help others understand that everyone should be happy in the skin they are in.

Recently we see some women on social media going against the societal norms of femininity, working to reestablish a more inclusive and diverse idea of femininity. Some ways women choose to go against these norms are by shaving their heads, growing out their body hair, and not trying to hide any of the imperfections that society deems as "flaws." Not only do they not try to hide these "flaws," but rather they show them off and flaunt them to show other women that no one is perfect and no real person is supposed to fit into the mold that society creates for women. According to Gill-Elias in their article "'Awaken your incredible': Love your body discourses and postfeminist contradictions," they state that the Body Positivity movement, or as they Gill-Elias call it, "Love Your Body" discourses, "They tell women that they are 'sexy at any size', 'beautiful just the way you are', and should feel appreciative and confident about their bodies" (Gill-Elias, 2014). But when used in the media, the idea of "loving your body" is now becoming commodified, where a person who flaunts their flaws gains cultural capital by asserting their "authenticity." Brooke Erin Duffy's article, "Manufacturing Authenticity: Manufacturing Authenticity in "real" Women," she analyzes women's magazines and states, "The uneven deployment of authenticity tropes within and across the magazines suggests that cultural producers' attempts to manufacture authenticity are carefully managed" (Duffy, 2013). Duffy's work can be applied to the LYB and Body Positivity movement, and although it might seem like a wonderful thing that women are showing off their socially deemed flaws, we begin to question the reality of the authenticity of these women.

An interesting thing I have noticed on social media, and specifically TikTok, is that the body positivity movement today especially emphasizes and represents plus-size women, but oftentimes does not include very thin women or mid-size women. The term "mid-size," which has found its origination on TikTok, refers to women who wear a size 8 to a size 14. (Di Donato,

2021) Tiktok's body positivity does not often represent these "mid-size" women and it has become a bit controversial since the body positivity movement claims to be accepting of all bodies. "Mid-size" women have been lobbying for more representation from the media, because although it is great that plus-size women are finally getting a bit of the spotlight from the body positivity movement, "those who fall somewhere in the middle between sample size and plus size, there's been radio silence" (Di Donato, 2021).

Recently with the popularity of the Body Positivity movement on social media platforms, athleisure companies other than Gymshark also have begun using plus-size models to model their clothing in an attempt to tag along with the body positivity movement. A great example of this is Fabletics. Throughout their whole website, they display a multitude of different female bodies, in terms of size, shape, and color of their skin. Some companies have started including bodies that are not the stereotypical "fit" body to show their customers of all sizes that their apparel can look good on them too, and not just the few people who have the body that society deems as the norm. According to Zhang, Mou, Wang and Hu, 2020 "Consumer-oriented information places emphasis on encouraging consumers to participate in products or services and tends to stimulate self-related ideas to help solve social and economic problems." Appealing to a larger range of body types on their website attracts more customers when they see models with their specific body type wearing that certain brand's clothing because they can relate to those models.

On the surface, I think Gymshark using plus-size women to model their clothing is a great way to continue to spread body positivity in our society and challenge the societal expectations of what women are supposed to look like. When people see that a brand that usually exclusively uses one certain body type for their models changes their exclusivity to inclusivity of

plus-size bodies, it helps the audience realize that they do not need to look a certain way to be able to feel confident in the gym. With all of that said, though, the question is: What does a "fit" body look like, and does Gymshark represent those bodies on their website? What exactly does being "fit" mean, and does being "fit" mean the same thing as being "healthy"? What is the relationship between being fit and healthy and looking fit and healthy? Does Gymshark really support the body positivity movement, or is Gymshark just using plus-size bodies as a token or a commodity to appeal to a larger audience of potential customers?

To address these questions, I will use a feminist approach to analyze Gymshark's postfeminism rhetoric and participation in the body positivity movement by examining how they use plus-size models on their website, as well as Gymshark's overall inclusivity of different bodies. There is a lot of conversation surrounding the female body that I would like to contribute to from a different perspective. I will also be using a feminist framework to understand the current societal expectations held for women and women's bodies that we see in third-wave media. I also want to touch on the idea of commodifying different female bodies and Gymshark's use of a wider range of women's bodies to appeal to a larger group of potential customers. In addition to this, I will discuss the relationship between the template of the "fit" woman and the societal expectation of women needing to look and be perfect and the societal tyranny plus-size and mid-size women experience for not fitting into the societal expectations.

I believe this research will be useful for many different groups of people, not just Communication Studies scholars, but also the fitness community and those who participate in or support the body positivity movement. With the rise of popularity of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, the popularity of working out has risen, and therefore the popularity of

gym apparel has risen as well in our society on social media. I think analyzing Gymshark's choices of female models in an attempt to be inclusive is very important in our current society, as well as uncovering whether or not Gymshark is using plus-size models to really promote body positivity or if they are just commodifying plus-size women to appeal to a larger audience of consumers. In this research, I will be identifying the issues in the lack of inclusivity on Gymshark's website, despite their claims of being an inclusive community, as well as analyzing the linguistic and visual rhetoric they use in an attempt to be inclusive, and emphasize where they fail to truly be inclusive of all bodies.

Fat People and Fat Women

The definitions of the words "fat," "obese," and "overweight" are all very commonly mixed up and misused when describing an individual's outward appearance of state of well-being and health, but every one of those words is used in a negative or condescending way towards people who do not fit the societal norm. For example the word "fat" is an adjective that is used to describe someone's physical appearance, where the words "obese" and "overweight" are used to describe the state of having a higher than average body mass index (BMI): "overweight (defined as body mass index (BMI) ≥ 25 kg/m2) and obesity (defined as BMI ≥ 30 kg/m2) among adults aged 18 years and older," (Hecker, Freijer, Hiligsmann, and Evers, 2022). The word "fat" according to Hall "does not denote a medical condition or suggest

there is an ideal weight" (Hall, 2018). Moreover, the word "fat" carries

a negative stigma that not only represents someone's physical

appearance also "represents moral turpitude, laziness,

irresponsibility, greed, and undisciplined appetites and behaviors"

(Smailes, 2014). Mark Graham (2005, p. 178-179) writes about this when

he says "in fat-obsessed cultures we are all 'lipoliterates' who 'read'

fat for what we believe it tells us about a person. This includes not

only their moral character but also their health." Being fat or having

a high BMI in our society is a way to be instantly judged by another

person just by them looking at you, and not only do they judge the

way you look, but they assume negative things about who you are as a

person even if they do not know you at all.

Both men and women are judged in our society for being fat, or for looking like they have

more fat on their body than the average person, but fat women seem to get more criticism if their

bodies do not fit the societal standard of big boobs, a small waist, and a big toned butt. Hall (2018)

talks about how "it has been argued that women are more restricted [than men] and tyrannized by

societal pressure to be thin," and that women are held to a stricter standard to look a certain way

than men are. Joan Chrisler (2011) considers that fat women's bodies are always located as

something to 'make better' rather than bodies with their natural rhythms, changes and ways of

being. Because of this mindset in today's standards for a woman's bodies, it is less about what a

woman looks like today or who she is today as a person, but rather it is more about what a woman

could become in the future with the "right" clothes or the "right diet." Elena Levy-Navarro (2012,

p. 341) encapsulates this limited repertoire as one which positions a fat woman as "the person who more clearly and noticeably lives by cultural imperatives to live for the profits of tomorrow."

In other words, being a fat woman is either a 'passing through' identity or a 'something wrong' identity. People look at fat women as an object that can be bettered or molded into the standard, and they are often not accepted for who they are or what they look like currently. Hall (2018) also discusses how fat people have stereotypically been portrayed as unattractive and this has led to fat people, particularly fat women, being desexualized. Not only is the character of fat women assumed by their appearance, they also lose their sexual femininity simply by being considered fat because they go against societal norms and expectations.

Who "Fits" the Template?

Our society has created an image and expectation for what "good health" should look like, even though we really have no idea what kind of health most people are in just from looking at them. There is a template for what being "fit" is for women that is not actually dependent on the physical well-being of the woman herself but simply by the way she appears physically. This template is: a small but toned shoulders and arms, a small waist (usually with some ab definition), and a big toned butt with toned legs. In our society and especially on social media, the words "fit," "fitness," and "health," get used interchangeably as if they all had the same meaning. According to Optimum Health Solutions, the definition of health as defined by the World Health Organization is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It includes aging well, longevity, quality of life, freedom from pain, etc." and fitness is "defined as a set of attributes that people have or achieve that relates to the ability to perform physical activity" (Optimum Health Solutions, 2015). While

looking at these two definitions, you notice there is nothing that relates to what the physical appearance of a "healthy" or "fit" person looks like, but our society designated a specific figure and physical appearance that is supposed to tell others that a specific person is "healthy" and "fit" by just looking at them.

Body Image

Body image refers to the way someone perceives one's body. Hamamoto, Suzuki, and Sugiera describe body image as made up of two components: "The first is perceptual in nature, and is measured by a discrepancy between one's actual body and perceived self-image ("perceived–actual discrepancy"). The other component is affective, and is measured by a discrepancy between one's perceived self-image and ideal body image ("perceived–ideal discrepancy")" (Hamamoto, Suzuki, and Sugiera, 2022). In simpler terms, body image is made up of a discrepancy of what someone's body actually looks like versus what they believe it looks like, or a discrepancy of what someone's body actually looks like versus what they want it to look like. And like most things in contemporary culture, what people want their bodies to look like is heavily influenced by representations of idealized bodies in traditional media as well as social media.

When the discrepancy between one's perception of themselves and what they actually look like is taken to an extreme, it can result in body dysmorphia, which is defined as "a preoccupation with apparent defects in a patient's appearance which causes significant distress and impairment" (Himanshu, Kaur, and Singla, 2020). Himanshu, Kaur, and Sigla conducted a study in 2020 about "Rising dysmorphia among adolescents: A cause for concern," where they analyze the rise in body dysmorphia in teenagers and young adults and find that there is "emerging concern linked with increased social media use and decreased body image satisfaction" (Himanshu, Kaur, and Singla,

2020).

Although both the young men and women showed dissatisfaction with their bodies, in general females were more dissatisfied with their body than the males were. The men and women's reasons for their dissatisfaction varied, but in females, they were more concerned about body fat and their body shape than the men were (Himanshu, Kaur, and Singla, 2020). Because women are held to a stricter standard in body shape and size than men are, their body discrepancies and dissatisfactions are much stronger than in men. Dionne and Davis (1995) suggest that "Perhaps one way to improve women's body esteem is not through the promotion of excessive diet and exercise, but by advocating further equality between the genders and by discouraging the view that women are defined simply by their appearance" (Dionne and Davis, 1995). Social media makes it easier for women to see the strict body standards we are expected to uphold, and because of this, the link between social media use and body dissatisfaction is of growing concern.

What is "fitness"?

The word "fitness" is defined as the condition of being physically fit and healthy. Similarly, if someone is "in-shape" or "in good-shape" it means they are in a good state of health or in good condition. But these terms get problematic because "being in shape" is equated to "looking as though you are in shape," which reinforces a very narrow range of acceptable body morphologies. The same is true of saying that someone "looks fit." These dynamics place enormous pressure especially on women, who are both inundated with images of idealized bodies and shamed when they do not match the ideal. In Krista Scott-Dixon's article "Big Girls Don't Cry: Fitness, Fatness, and the Production of Feminist Knowledge," she goes into detail about how "fitness is frequently viewed as a cosmetic project—namely a means to purge fat,

pursue a generally unattainable thin and youthful aesthetic, and erase or "overcome" any markers of physical debility or difference (including age, ethnically distinct body features, and disabilities), as well as evidence of life experiences such as pregnancy and menopause" (Scott-Dixon, 2008). There is an idea in our society that if a woman can become "fit," they will have the ability to erase all of their flaws, or things that do not make you look like the 21st century western ideal of a perfect woman. The funny thing is, though, and I use the word "funny" sarcastically, that the things that our society considers flaws in women are really just natural occurring physical aspects that virtually all women obtain in their lifetime, like stretch marks, belly fat, acne, and wrinkles.

Social media is an easily accessible way for women to realize that their naturally occurring physicality is flawed, and therefore, according to our current society's template of what it means to be fit, not fit. Katherin Pilgrim and Sabine Bohnet-Joschko discuss how social media influencers have a strong influence on what people think health is in our society: "Building a connection between external beauty and perceived well-being, and thus mental health, is a direct effect of influencers' health communication" (Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). Not only does this current societal idea of fitness affect the routines of healthy women with naturally occurring changes in physicality because they begin working out more to fit the template social media tells us is what we are supposed to look like, but attempting to fit into that template even when it is not natural for every specific individual to be able to is very taxing on women's mental health and never-ending.

Social Media Influencers in Third-Wave Media

With the rise of third-wave media in the 21st century, and specifically social media, celebrities are becoming plentiful and more publicly recognized than ever, and now there is a new subcategory of celebrities called "social media influencers" who make a name for themselves simply for their content on social media. SMIs are individuals who, through producing original content that publicly displays their expertise and/or taste, have amassed a large network of followers and are regarded as trusted tastemakers and experts (Scholz, 2021). Given their origins as "ordinary" consumers, influencers are generally conceptualized as similar to everyday consumers and, hence, more authentic than models and celebrities who are traditionally featured in advertising. Bloggers, YouTubers, and "Instafamous" people have been found to outperform their more traditional counterparts (e.g., magazine articles, celebrity endorsers) because consumers feel more closely connected to them and perceive them to be more credible and relatable (Scholz, 2021).

In displaying their lives to their hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions of followers, many people, but specifically women follow them because of their envy of those influencers' highly curated lives. In Jiyoung Chae's article "Explaining Females' Envy Toward Social Media Influencers," they state, "... influencer postings are the catalogs of what many young people dream of having and the lifestyle they dream of living (Chae, 2018). Social media portrays the best part of people that makes everyone else think that that is their real life. Typically people do not portray their flaws or express their hardships unless it is for a strategic purpose, so it makes followers believe their lives are perfect, and who would not want a perfect life with a perfect body? Iwannicka and Soroka describe social media as promoting "body cult" behaviors: "The goal of the above-mentioned activities is for young women to obtain a slim and attractive figure in line with the trends of female attractiveness proposed by the media"

(Iwannicka and Soroka, 2021). Social media influencers are the leaders of this "body cult" and women like the Gymshark ambassadors and models are the people that younger girls want to look like, no matter what the cost, because social media is like a never-ending loop that tells them that the way those social media influencers look is the only way women can be seen as beautiful.

Fitness Influencers

When it comes to fitness influencers, we find that recently with the rise of the fitness community on social media, the followers and fans of fitness influencers do whatever their favorite influencers tell them to do because they believe it will help them become like their favorite influencer. For example, when more and more influencers started posting a lot of at-home workouts on their social media, especially during the pandemic, many young women began also doing those at-home workouts that then became integrated into their daily lives. Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko conducted a research study on "Selling health and happiness: how influencers communicate on Instagram about dieting and exercise: mixed methods research" where they analyzed communication from multiple influencers on social media. They state that social media influencers "gain the trust and friendship of their followers by designing body-shape focused visual content and targeted communication techniques. They identify and define diet and exercise as factors to be controlled for body perfection" (Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). By publicizing the dietary supplements they take, wearing a particular brand, and posting everything they do in the gym, influencers promise a simplified way of improving someone's appearance as the key to happiness.

Influencers today suggest a dependence on happiness, well-being, health and beauty, and

only those who create a body shaped through control and discipline are healthy and beautiful, and only those women can be happy (Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). As mentioned previously, there is a strong correlation between social media use and body dissatisfaction in teenagers and young adults, and especially women (Himanshu, Kaur, and Singla, 2020). Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019) elaborate on this finding that young women with low self-esteem, depression, the urge for perfectionism and being thin as an ideal of beauty are exactly those user groups who feel more attracted to social networks in order to experience confirmation and satisfy their personal need for security. The issue with social media fitness influencers is that the information given to these young women about what health is supposed to look like is not regulated, and therefore these young women could be receiving misinformation. Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko (2019) also suggest that in addition to regulatory issues, public health professionals, teachers, guardians and decision-makers need to enhance their digital skills to provide minors with appropriate information, because the targeted demand on the part of (mainly) underage users and the high attractiveness of influencer marketing on the part of companies.

Beauty is in the Eye of the Modeling Industry

The modeling industry for many years has produced the expected standard of what women are supposed to look like. For many years, even as the standard shifted slightly with changing cultural tastes, that standard was extremely constrained to a very specific body type, to the point that other body types were virtually invisible in advertisements and catalogs and websites for decades. "Currently, the normatively attractive female body is one that is very thin—often unattainably so—and most often white or fair-skinned with no noticeable imperfections (e.g., cellulite, rolls, acne, etc.). This thin-ideal communicated via advertising and

other media has been associated with disordered eating habits, low self-esteem, and stigmatized attitudes toward women who do not conform to this ideal" (Pounders and Mabry, 2019). In recent years, however, we have seen that standard expand to include "plus-size" models and women with more "natural" or "normal" appearances. According to Schroeder and Zwick (2004, 24), "advertising discourse both reflects and creates social norms" and media and advertising representations influence both cultural and individual perceptions of gender identity, femininity, and physical attractiveness. The issue with the modeling industry, though, is that "many of the companies adopting the iconography of 'natural', 'real' women, and passing it off as 'authentic' use precisely the techniques that they claim to reject: makeup and photoshop" (Gill and Elias, 2014). Even when companies claim to promote "authenticity," not only do they erase the model's flaws, they also have a strict standard body type for the models they choose to use. To further this point, Duffy's article discusses how authenticity itself can become commodified even when it does show flaws: "Content creators can thus shine the spotlight on their own flaws and contradictions in an attempt to make their creative products seem more 'authentic,'" (Duffy, 2020). The commodification of "flaws" in the media make us begin to question the realness of "real" nowadays.

Gymshark, and other athleisure companies vary from these trends, in that they use women who have a little more muscle tone, but still most of their models are pretty thin. Some people might think that the Gymshark models are more realistic because they are not super thin and skinny, but that does not necessarily mean the stigmatized attitudes towards women who do not look like them have gone away in our society. The gym apparel industry perpetuates and institutionalizes gender inequality by placing an inordinate emphasis on the personal appearance of women, (re)producing largely unattainable aesthetic standards (Hartley, 2001), and

perpetuating misogynist and harmful cultural practices (e.g., labiaplasty and breast augmentation) (Jeffreys, 2005). Now with the rise of workout trends and gym clothes, even more harmful cultural practices are occurring in our society with young women, such as extreme diets or extreme workout plans. Although working out is good for our bodies, looking up to the extreme examples of "fit" women on Gymshark's (and other gym apparel companies') websites, there may be a shift in the female body standards to something seemingly "healthier" in that it can only be achieved through working out, but that does not mean that the way people try to achieve that standard is healthy.

Body positivity

The body positivity movement is a movement that challenges societal body expectations for men and women, and promotes the acceptance of all bodies. It is any message, visual or written, that challenges dominant ways of viewing the physical body in accordance with beauty ideals and encourages the reclaiming of embodiment and control over one's self-image. Body positivity encompasses any individual or movement actions which aim to denounce the societal influences and construction of body norms, and instead promotes self-love and acceptance of bodies of any shape, size, or appearance; including rolls, dimples, cellulite, acne, hairy bodies, bleeding bodies, fat bodies, thin bodies, and (dis) abled bodies" (Zavattaro, 2021). On social media today, we see much more awareness of the body positivity movement, and there are many women, even influencers and celebrities, who show off their bodies despite not fitting into the societal expectations of women.

Social media have become vital sites where social justice fights are happening in response to the so-called obesity epidemic, where people focus on body positivity and fat

acceptance instead (Zavattaro, 2021). Afful and Ricciardelli (2015) discuss how "In recent years, fat activism has filtered into the mainstream via the proliferation of online spaces and social media channels dedicated to the subject – known as the Fatosphere, through which these messages are becoming part of the wider culture." Although the societal expectations remain in place as a way to influence women to look a certain way, the recent rise in popularity of the body positivity movement has lessened the pressure that women have to look perfect in every way because it helps women understand it is not totally natural for every single woman to fit into one template.

Gymshark has been trying to take steps towards becoming a more inclusive brand, and they display this to their audience in many ways through their visual and linguistic rhetoric. They began including plus-size bodies on their website, and using rhetoric to tell their audience that they are inclusive of everyone. With the rise in popularity of social media and working out during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, gym apparel brands like Gymshark, Alphalete, and NVGTN have become very popular through influencer marketing, which is "the strategy of promoting brands, products, or services with selected individuals who are judged most likely to exercise a significant influence on purchase decisions within a particular target market" (Oxford Reference). In addition to this, due to the rise in popularity of social media, the body positivity movement has gained a lot of stride from content creators, and our society is trying to break the stigma of the expectations and beauty standards held for women. Putting all of this together, gym apparel brands like Gymshark have been trying to join the body positivity movement on their website by using plus-size models, and talking openly about their efforts to be inclusive. Because Gymshark is such a popular, well-known brand, they have a lot of influence on our society,

especially on social media. And with them being a gym apparel company, their efforts to show their inclusiveness could be very beneficial in knocking down the stereotypes and expectations held for women's bodies. In this paper, I will be using a feminist analysis of the visual and linguistic rhetoric of Gymshark's website in relation to post-feminist ideals of the body positivity movement, and analyze the ways in which Gymshark succeeds and fails in their claim of being an "inclusive" brand.

Uniting the Conditioning* Community

Gymshark tries to make it known to their audience that they are an inclusive brand by using a variety of linguistic appeals on different pages of their website. On Gymshark's website, the very first line in their "About Us" section states, "We're Gymshark. We exist to unite the conditioning* community," and following that, they define the word "conditioning" as "everything we do today to prepare for tomorrow" (Gymshark). It is interesting to notice that Gymshark created their own definition of the word "conditioning," while Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it as "the process of training to become physically fit by a regimen of exercise, diet, and rest" (Merriam-Webster). You would think that Gymshark, being a gym apparel company, would simply use the word "conditioning" for its commonly accepted meaning, but by creating their own definition, it is as if they are redefining what fitness is. Also, because Gymshark is a very popular and well-known brand in our society today and is a big part of the fitness community, it seems as though they feel they have built up enough credibility to redefine a word like "conditioning" that is something that is used very often in the fitness community.

While analyzing Gymshark's definition of "conditioning," take notice of the vagueness of the definition. "Everything we do today to prepare for tomorrow" could be interpreted in a variety of ways in a variety of different situations. Yes, it can be used in the context of the gym, for example how lifting a heavier weight in an exercise today will make you stronger in the same exercise tomorrow, but you could also think of it in the context of studying in school for your big exam tomorrow, packing your suitcase for a trip you are leaving for tomorrow, or marinated steak that you plan to grill at your family barbeque. In all of those situations, we ordinarily would not use the word "conditioning" to describe our preparation for those events. Gymshark redefining the word "conditioning" is a way for them to try to include not just people in the fitness community but in all aspects of life, and is a way for them to let their audience know that they are a clothing brand that you could wear whether you work out or not.

Another example of Gymshark's linguistic rhetoric being used to tell their audience that they are an inclusive brand is also on the "About Us" page where they state, "Today, we create the tools that help **everyone** become their personal best: the clothing you'll sweat in, the content you'll find inspiration in and the community you'll become your best in" (Gymshark). In this sentence, Gymshark bolds the word "everyone" to put an emphasis on the statement that their clothing, content, and community is for any and all people. In doing this, though, they create a subsection of people that is actually so broad, that it completely loses its meaning. One of Gymshark's company values is being "Inclusive," where they state that they "celebrate anyone, and everyone, working to positively impact themselves, others or the world around them" (Gymshark). Similar to their self-created definition of "conditioning," they redefine the word "inclusive" by actually excluding a whole group of people: those who are *not* actively "working

to positively impact themselves, others or the world around them." If you are not constantly trying to impact yourself and the world positively, Gymshark does not include you.

Gymshark, though, makes a statement on their website that almost forces the audience to be forgiving of their mistakes or missteps in inclusivity: "This culture of diversity, inclusivity and honesty is something we must not only preserve, but strive to progress. We're not perfect now – and we never will be – because we believe there will always be opportunity to improve" (Gymshark). By making this statement, it asks the audience to forgive them if they fall short of really being truly inclusive. It gives Gymshark an excuse to stop where they are on their journey to inclusiveness if they want to, and also gives them a pass if they do something controversial or wrong in the future. Even though Gymshark makes this statement, in this paper, I will continue to analyze their version of inclusivity, and uncover their imperfections.

Who is (and isn't) "Everyone"?

Although Gymshark claims to not have a set standard for who they choose as models and ambassadors to represent their brand, they show patterns in their current models and ambassadors that show the audience otherwise. Ambassadors are social media influencers that have a significant following and fan base on their accounts, usually Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. To become an ambassador, Gymshark either chooses you based on your public profile, or you can apply to become an ambassador. Gymshark has models on their website, and separately has ambassadors to show off their brand on social media platforms, but sometimes they also use their ambassadors as models as well.

On Gymshark's support page of their website about how to become a Gymshark athlete, the company states, "We don't really have set criteria when we choose our athletes, as all our

athletes are so unique. The only advice we can offer is to identify what makes you unique and how that unique nature or ability can inspire others to become greater versions of themselves" (Gymshark, 2021). Gymshark claims that all of their athletes (models and ambassadors) are unique, and yes, they are all individual people and have unique physical traits as people do, but there are some major trends between virtually all of their athletes. The majority of their social media ambassadors have the stereotypical "fit" woman body type as described previously, and the same goes for their models as well. There are a few plus-size models and non-"fit" models on their website, but even those women to an extent have a very similar body type to one another. If you do not fit the "fit" template for a female body, and if you do not fit their expectations of what a "good" plus-size body looks like, odds are Gymshark will not pick you to be a model athlete, regardless of your "ability to inspire others to become greater versions of themselves." Gymshark describes their criteria very vaguely to make it seem like anybody can become a Gymshark athlete, when in reality, when we look at the patterns of who they actually choose and the body types they choose, it seems like they have a much smaller set of standards than they claim to.

Here is an example of a "fit" model versus a "plus-size" model taken directly from Gymshark's website. An interesting thing to notice while comparing these two photos and bodies is that although in terms of size itself, the "plus-size" model is a little larger than the "fit" model, they both have very similar proportions. In other words, the "plus-size" model has a small waist in proportion to her hips and shoulders, and therefore still fits into the societal ideal body template, just on a little bigger scale.

Another example of the same point I mentioned above is displayed in these images of these models with different body types wearing the same exact outfit, just in different colors. The "plus-size" model on the left has many of the features that the societal ideal template holds: small but toned arms, large breasts, and a relatively small waist in proportion to her hips and shoulders. Similar to the first comparison of models, these two models have similar body proportions but on a different scale.

What Working Out Looks Like

Gymshark's models are supposed to represent what a woman would look like wearing clothes that are meant to be worn in the gym or working out, but the models and photos of the models do not actually do a good job of representing what a woman would look like if she were working out in those clothes. In the "All Products" section where the customer can look through all of the articles of clothing to see what they want to buy and wear to workout, every single model that is modeling a specific article and style of clothing has their hair done, and makeup done, and they are posing in the gym apparel as if it were a Banana Republic or Aeropostale website. Let me explain further exactly what I mean by that: although the models are wearing gym apparel and workout clothes on this outfit, they do not look like they are in the process of working out or have worked out that day at all.
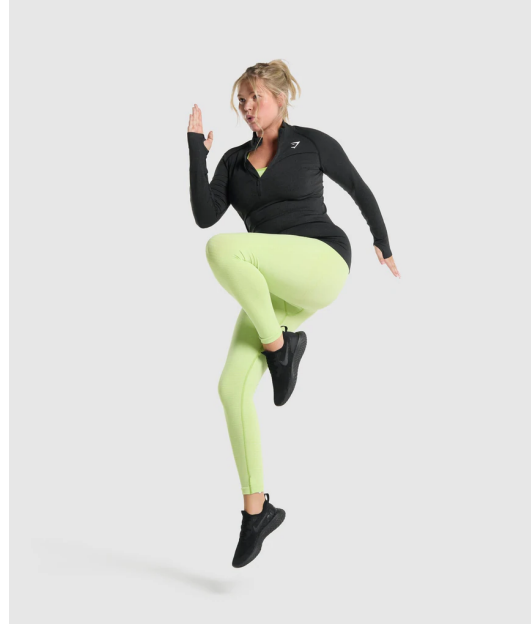
Although most women on the website have their hair in an updo (which is very often done when women workout to get their hair out of the way), the styles of their updos still are very pretty, put-together, and model-esque. The hair may be in an updo, but the ponytails are tight, there are no flyaways or stray strands of hair, and the hair is dry, which tells us there is no sweat to represent that they have actually worked out in the clothes they are modeling. Even the models on the homepage of Gymshark's website that are shown to be working out or that are posing as an implication of them working out have perfect hair and makeup and dry faces. For example, there is a picture of two women doing bicep curls, there is a picture of a woman doing battle ropes, and there is a woman sitting on a bench press bench.

Another example is this image (on the left) where the model is doing a kettlebell squat, but when you look closely, you can see how although there is a slight sheen to her forehead, she does not look
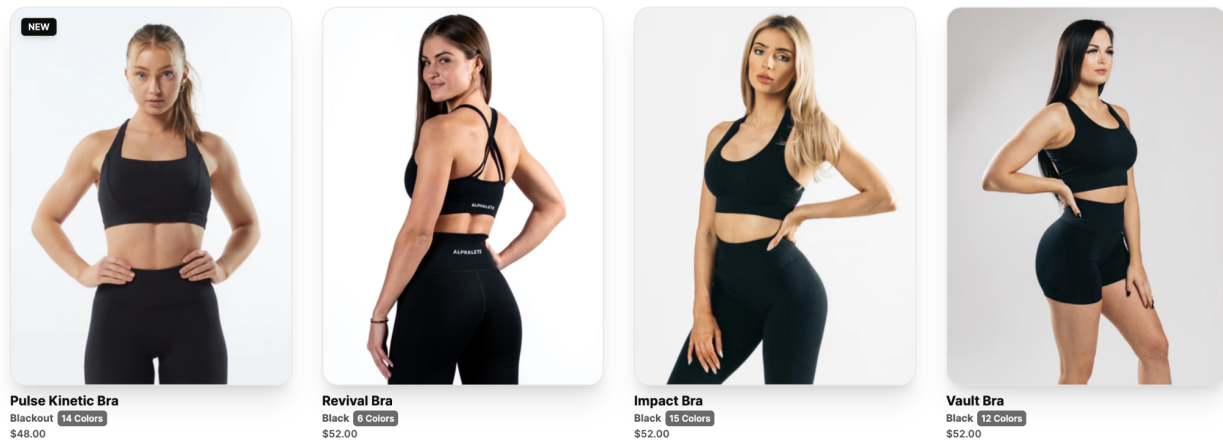

sweaty overall.

In this photo (on the right), the model is doing a high-skip. She appears to have no sweat on her face or body, and her hair is still intact and not messy like it should be if you are jumping. Each one of the photos described implies that the women are actively working out, but there is also an element of the photos that tells the audience that they are not candid photos of the women actually working out.

This portrayal of gym clothing on models is not just displayed this way by Gymshark alone, but by many other gym apparel brands as well. It is a common way that athletic wear is promoted–by showing the ideal instead of the real.

Pulse Kinetic Bra
Blackout 14 Colors
$48.00

Revival Bra
Black 6 Colors
$52.00

Impact Bra
Black 15 Colors
$52.00

Vault Bra
Black 12 Colors
$52.00

This is a screenshot from one of Gymshark's competitor's (Alphalete) websites on the sports bra page. We notice these models also have their hair and makeup done to make them fit the mold of the modeling industry, and make them look presentable as female models.

This image (on the left) is an example of a NIKE Inc. model modeling a sports bra, with the same concept as Gymshark and Alphalete: displaying the ideal instead of the real. This trend is not just apparent on Gymshark's website but on their competitors' websites as well, and in most of the gym apparel world.

You Look Like a Man

Despite claiming to be inclusive of all bodies, Gymshark models of all body shapes and sizes represent the cisnormative, heteronormative, and feminine expectations of women in our

society. Clark defines "cisnormativity" as "the assumption that it is 'normal' to be cisgender," for one's gender to align with expectation based on sex assigned at birth" (Clark, 2021). In other words, cisnormativity is the societal expectation that people should identify as and look like the sex they were assigned when they were born, and aligns with the idea that sex and gender are interchangeable words that we do not have the power to change. Cisnormativity thus implicitly reinforces the gender binary by making it feel natural that females are feminine and males are masculine, and anyone who does not conform to that schema is surveilled. In our society, women are supposed to look and act feminine to fit into those cisnormative gender expectations, and those who do not look or act stereotypically feminine are automatically deemed as masculine.

At what point does a woman cross the line of not being feminine enough? In Justen Hamilton's article, "Undoing Gender or Overdoing Gender," the author conducts a study about female MMA fighters' relationships with their femininity in a dominantly masculine sport. One question that was asked in the interviews to these women was if physical protection was something they look for in a partner. Hamilton quotes one of the responses, "Even though I know I can defend myself and protect myself, and I'm very confident in myself and my abilities, I feel that, you know, it's still nice, as a woman, to feel safe and protected by a significant other," and then goes on to discuss that "the desire for physical protection stemmed not from a need for safety, but rather as a marker of womanhood" (Hamilton, 2020). Why do these strong, independent women feel the need to be protected by someone else because they are a woman? Hamilton states, "Because femininity is commonly associated with submissiveness, submitting to a dominant male partner was an effective strategy for combating their perceived feminine deficit" (Hamilton, 2020). I reference this article because I think there are many parallels between female MMA fighters and female weightlifters, powerlifters, and crossfitters in that the

women are participating in a societally deemed "masculine" sport, and the muscle mass that these women put on from these sports are also seen as "masculine," almost as if women are not allowed to have "too much" muscle. On social media and on gym apparel websites like Gymshark's website, we often see the commonly accepted template of women with "toned" muscles, and we very rarely see women with "bulky" muscles. Having more muscle than our society-created template of a "fit" body automatically makes a woman "masculine" in the eyes of our society.

Being a gym apparel brand, it would be expected that Gymshark would have very strong and muscular women on their website, but instead we only find women whose bodies conform to the cisgendered ideal through their physical femininity. Before the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of social media popularity that led to the popularity of women working out and going to the gym, it was never very common to see women in the gym because of the fear that they would be seen as too muscular or "look like a guy" and now we see many more women in the gym because of social media trends. But even still, we continue to see a stigma of not getting "too bulky" or else women will start to "look like a guy," which still influences women to shy away from certain exercises to keep their socially perceived femininity.

This is something I have experienced first-hand. I have been lifting weights for about 6 years now and have gained quite a bit of muscle mass in my upper body that I personally am very proud of. But in my personal experience, I have had people ask me how to lose weight or how to get a bigger butt and I always suggest that they lift weights in the gym. To that suggestion, I have had the response of "Well I don't want to lift weights and get bulky like you," and "If I lift as much as you do, I'll look like a guy."

All of the women on Gymshark's website, although they are modeling clothing for a

sport that is deemed as "masculine," because of their body shapes, muscle tone, and poses, you

can easily identify at first glance that they are cisnormative and feminine. None of the women

have "too much" muscle mass that would consider them to be too bulky and none of them "look

like a guy." These women portray their sexiness and sex appeal to the audience because of their

femininity. Adding on to this, and touching back on the point about how the women look

feminine with their hair and makeup done, none of the women are in poses that show off their

muscles like we see with some men on social media, and none of the women are flexing their

muscles in any way. Each woman is standing still and looking pretty for the camera which makes

the audience know that these women are still "heterosexy" to appeal to cisgendered straight men,

or to be aspirational figures for cisgendered straight women, not necessarily for queer audiences.

Restricted Inclusivity

Although there is a larger range of women's body sizes on Gymshark's website now than

there were before, the variety of body types in that range is still very constrained. Throughout the

website, many women that have the stereotypical "fit" body, some women that may not fit into

the "fit" category but still can be considered thin, and then there are some women who are

considered plus-size. To put it in other terms, on the Gymshark website, when you click on an

item of clothing to get a better look at it and to look at the details of the product, there is also a

small section that tells the customer the height of the model and what size she is wearing. Even

though Gymshark carries a size XXL in their women's clothing, they do not have any models

who actually wear a XXL. The models' sizes range from XS to XL. Even though Gymshark

claims to be inclusive of everyone, they do not actually include all body types. We do not see

very skinny women, very muscular women, very plus-size women, or obviously disabled bodies. On the surface, adding a wider variety of models who are considered to have an average or plus-size body, that are not the stereotypical "fit" body, seems inclusive and progressive. But when really analyzing all of the bodies Gymshark displays on their website, it seems as though there are a lot more bodies that lack representation and therefore still prevent Gymshark from actually being as inclusive as they claim to be.

It may seem as though Gymshark is being inclusive by adding plus-size women models on their website, but the actual clothing Gymshark sells itself is not inclusive for all body types, and therefore Gymshark's brand overall is not as inclusive as they make themselves out to be. Their sizes range from XS - XXL for women's clothing, and goes up to XXXL for men's clothing. The styles of Gymshark's clothing are meant to be flattering on smaller women and then are just made bigger for larger sizes, without taking into account what is actually flattering on those plus-size women.

An interesting thing also about Gymshark's sizing itself is the waist measurement for a size XS is 26 inches in the waist, and the measurement for the XXL is 36 inches in the waist, meaning there is only a 10 inch difference in the waist between Gymshark's smallest available size and largest available size for women. (Gymshark) For comparison, NIKE, Inc.'s women's XS measurement is 23.5 - 26 inches in the waist and 38.5 - 42.5 inches in the waist for XXL. (NIKE, Inc.) Not to mention, NIKE's sizes run from XXS to XXXL, and the difference in waist measurements between their smallest size and largest size is 31.75 inches. (NIKE, Inc.) NIKE has a 21.75 inch greater range in their clothing size measurements than Gymshark, which really helps us get a better grasp of how restricted Gymshark's clothing really is. Not only does

Gymshark not offer an extensive range of size, the actual sizes of the clothing itself is even more restrictive and exclusive.

Even though the plus-size women and the non-"fit" bodies are being included on Gymshark's website now, they still are being portrayed as the "other" because they do not look like the majority of other models and therefore stand out. The "fit" models on Gymshark's website fit the template of the expectation for what women are supposed to look like in our society, and what is seen as universally attractive. Because the other bodies do not fit that template, they are seen as people who need to be improved rather than just being accepted for who they are right now. Gymshark is a very popular brand especially for those who are just beginning to work out and start their fitness journey because they are so widely known all around the world. With that said, the non-"fit" women could represent those who are just beginning their fitness journey. Instead of being portrayed like the "fit" models are, to give women an aspiration to strive for, the "other" women are there as a token so Gymshark's audience thinks they are inclusive. But that inclusivity is not presented in the same idealized manner. Instead, it is used as a lure for plus-size women to feel included while they are also implicitly shown that they are not yet ideal. Seen this way, it looks more insidious: it is almost like Gymshark's website gives women a visual representation of what their fitness journey steps could look like: from plus-size, to non-fit but non-plus-size, to fit.

You can't wear that

On Gymshark's website, with different styles of clothing, we see different size bodies, but some sizes are shown more often than other sizes with certain clothing, giving the impression that Gymshark thinks only certain size bodies are fit for certain kinds of clothes. For example, out of all the women's sports bra models, we only see three different women of a non-"fit" body

type, and although those three women are modeling multiple styles of sports bras, they are still not modeling nearly as many as the "fit" women are. An interesting thing about this also is that the first plus-size woman we see modeling a sports bra does not show up until you scroll to the 5th line of products. For bottoms and leggings, it is a little more difficult to distinguish between who is "fit" and who is plus-size but for the most part from what my eye can tell, there are not many plus-size women modeling leggings and bottoms. Gymshark has different styles of hoodies and jackets that are both form-fitting and baggy, and a very interesting pattern I recognize in Gymshark's models of this category of clothing is out of all of the form-fitting, tighter jackets, there is only 1 plus-size woman modeling a form-fitting style. There are about 4 different non-"fit" women modeling the baggy hoodies and jackets, and although you are not able to see their body shape because of the clothing, you can still tell from their face who is "fit" and who is not based on what society tells us women are supposed to look like. There are quite a few styles of form-fitting jackets on Gymshark's website that would be flattering on many body types, including plus-size bodies, but Gymshark chooses not to display their plus-size models in the form-fitting jackets because they do not fit the "fit" template. Gymshark, in many different categories of clothing, seems to have a specific placement for where they place the non-"fit" and plus-size models so they can be included, but does so in a way that only allows the non-"fit" and plus-size models to be included in specific items and styles of clothing, while the "fit" models are seen way more frequently throughout the website and wear all different styles of clothing. This has the effect of further marginalizing and tokenizing plus-size the bodies that do appear on the website.

Commodifying the Body

Gymshark's portrayal of plus-size models represents the bigger-picture problem with the modeling industry as a whole, and how they only display women that appeal to the consumer and give them an aspirational body type to strive towards. Gymshark's athletes' purpose is to portray what customers would look like if they were to buy a specific article of clothing from their company. The issue with this is that they are essentially saying, "Here's what you will look like if you buy this and wear it" but in reality, that sports bra will actually look completely different on your specific body type if you were to wear it. This is the problem with the commodification and idealization of aspirational women's bodies in general. Clothing on the normative body attracts consumers because it is an overall physical appearance you aspire to have in that clothing, but there is often a gap between what you expect based on looking at the pictures and what you experience when you try the clothes on for yourself.

In my experience, when I purchase something online, I purchase that article of clothing based on what the model looks like and expect it to look the same on me. Then when the clothes come in the mail and I actually try them on, they are a little tight on my shoulders but loose on my stomach, or they are tight on my legs but loose around my waist. The purpose of the modeling industry in general is to have the normative body model clothes on clothing websites to tell the customer that they will look like the model in the pictures.

Therefore, in Gymshark's case specifically, and because they do not have nearly as many non-"fit" models as they do "fit" models, being a Gymshark athlete not only helps sell the product you are endorsing or modeling, it also sells the "fit" body people want. The commodification of women has been happening in our society for decades, and specifically the commodification of the female normative (and in this case "fit") body is still prevalent and

relevant on Gymshark's website even though Gymshark is making an effort to include plus-size models.

Gymshark displays these "plus-size" models throughout their website in a way that makes them simultaneously fit in with the rest of the models, but also makes them appear like the "other." Referencing back to the Gill-Elias article quoted previously, "Many of the companies adopting the iconography of 'natural', 'real' women, and passing it off as 'authentic' use precisely the techniques that they claim to reject: makeup and Photoshop" (Gill-Elias, 2014), we apply this idea to not just the makeup and photoshop, but to the clothes themselves. Not only can we tell that Gymshark uses makeup on their models based on their flawless, clear, and sweatless skin as discussed earlier in this paper, although we may be unsure about the use of photoshop, Gymshark alters the "plus-size" bodies to attempt to still make them fit into the "fit" template by placing them in certain styles of clothes that emphasize their small waist and curves that are considered "attractive" in our society. Even though the "plus-size" models are being included to make the brand seem more inclusive, Gymshark is still continuing to change the appearance of these women's bodies as objects to make them fit the societal mold. Not only is Gymshark objectifying these models by placing them in their clothing to fit the mold, they are also using these "plus-size" models as a token to be able to claim that they are an inclusive brand. By only using certain shaped bodies of "plus-size" women in certain styles of clothing that make them appear to fit the template better, and not using these women to model any and every style of clothing, Gymshark proves that their main goal as a company is to appeal to the consumer to make more sales, rather than to truly be inclusive and accepting of any and all bodies like they claim to be.

Conclusion

Although Gymshark claims to be an inclusive brand, we see many patterns throughout this paper that reject that idea. There are many more women's bodies that lack representation than those bodies that are represented on Gymshark's website, such as very muscular women, very plus-size women, and obviously disabled bodies. Gymshark's attempt to be inclusive may seem like a good effort, but there is still much more work to be done and much more effort to be put into including "everybody," like they claim they do.

This paper mostly focuses on the body shapes and sizes we see on Gymshark's website, as well as how Gymshark models represent the cisnormative, heteronormative, feminine standards that women are expected to live up to in our society. I did not analyze the race of these women, and I think that is something that should be analyzed in the future to have an even deeper dive into the "inclusivity" of Gymshark's website and brand as a whole. I think a deeper analysis into the commodification of these different sizes of women on Gymshark's website could also be beneficial to understanding the true intentions behind Gymshark's recent bandwagon switch to being "inclusive of anyone and everyone."

I believe this work is beneficial to readers who hope to get a better understanding of Gymshark's brand, and their website, as well as the modeling industry and fitness industry in general. With the rise of Gymshark's popularity on social media platforms, their audience is getting larger by the day. For women, like myself, who do not see their bodies represented on the Gymshark website when they are shopping for new gym apparel, it is important to be able to recognize the disconnect between Gymshark's visual and linguistic rhetoric so we can understand that the lack of representation of our bodies is due to the societal feminine expectations held for us, and not due to any fault of our own.

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