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Context in Research and Practice:

A Counselling Psychology Perspective

Jasmine Shingadia

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Department of Psychology

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Declaration of Power of Discretion

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Section A: Preface to the Portfolio

The central theme linking the parts of this DPsych portfolio is the consideration of contextual issues and their impact on research findings and therapeutic practice. I acknowledge context in expansive terms: 'it [is] impossible to conduct Counselling Psychology or any of its related activities out of context. That means that all therapeutic activities inevitably and inextricably occur within the idiom and the atmosphere, the climate and the background of the cultures that impinge on it' (Clarkson & Nippoda, 1997, p.415). I have appreciated the significance of the wider social, cultural and political domains in which my research and practice operates while acknowledging context in many different forms, including how it presents in the 'cultures' of gender, organisation, profession, nationality, language and so on (Clarkson & Nippoda, 1997).

The portfolio reflects how I have been influenced by the contexts in which I am embedded; that is, it examines the interconnected nature between myself and the social world I am a part of. This is most apparent in Section B, where I present my research: 'Young women's constructions of the impact of using Instagram on their body image'. My own personal experiences of body image and Instagram acted as an initial source of my interest. This was spurred by a lack of psychological research in this area; furthermore, I was struck by women's similar and different experiences of using Instagram. I initially chose a phenomenological approach focusing on lived reality and individual experience; however, the data challenged this epistemological stance, including my own assumptions, biases and influences from training and clinical practice, in which I attended to context but mainly focused on 'inner' experience. Although it was an unfamiliar and daunting route, to respect the accounts gathered I decided instead to adopt a social constructionist perspective towards participants'

experiences. Social constructionism challenged my previous assumptions about the self, reality and knowledge, and exposure to critical feminist theory and practice provoked self-reflexivity towards what it means to be a woman. I sometimes felt the force of being a postmodern self: multi-being, full of potential, fragmented and interchangeable (Frosh, 1991; Gergen & Gergen, 2008). I acknowledge the context of these experiences, including how my own gender, body image and use of Instagram shaped the research. In offering a contextual approach, the women's subjectivities relating to body image are situated as gender specific and socially constituted. A critical exploration of the context of Instagram as a visual-based social media platform is provided, particularly the effects its novel format can have on body image. This research project provides opportunities to affect context through viable knowledge and the pursuit of social action.

Section D is a journal article that presents some of the findings from the research project in Section B. The paper showcases the theme 'Shaping a woman: Am I meeting expectations?', which demonstrates how contextual forces influence women's narratives of body image. Counselling Psychology works towards updating its professional development to reflect contemporary context and a rapidly changing social world. To reflect this ethos, the journal is to be submitted to *Feminism & Psychology*, as it offers insights into gendered realities in light of technological advancements such as social media. The paper offers awareness into forms of gender inequality that exist as a result of the cultural and ideological influences of femininity, while providing a nuanced perspective that aims to speak to the feminist agenda and to young women's experiences.

Lastly, Section C is a client case study that refers to the dialectic process between client and therapist, particularly how the context of my personal life affects the

intersubjective experience in countertransference. In addition, the therapeutic relationship focuses on the role and context of relationships and their effects on psychological distress. Individual self-development and -awareness is a core value of Counselling Psychology training, which is reflected in this piece of work, in which the therapeutic process shifts towards a collaborative approach that takes into account the relativity of all knowledge. The improbability of being 'value-free', 'neutral' or a 'blank screen' has been a crucial aspect of my development as a practitioner – learning, through research and practice, that we cannot dislocate from context.

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Section B: Research

Young women's constructions of the impact of using Instagram on their body image

Abstract

This empirical study sought to illuminate 'How young women construct the impact of using Instagram on their body image'. To do so, it employed a social constructionist methodology, informed by the work of Michel Foucault (1972; 1975; 1977; 1980a; 1980b; 1982; 1988) and aligned with a critical realist ontology (Hruby, 2001). Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with eight female participants aged 18–25. The interview data was analysed using social constructionist thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), from which three master themes emerged. In the first, 'Shaping a woman: Am I meeting expectations?', participants' experiences of their own bodies were shaped by the recognition that other women on Instagram met a sociocultural standard of feminine beauty. The second master theme, 'Feeling the pressure: The gap between my body and "her" body', demonstrated how participants were confronted with societal pressure to construct and discipline their physical appearances towards a standard of acceptable femininity. In the final theme, 'An illusory ideal: Limiting the damage to my own body image', participants drew on resistant and critical discourses to challenge the representations of other women on Instagram. The findings have implications for Counselling Psychologists working with females who enter therapy for body image concerns – either in general or specifically in relation to Instagram's visual-based social media platform – for whom such issues may remain explored. The quality, transferability and limitation of the study are considered and areas for future research suggested.

1.Young women's constructions of the impact of using Instagram on their body image

1.1 Introduction

Technological advancements have ushered in new forms of media, including social media, which have become an integral part of modern existence – especially for generations that have never experienced life without digital technology. The mass adoption of mobile media devices (such as mobile phones, tablets and laptops) has increased the use and desire for social media, and the ubiquity and convenience of such connection have saturated our methods of relating with advancement and speed (Balick, 2014). The evolving nature of social media and its overwhelming presence in contemporary lives is the rationale behind this enquiry.

The potential health implications of growing reliance on virtual socialisation and relationships have been extensively studied in recent decades (see Balick, 2014 for an overview). It has become increasingly common to question concepts such as identity, self-esteem and psychological or social well-being, and research findings underline social media's effects on social reality (see McKeena et al., 2002; Zhao et al., 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010; Rosen et al., 2010; Gonzales & Hancok, 2011; Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011; Oulasvirta et al., 2011; Rosen & Egbert, 2011; Ryans & Xenos, 2011; Feinstein et al., 2013; Vogel et al., 2014).

Despite social media being a core issue in applied social sciences research, relatively little attention has been paid to developing theory and practice that attends to the challenges our clients face in the online world (Balick, 2014). This research project is therefore salient for therapeutic practice, and particularly for Counselling Psychology since more young people are accessing therapy for online concerns (Ofcom, 2017). Evidence of a substantial rise in mental health problems among young people has led to increased interest in links between social media and mental health (Frith, 2017). A particular focus on young women is warranted here, as the pressures of social media disproportionately affect them (Frith, 2016).

This research addresses how the recent proliferation of visual-based social media platforms, such as Instagram, raises concerns about women's body image; in doing so, it responds to calls from both academic research and body image initiatives to

further investigate this issue (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Frith, 2017). My research explores how a group of young women defines their experiences of using Instagram and its impact on their body image. Particular attention is paid to the appearance-related content the women are exposed to and its potential to provoke body image concern; this addresses a gap in the literature, which has briefly touched on the phenomenon but so far has failed to investigate it comprehensively.

As a social constructionist inquiry, the research will emphasise human experience and meanings as relative to historical, cultural and social context, in which language conventions determine how we understand and view the world (Burr, 2003). Through accounting for reality as a social process, it is possible to investigate social structures relating to experience and to show social aetiology in body image, which may contribute to therapeutic practice and society at large (Burr, 2003). Since most relevant research is situated within a sociocultural framework, it is appropriate to investigate how a gendered context influences young *women*'s accounts of Instagram and body image; the literature highlights that it is women who are most affected.

From a sociocultural perspective, individuals co-construct realities in a dynamic online space, which speaks not only to the individual's but also societies' and cultures' relationships to technology (Balik, 2014). To avoid a simplistic 'technological determinism' mindset, which assumes 'the more you use [technologies] the more you are influenced by them' (Baym, 2010, p.26), the research takes a 'social construction of technology' perspective; this acknowledges that users are embedded in an online world that cannot be relinquished from its social context, theorising technology as the result of social processes rather than vice versa (Baym, 2010). Following Balick's (2014) lead, I, therefore, focus on how individuals and society are implicated and mediated within social media itself. This perspective allows a relevant and novel view on the possibilities and constraints that Instagram offers women in relation to their body image, and the practices and implications of these possibilities and limitations when taken up, rejected or reworked (see Baym, 2010).

I will next present an overview of the relevant research concerning this investigation into young women's body image and Instagram. First, I explore research into visual-based social media and female body image. I focus on a sociocultural framework for body image and particularly investigate the literature on traditional

media since its format is both similar to and different from online platforms. Lastly, I provide an overview of feminist perspectives on body image, including the critical historical, social and cultural contexts that have influenced social constructions of the female body. I have aimed to provide a contextual framework for the study and highlight gaps in the literature that it contributes towards filling.

1.2 Literature Review
1.2.1 Defining Body Image
Body image is a multifaceted concept that encompasses how individuals perceive, think, feel and behave with regard to their own body (Cash & Deagle, 1997; Grogan, 1999; Cash, 2002; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). *Body image disturbance* is a multidimensional issue that refers to 'maladaptive' cognitions, affect and behaviours related to one's body (Cash & Deagle, 1997). *Body dissatisfaction*, a component of body image disturbance, includes negative and 'dysfunctional' beliefs and feelings about one's appearance (Garner, 2002; Crowther & William, 2011). The body image literature is characterised by numerous variations in defining and assessing such constructs; contradictions, therefore, exist within the evidence (Cash & Deagle, 1997). However, *body image attitudes* tend to include cognitive evaluation (e.g. body dissatisfaction and body size distortion) and psychological investment (e.g. basing value and self-worth on one's appearance) (Cash, 2002). An individual's own subjective experience of their body and appearance is seen as psychologically powerful in overruling an 'objective' reality of their actual body (Cash, 2004).

Since this research incorporates a sociocultural lens, it contends that the current thin beauty ideal for women is societally reinforced and socioculturally transmitted, and that women are aware of, adhere to or construct their bodies in ways that comply with cultural, racial and ethnic expectations of how they should look (Lorber & Moore, 2007).

1.2.2 Social Media
The impact of traditional media on young women's body image is well-documented (discussed later in section 1.3.1). Recent research has focused on the impact of social media; given the strong online presence of young adults – particularly women – and their reliance on social media, it is necessary to understand how this new

media format can influence body image perceptions and disturbance (Perloff, 2014). The ability to view and create photographs on mobile devices, anywhere and at any time, creates exponentially more opportunities for appearance-focused social comparisons than has ever been available through traditional media (Perloff, 2014). Social media offers a platform for women to display their bodies online; women are highly selective in the version of themselves they present and only upload the most attractive (generally edited or enhanced) images (Zhao et al., 2008; Chua & Change, 2016), often emulating or idolising mass media beauty ideals (Boyd, 2011). Although a strong peer presence is emphasised in relation to social media, the platform allows for interactions with a range of different people, including friends, families, strangers and celebrities (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Unlike traditional media, social media's users can shape, customise and direct online content and interactions, and social media platforms offer easy and frequent access to other users (Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Perloff, 2014). Of most significant concern to researchers is that appearance-related content and interactions on social media significantly heighten young women's body image concerns (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly & Vartian, 2016).

1.2.3 Facebook

Recent studies have focused on Facebook usage and body image concerns. Tiggemann and Slater's (2014) longitudinal study with adolescent girls in Australia found that the time they spent on Facebook increased substantially over a two year period and was associated with body image disturbances. However, it was having a higher number of Facebook friends that predicted a drive towards thinness and body surveillance. The researchers argued that it was possible that having more Facebook friends enabled greater opportunities for social comparisons to the somewhat idealised images on the social media platform. They hypothesised that, given the high number of Facebook friends the adolescents had, these must include people they did not personally know – such as distant or unknown peers. A similar study by Tiggemann and Slater (2013) demonstrated that, for Australian pre-adolescent girls, there was a correlation between time spent on Facebook and drive for thinness, increased body surveillance, dietary restraint and low self-esteem mediated by internalising a thin ideal (the latter is defined as the extent to which individuals endorse societal beauty ideals as personally significant beliefs and goals; Thompson & Stice, 2001). The researchers were

concerned that, despite the adolescents being too young (under 13) to have their own account according to Facebook's rules, they used the site for over an hour each day. Also, because social media is limited by neither cost nor physical availability and is accessible at any time and in private, the study confirmed that pre-adolescent girls were able to access content more suitable to adolescents or young adults. It could be concluded from both of these studies that social media represents a potent sociocultural force among pre-adolescent and adolescent girls in its potential to arouse appearance and self-presentation concerns. However, a limitation of these studies is that they were unable to correlate which aspects of using Facebook (e.g. status updates or viewing pictures of friends) were related to body image concerns.

Research focusing on the older age group of young women, and the relationship between their body image concerns and Facebook usage, has yielded similar results. In particular, Fardouly et al., (2015a) found that, for young women in Australia, negative comparisons of one's appearance mediated the relationship between Facebook usage and body image concerns. They suggest that the young women's lack of personal contact to distant peers (in comparison to close relatives or friends) makes it more difficult for them to gauge the extent to which those peers' appearances on Facebook were idealised. Smith, Hames and Joiner's (2013) findings showed that young women's tendency to engage in appearance-related comparisons significantly predicted body dissatisfaction and bulimic symptoms. Their findings were consistent with an interpersonal formulation of eating disorders (Rieger et al., 2010), which states that individuals engage in disordered eating in response to negative social comparisons to attempt to alleviate their distress by improving their self-image. The results of both these studies are consistent with the finding that social comparisons contribute to increased levels of body dissatisfaction (e.g. Myers & Crowther, 2009).

The changing and varied content of social media have been challenging to capture in a controlled environment; therefore, experimental work into this domain has yielded mixed findings (see Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Cohen and Blaszczynski (2015) took the approach of showing young women in Australia idealised images, either in the media or on Facebook, before asking them to complete pre-and post-image exposure measures of thin-ideal internalisation, appearance-related comparisons, self-esteem and disordered eating. Exposure to Facebook images was associated with

increased body dissatisfaction and a higher eating disorder risk. Although this study demonstrated that Facebook is similar to conventional media exposure in its harmful effects on young women's body image, a crucial criticism is the lack of external validity, given that the Facebook images were of mock social media profiles rather than the content participants are actually exposed to via their accounts.

An experimental study that Fardouly et al., (2015a) conducted with young women in the UK found that brief exposure to their own Facebook account led to an increased negative mood. However, contrary to the previous study, they did not find exposure to Facebook to have a direct impact on the women's body dissatisfaction. This perhaps reflects the fact that photographs on Facebook generally contain more portrait images which do not offer the opportunity to make body or weight-related comparisons (Haferkamp et al., 2012). Also, the participants were not directed to look at photographs of others, so they may not have explicitly viewed appearance-related content.

It has been suggested that appearance-related activities, rather than general Facebook usage, is related to body image concerns in women and adolescents (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). The most salient findings are from Mier and Gray's (2014) study with female adolescents in the U.S, which demonstrated that sharing and viewing photographs on Facebook was correlated with body dissatisfaction, thin-ideal internalisation and self-objectification (the extent to which participants view their body in terms of its appearance rather than competence; Noll & Frederickson, 1998). The latter could be expedited by social media, as one is encouraged to take a third-person perspective when deciding to share, edit and upload photographs. In addition, a study of adolescent girls in Australia found that regularly sharing self-edited photographs of themselves and basing importance on one's appearance was associated with body image concerns (McLean et al., 2015). Instagram – which is more image-based than Facebook – therefore lends itself to further investigation, as its format may enable a greater focus on body and appearance (Meier & Gray, 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017).

1.2.4 Instagram

Instagram is the fastest growing image-based social media platform in the world; its more than 500 million active daily users upload 95 million photographs a day

(Omnicore, 2018), as such, its format enables the creation and exchange of body image-related content, including plenty of opportunities to compare one's appearance to others (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Given that Instagram's primary use is posting, sharing and viewing images, researchers have suggested it may be more detrimental to women's appearance concerns than other social media platforms (such as Facebook or Twitter) that contain more varied content (e.g. Fardouly et al., 2015a; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Individuals can enhance their self-presentation through the use of features provided by Instagram (including other popular apps, such as Facetune or Afterlight) before posting them on their profiles. The content on Instagram may promote a standard beauty ideal and result in users judging themselves to be less attractive than others (e.g. upward comparisons), contributing to both greater body dissatisfaction and self-objectification (e.g. Tylka & Sabik, 2010). Instagram is a platform in which it is more common for individuals to follow and view images of models and celebrities than friends, family, acquaintances or strangers. Thus, appearance-related comparison to celebrities and models may be more prominent than has been documented on Facebook (e.g. Fardouly et al., 2015a; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

Instagram is particularly popular among young women (Instagram, 2016; Poushter, 2016) – a demographic particularly salient for body image difficulties related to social media use (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Furthermore, young women increasingly use social media as their preferred social resource over conventional media forms (Baird et al., 2012). Young women in Australia self-reported spending around thirty minutes per a day on Instagram (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), which is consistent with the average time that users under 25 spend on the platform (Instagram, 2016).

Most of the research on Instagram has been confined to the prominence of 'fitspiration' images (a portmanteau of 'fit' and 'inspiration'), which consist of images and messages promoting a fit and healthy lifestyle (Abena, 2013; Boepple & Thompson, 2016). Fitspiration arose as an allegedly healthy antidote to the trend of 'thinspiration' (a portmanteau of 'thinness' and 'inspiration'), which celebrates and glamorises thinness by featuring images of skeletal emaciated women and weight-loss quotes or techniques and has received a considerable amount of public attention for contributing to the onset of eating disorders (Borzekowski et al., 2010; Boero & Pascoe,

2012). However, fitspiration imagery contains only one body type – thin, fit and toned – which is just as unattainable to most women as the body types featured in thinspiration imagery (Bozsik et al., 2018); an individual would need to have a very low bodyweight to emulate the content (Talbot et al., 2017). Boepple and Thompson (2016) compared thinspiration and fitspiration content online and found similarities regarding guilt-inducing messages concerning bodyweight, stigmatisation of fat and encouraging weight-loss through dietary restraint. While these findings are useful, the content analysed was featured on websites rather than social media; it is likely that fitspiration content is presented differently on the latter. Indeed, Deighton-Smith and Bell (2017) have suggested that fitspiration imagery on Instagram can result in increased body dissatisfaction; their analysis of the physical characteristics of individuals featured in such imagery found them to be thin, toned and conforming to sociocultural beauty ideals. The individuals were typically presented in sexually objectifying ways and body-centric poses and encouraged exercise and fitness as a means of achieving a similar appearance; however, exercise for appearance rather than enjoyment or health is associated with body image concerns (e.g. Strelan et al., 2003).

An experimental study by Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) determined that fitspiration imagery on Instagram led to greater body dissatisfaction and negative mood among young women in Australia than exposure to control (travel) images – a relationship mediated by how frequently women made upward comparisons during exposure. Furthermore, they noted that the effect sizes found in their study were higher than those typically reported in literature concerning conventional media (Groez et al., 2002; Grabe et al., 2008) and social media (Cohen & Blaszczynski, 2015; Fardouly et al., 2015a; Fardouly et al., 2015b). Thus, they hypothesised that fitspiration images are more potent in some way than thin-ideal imagery; perhaps adding tone and strength to thinness cumulates to provide women with more ways in which to feel inadequate. Or, this could reflect the present perceived ideal feminine figure as associated with both thinness and muscularity (Bozsik et al., 2018). Alternatively, they argued that the size effects could be due to the function of the imagery being presented on Instagram, which provides a more powerful form of transmission (e.g. Meier & Gray, 2014).

Similarly, Fardouly et al. (2015b) examined the relationship between Instagram usage (both overall and fitspiration images specifically), body image concerns (body

dissatisfaction and drive for thinness) and self-objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) among young women (18–25) from the US and Australia. Overall Instagram use was correlated with self-objectification, which was mediated by internalising a thin ideal. The content present on Instagram can be carefully selected, edited and enhanced to reflect idealised representations of women's physical appearances, and may, therefore, be associated with internalisation of the beauty ideal and higher self-objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Morry & Staska, 2001). Frequent exposure to fitspiration imagery specifically was also associated with greater body image concerns (higher body dissatisfaction and a higher drive for thinness) – a relationship mediated by thin-ideal internalisation and appearance comparisons to women in fitspiration images. However, only comparisons to celebrities mediated the relationship between Instagram usage and self-objectification, perhaps because users follow and view more images of celebrities on this social media platform.

Brown and Tiggemann (2016) conducted an experimental study that investigated the impact on women's body image of viewing attractive celebrity and peer images. The researchers argued that celebrities hold the top followed accounts (*Telegraph,* 2016), in which the most followed are thin, toned and attractive female celebrities. Furthermore, research has shown that individuals are more likely to upload images in which they look thin and attractive, as well as edit or filter their photographs to achieve an idealised version of their appearance, thus creating exposure to idealised images of peers (Manago et al. 2008). Therefore, there might be little discrepancy between celebrity and peer images that are presented regularly on the same platform. The aim of Brown and Tiggemann's (2016) study was, therefore, to examine the effects of Instagram images of celebrities, compared with similarly attractive (unknown) peer and control (travel) images among young women from Australia. Exposure to either attractive celebrity or peer images led to greater negative mood and body dissatisfaction than exposure to travel images, and these effects were mediated by appearance-related comparisons. Therefore, these results demonstrate that exposure to idealised images may have a similar negative effect on mood and body image, *regardless* of the context or whose body is featured, as images of thin, toned and attractive women (peers or celebrities) had a similar detrimental impact (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Since women are exposed to attractive celebrity and peer images on a daily basis, with most users

following 100–200 people, the researchers argued that there would be a greater accumulative detrimental impact when viewing these types of images regularly.

Similar to the previous study, Hendrickse et al. (2017) investigated the potential association between appearance-related comparisons to ideal images of others and young women's body image in North America. The findings demonstrated that individuals who reported engaging in appearance-related comparisons showed greater drive towards thinness and greater body dissatisfaction. However, social comparisons did not completely explain the relationship between Instagram usage and body image concerns; therefore, it is likely that other mechanisms contribute to these outcomes. For example, Ahadzadeh, Sharif and Ong's 2017 study showed that self-schema and self-discrepancy mediated the relationship between Instagram use and body dissatisfaction, and this association was strongest for users with lower-levels of self-esteem. Individuals who invest in their appearance (appearance-schematic) for self-worth and self-evaluation can construct a negative self-image if the difference between their actual appearance and ideal appearance is considered large, as well as become concerned with such discrepancy. Exposure to idealised images on Instagram can create schematicity, leading to social comparison and self-discrepancy if there is deemed to be disparity between the actual and ideal self-body image. Moreover, these findings suggest that young adults with low levels of self-esteem are particularly vulnerable to experiencing discomfort with their body and appearance when viewing idealised images on Instagram.

Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat & Anschutz's 2018 study demonstrates that concerns shared by academia and society in regard to idealised photographs on Instagram are justified. Adolescent females from the Netherlands were exposed either original or manipulated (retouched and reshaped, e.g. removing blemishes, wrinkles or discolouration from skin or reshaping legs to be thinner and waists to be smaller) Instagram images that emphasised face, skin, hair or body. Results showed that exposure to the manipulated images was associated with body dissatisfaction; adolescent females with particularly high social comparison tendencies were most affected by such exposure. The manipulated photographs were rated more highly than the original photographs. Although the use of filters and effects applied to the images were detected, interestingly the adolescents did not notice the reshaping of the bodies,

instead viewing the images as realistic. Since the participants saw the presented Instagram images as representative of reality it does justify societal concerns that idealised images encourage greater focus on the body and lead to body dissatisfaction. It can also be argued that the appearances of peers on social media are seen as more attainable and therefore more likely to lead to social comparisons, as well as being less likely to be attributed to manipulation as compared with models or celebrities showing well-known unrealistic beauty standards. Another explanation for viewing the images as realistic is the fact that edited or retouched images have become so widely accepted and consequently *normal* for contemporary adolescents and young adults. Therefore, the results reinforce previous findings that not only celebrities or models exert influence but that (unfamiliar/unknown) peers also need to be considered as a powerful influence on Instagram.

Tiggeman and Barbato's 2018 study extends the experimental investigation of Instagram and body image through their examination of the effects on young Australian women's body image of viewing appearance-related comments accompanying Instagram images. In particular, the effects that viewing positive appearance-related comments (e.g. 'great legs' or 'you look amazing') had on women's body image was examined, as appearance commentary has been associated with body dissatisfaction and self-objectification in adolescent and young women (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Calogero et al., 2009; Slater & Tiggemann, 2015). The participants in the study viewed a set of attractive images of women with either comments related to appearance or place-related comments. As the researchers predicted, exposure to appearance-related comments led to greater body dissatisfaction than place-related comments. The results were seen as endorsing objectification theory's (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997) argument that any focused attention on external appearance, even positive comments about another individual, can produce negative consequences for female body image. Interestingly, the visual image itself, rather than the accompanying text, was seen to be the most salient feature of any posting on Instagram, since the findings showed that self-objectification did predict an increase in body dissatisfaction in response to viewing the images, regardless of appearance- or place-related commentary (rather than specifically increasing in response to appearance-related comments). Future experimental research should investigate other potential mechanisms for the observed effects of comments;

appearance-based social comparisons could be the most likely given it is implicated in other studies on Instagram (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

Holland and Tiggemann (2017) note that, to date, psychological research on social media has focused on the effect of exposure to content. They instead investigated the characteristics of women who regularly post fitspiration on Instagram. Despite the apparently healthy promises of fitspiration, these women scored higher on measures of disordered eating, drive for muscularity and compulsive exercise than women who posted travel images (control condition). Although regular physical activity for enjoyment or health is beneficial, they noted that the women who post fitspiration images on Instagram engage in a dangerous combination of compulsive exercise and disordered eating that is potentially harmful to their physical and mental health. Fitspiration can urge individuals to exercise with little regard for potential adverse health outcomes when the body is pushed beyond its physical limitations; yet pain is conceptualised as a 'motivation' and essential to gain the desired 'fit' physique (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017). In addition, exercise is urged as necessary for sex appeal, possibly driving compulsiveness; 'sex appeal' is demonstrated as worth fighting for, and 'fit' is the new sexy (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017). Holland and Tiggemann (2017) point out, worryingly, that even though the young women may present as fit and healthy, fitspiration imagery is a culturally sanctioned way of rationalising, normalising and engaging in disordered eating and compulsive exercise as a means of achieving the desired thin and toned physique.

Turner and Lefevre (2017) investigated the relationship between Instagram use and Orthorexia Nervosa (ON), of which the proposed diagnostic criteria includes fixation on healthy eating, dietary restrictions and food-related anxiety. ON is yet to be formally recognised by the DSM as it is remains unclear whether it is a distinct disorder or is a sub-type of anorexia nervosa (AN), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) (Kummer & Teixeira, 2008; Koven & Abry, 2015). Nevertheless, attention has been directed towards the impact of the 'fitspiration' Instagram influencers that offer advice on diet and health, since such accounts encourage eating only a narrow group of foods (i.e. no sugar, no carbohydrates, no dairy, no animal products) that potentially encourages orthorexia symptoms and patterns of disordered eating. On assessing Instagram usage, eating

behaviours and orthorexia nervosa symptoms in adult females (the majority from the UK and North America), Turner and Leferve (2017) found a significant relationship between Instagram use and ON symptoms, with higher Instagram use being associated with a greater tendency towards ON. Although the size of the effect was small, the researchers argued that given Instagram has 500 million users, this is meaningful at population level. In our visually dominated society, images hold affective power over words; they are more likely to have a lasting impact, so Instagram is an effective platform to share highly curated images of food and health. Limited exposure to the content these accounts produce may result in social pressures to conform to what is perceived as normal or prevalent behaviour, which is reinforced by Instagram influencers with a large following being perceived as authoritative figures in health and diet culture – despite most having no formal training in health sciences or nutrition (Turner & Leferve, 2017). Users' exposure and interactions with images portraying a certain diet or behaviour is likely to encourage problems related to food and exercise. Overall, these factors corroborate previous findings that suggest fitspiration content on Instagram has clinical implications for body image concerns, disordered eating and eating disorder development and recovery.

Lastly, research has investigated the impact of user-generated engagement on Instagram, specifically the role of 'selfies' (photographs taken of the self, typically taken using a smartphone or a webcam at an arm's-length distance or using a mirror) in relation to young women's body image. The study by Wagner et al. (2016) was able to discern that young women who were dissatisfied with their bodies tended to take more selfies per month; however, they did not find a correlation between body dissatisfaction and the frequency of posting selfies onto Instagram. The researchers argued that further examination is required to confirm explanations for such results. However, speculatively, it is possible that women with low body satisfaction tend to take more photos in order to find the best angle or lighting that contributes to the ideal selfie. As participants in their study with varying levels of body satisfaction were equally likely to post selfies onto Instagram, it is possible that their motives/gratifications for selfie-posting were different; some women may take selfies to rejoice in or affirm their bodies and others may take selfies to monitor and evaluate their bodies. This highlights the

need for further investigation to understand the complexities between body image and user activities on Instagram.

Contributing to this area of research is Cohen, Newton-John and Slater's 2018 study, which used self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) as a framework to examine the relationship between 'selfie' posting on Instagram and body image and eating concerns in a population of young women in Australia. According to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), selfie activities (i.e. selfie-taking, selfie-posting, photo investment, photo manipulation) may foster self-objectification in women by encouraging the inspection of one's outward appearance for the observation of others, and instant feedback through 'likes' or 'comments' can reinforce body preoccupation. The results demonstrated selfie activities were associated with greater body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in young women. Greater photo investment was associated with decreased body satisfaction, perhaps because those less satisfied with their bodies tend to invest more in the selection and presentation of their photos before posting onto Instagram. Moreover, self-objectification was found to moderate the relationship found between selfie activities and bulimia symptomology (even after accounting for thin-ideal internalisation and body mass index (BMI); both known risk factors). This finding is consistent with objectification theory, which suggests that self-objectification experiences may intensify the link between body surveillance and eating-disorder symptoms (Fredrickson & Roberts,1997). It is also possible that participants' endorsement of disordered eating and sexual objectification leads to greater investment in how one is perceived online. However, further experimental research is required to determine causality and direction of effects. Nevertheless, this study adds to the extant literature in its demonstration that specific photo activities rather than general Instagram usage is significant to body-related and eating difficulties in young women. In particular, the findings highlight that active investment in selfies is particularly pertinent to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.

To the researcher's knowledge, to date, there has been only two qualitative studies on Instagram and body image concerns. Chua and Chang's (2016) study explored the narrations of Singapore adolescent girls' self-presentation and peer comparison on Instagram. Twenty-four in-depth interviews were thematically analysed; the results showed that teenage girls negotiated their self-presentation to achieve a

media-ascribed standard of beauty, which peer comparison and pressure reinforced. However, the identified patterns, meanings and norms are specific to teenage girls in the Singapore context, and the study focused on peer influence and individual motivations rather than the wider sociocultural context.

Grogan, Rothery, Cole and Hall's 2018 exploratory qualitative study aimed to investigate how eighteen British young women (aged 19–22 years old) made sense of their decisions to post selfies onto Instagram and of their experiences of taking or posting selfies in relation to their body image. The participants were interviewed and this data analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings demonstrated three main themes that specifically related to body image issues – the 'ideal' body, identity management and body exposure. Women objectified their own and other's selfies and tried to portray an image as close to the ideal image – i.e. slender, tanned and toned, as they saw presented by celebrities, models and peers. Selfie-posting was constrained by peer- and social pressures as the women tried to ensure their behaviours conformed to socially shared rules for posting selfies – for example, presenting an 'ideal' look, bodies should not appear too sexualised and the number of selfies should be limited in order to not be seen as vain. In this way, their selfies aligned to social and cultural norms of feminine appearance in order to invite positive responses about their bodies and reduce critical comments. The young women were, therefore, positioned as not completely free to post any selfie they wished; rather, taking and posting selfies were social activities that were limited by judging, or being judged and objectified. The analysis and interpretation of the nuances and meaning around selfie posting were explored in relation to academic research on gender and feminist approaches to body image. However, the study did not situate the findings within a social constructionist perspective and focused specifically on norms of feminine appearance that maintained a strict regulation of how women can 'look' in their selfies. The study was, therefore, unable to comment on the complexities of social media and body image as implicated and mediated within the wider social, cultural and political domains in which they exist.

1.2.4.1 Instagram in the Media

The British and US media outlets (i.e. newspapers, magazines, online articles) have focused on the associations between Instagram usage and body image concerns (for example, Daily Mail, 2017; The Insider, 2017; British Psychological Society, 2018). The most widely reported study is that by Fardouly et al. (2015b, see previous section 1.2.4); with headlines sensationalising the claims, e.g. 'Instagram can wreck body image in just 30 minutes' (*New York Post*, 2017) and 'Looking at this social media platform for just 30 minutes can affect your body image' (*Stylist*, 2017). Both the online articles mentioned above focus on the fact that spending as little as thirty minutes a day on Instagram is enough for a woman to become fixated on her body and appearance, highlighting that consuming 'fitspiration' images, in particular, is related to body dissatisfaction. In the articles, women are warned to be mindful of who they follow on Instagram and to consider the photographs as representing only highly curated, filtered and manipulated versions of how others look, in order to make scrolling through such images less detrimental to one's body image (*New York Post*, 2017; *Stylist*, 2017).

Similarly, a UK survey published by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2017) has been cited by the NHS (2017) as well as broadly by the UK media (*BBC*, 2017; *The Guardian*, 2017; *Sky News*, 2017) for emphasising that Instagram was the most damaging social media platform for mental health; the image-based the platform was particularly linked to body dissatisfaction and anxiety in young people. However, interestingly, Instagram was also associated with self-expression and self-identity. The results were unable to represent the underlying complexities of such findings, since the positive and negative effects of online social networks were determined by asking young people to rate whether they felt better or worse in specific areas, i.e. sleep, anxiety, depression, relationships, body image, bullying, etc. Nevertheless, the RSPH research (2017) sparked an important and much-needed discussion in the media for recommendations to safeguard young people online. Several suggestions were made by the RSPH (2017), including a pop-up warning for individuals who have been online for a length of time deemed potentially harmful; an icon to highlight when photographs of people have been digitally edited; for social media to identify vulnerable users and signpost them to the appropriate services; and for safe social media usage to be taught in schools. Although Young Minds backed such calls

for Instagram and other social media platforms to take further initiatives to protect users online, Tom Madders, its director of campaigns and communication, said that 'protecting' young people from particular content could not be the whole solution; rather, he argued that individuals needed to understand the risks of online behaviours and be empowered to make sense of and know how to respond to potentially harmful content (as reported in *The Guardian* 2017). A similar message was provided by Professor Sir Simon Wesseley, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, who said that young users need to be taught how to cope with both the good and bad aspects of social media to adequately prepare them for increasingly digitalised lives. He criticised the RSPH (2017) findings for being too simplistic in the way that they blamed social media for its negative impact on young people's mental health, which may also ignore more complex reasons for social media's varying effects on wellbeing (as reported in *The Guardian,* 2017).

The Guardian (2015) asked several young women if they felt that Instagram affected their self-esteem, following the headlines that Essena O'Neill, an Australian teenager, chose to quit the social media platform because it made her anxious and in need of attention and validation. These experiences were shared by the women interviewed as they felt a pressure to look particularly good and only post flattering photos. They were anxious that their photos would not receive enough 'likes' and *did* delete photos that did not get enough likes. In particular, this was related to the fact that they wished to present a feed of well-liked photos that showed the 'best' versions of themselves.

In relation, the terminology 'instagramxiety' was coined by Jenny Stallard (writing for *The Telegraph*, 2018) to encompass the mixture of self-doubt, self-criticism, self-hatred, stress, jealousy and sadness experienced after seeing other people's uploads on Instagram. In particular, comparing themselves to people who are attractive, seem to live a better life, have good things and take trips abroad can potentially make individuals feel less successful and their lives meaningless; this has an impact on emotional wellbeing, in particular creating states of low mood, anxiety and stress. Interestingly, the reporting on 'instagramxiety' coincided with mental health awareness week and an announcement made by Instagram that it was launching a wellbeing team and that making the online community feel safe and good was a priority.

Another article that focused on 'instagramxiety' mentioned the 'signs' of being overwhelmed and stressed, which included worry about what other people upload onto social media, agitation or a fear of missing out, irritability, detachment or exhaustion, worry or fear of not being good enough, and a struggle to maintain a balance between using Instagram and daily life (*The Sun*, 2018).

Similarly, *Cosmopolitan* (2018) reported 'warning signs' of unhealthy Instagram usage, including keeping track of comments or likes (posting for validation only), heavily editing or manipulating photographs (a reflection of self-esteem problems), boredom unless on the phone (impacting day-to-day interactions) and sleep deprivation or being on the platform late at night (affecting sleep and a healthy daily routine). Although both articles raise awareness and offer guidance on managing Instagram usage safely, with signposts to accessing help, the evidence that supports the claims made is unclear, apart from references to the aforementioned RSPH (2017) findings and the study by Fardouly et al. (2015b; as mentioned in the *The Sun*, 2018) and salient comments from psychologists as reported in *Cosmopolitan* (2018).

The most comprehensive guidelines have been reported by *Women's Health* (2019*)*, which offers a guidebook. This includes how to note which posts leads to unhealthy thoughts and behaviours, how to avoid making comparisons, engage with a community that reflects personal values, reclaim time by using Instagram intentionally (as opposed to 'mindless' scrolling) and useful advice from psychologists and influencers. The advice challenges the conception of the platform as a negative medium, and instead focuses on how Instagram can be a place for women to create and share inspiration. These well-considered recommendations, however, lack validity in that they are not based on scientific research in the area. Rather, they very much highlight the need for psychology to respond to calls from both academic research and clinical practice to further investigate this issue and to develop theory and practice that attends to the challenges that women face when using the social media platform.

Instagram announced that it would ban all graphic self-harm images in response to the death of a British teenager whose Instagram account contained distressing material related to depression, self-harm and suicide (*The Guardian,* 2019a). This move followed significant public anger, and critics argued that more needed to be done to remove such content at scale, including preventative measures to protect the most

vulnerable. *The Guardian* (2019a) reported that the focus on removing images of self-harm did not go far enough as young people also faced being confronted with images that promoted eating disorders – for example, diaries of weight loss and images and comments on goal weights. Tom Quinn, Director of External Affairs at eating disorder charity Beat, said that more needed to be done to ensure that content that glamorised eating disorders could not be posted, in the same way that Instagram is now stopping images of self-harm (reported in *The Guardian,* 2019a). Dasha Nicholls, chair of the eating disorders faculty at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, felt this was particularly pertinent since some images on Instagram actively promoted disordered eating and inspired others to engage in restriction and fasting. Although some of the accounts encouraging eating disorders are private, other images are openly searchable, and users may be aware of 'workarounds' that make it easy to find images that potentially could put them at risk – without the offer of support or a warning about continuing to the content (reported in *The Guardian*, 2019a).

As a result of such publicity, Instagram is focused on reviewing its policies in light of these concerns and hopes to prevent the posting of content that could be harmful to the mental health of its audience, especially teenagers and young adults, who are heavy users. At a time when social media companies such as Facebook, which owns Instagram, are preparing to negotiate with the British government on the future of internet regulation in the UK, this research study could contribute meaningfully to the discussion around images that have a harmful effect on mental health, in particular on body image and related eating concerns.

1.3 Sociocultural Influences on Body Image
Given this study's social constructionist viewpoint, the literature reviewed here focuses on the sociocultural environment as a powerful determinant of body image development. A sociocultural perspective argues that body image disturbances develop as a result of environmental pressures to achieve a culturally defined body and beauty ideal (Thompson et al., 1999; Tiggemann, 2011). The current ideal body type for women is slender, with a toned physique, while maintaining fat distribution in specific areas (e.g. breasts and buttocks) (Harrison 2003; Overstreet et al., 2010). The difficulty of attaining such an ideal is associated with body dissatisfaction among girls and young women (Riccardelli & McCabe, 2001; Thompson & Stice, 2001; Prunzinsky & Cash,

2002; Monro & Huon, 2005). Negative female body image is a growing concern as it has reached 'normative' levels in the Western female population (Cash 2002). While more immediate socialisation (e.g. parents and peers) has a critical role in reinforcing feminine norms of appearance (see Thompson et al., 1999; for reviews, see Thompson & Stice, 2001; van den Berg et al., 2002; Keery et al., 2004), the literature on traditional media is particularly salient to this research, while social media reflects a newer *format* of conveying appearance-related content, it depicts a similar *beauty standard* to conventional media. Therefore, what follows focuses on the impact of traditional media on women's body image.

1.3.1 Traditional Media

The media is seen as the most potent and pervasive communicator of cultural messages about the aesthetics of body image. It imparts an unrealistic and artificial image of female beauty that is inconceivable (and dangerously thin) for the majority of women to achieve (Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 2003; Levine & Murnen, 2009; Tiggemann 2011). Meta-analyses of research – predominantly conducted in Westernised (mostly the US, UK and Australia) societies, using mainly white female participants who share the same unrealistically thin 'body perfect' media ideal (Bell & Dittmar, 2011) – have attested to the media's contribution to body dissatisfaction in adolescent girls and women (Groesz et al., 2002; Grabe et al., 2008; Want, 2009). The strength of effect from these meta-analyses are small to modest, and there is some contention regarding the directional nature of the relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction; in correlation studies it could be that women with high body dissatisfaction pursue media-thin body images, while in experimental studies women most affected by media exposure could already present with body image concerns (Grabe et al., 2008). Thus, individual differences are believed to moderate exposure effects – specifically the role of *thin-ideal internalisation*, which refers to the extent to which an individual 'buys into' sociocultural stereotypes of a thin ideal (i.e. equates thinness with success, attractiveness and desirability) and engages in behaviours intended to produce an approximation of this ideal (Thompson et al., 1999; Thompson & Stice, 2001). It has been suggested that those who aspire to be thin are those most

impacted by body dissatisfaction and at risk for developing eating pathology (Thompson & Stice, 2001; Keery et al., 2004; Shroff & Thompson, 2006).

A sociocultural perspective of body image highlights the role of appearance comparisons in the development and maintenance of body dissatisfaction. It is argued that, although painful, thin-ideal media images are targeted for comparison because they provide an individual with accurate and valuable information to evaluate appearance; this explains why women compare themselves to these thin-ideal images even when they anticipate that this will lead to negative affect (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). In particular, body dissatisfaction occurs when women make upward comparisons – comparing their appearance to someone they believe to be more attractive (thinner) than themselves (Myers & Crowther, 2009; Myers et al., 2012) – and leads to a perceived discrepancy between their body ideal and actual attractiveness (Harrison, 2001). There is substantial evidence that appearance-related social comparisons to idealised media images account for women's body dissatisfaction (Tiggemann & McGill, 2004; Tiggemann & Slater, 2004; Bessenoff, 2006; Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010). As such, the type of processing in which women engage in is a critical component in how their body image will be affected.

Objectification theory, which argues that Western women live in a culture that subjects them to routine sexual objectification – 'their bodies exist for the use and pleasure of others' (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) – is particularly salient for this research. A core tenet of this theory is that learned cultural practices of objectification (including traditional gender role socialisation processes, social constraints on gender roles and consistencies in gender stereotypes over time) routinely encountered in Western society teach women to self-objectify, adopting societal emphases on attending to their outward appearance rather than personal qualities as they learn that the former is a central cultural evaluative dimension for women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Traditional media is criticised for encouraging sexual objectification, as viewing media-idealised images increases self-objectification in women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Morry & Staska, 2001; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008). Habitual *body monitoring* (or *body surveillance*) refers to how women adopt an 'outsider' perspective on their physical selves; they learn to view their own body as an object that must be constantly monitored and scrutinised to conform to a cultural standard of appearance, and when they

inevitably fall short, feelings of body shame can fuel efforts to meet an 'oppressive' societal standard for a thinner, more 'feminine' appearance (Wolf, 1991; Fredrickson et al. 1998). Body surveillance is thought to be a critical underlying mechanism that produces body image disturbances – an experience so common it is 'normative' among girls and women (Rodin et al., 1985; Erchull et al., 2013).

The majority of theoretical and empirical research has investigated body image disturbances using quantitative methodology; however, since this a qualitative study, I have chosen to focus on a small number of studies that have used qualitative accounts to explore the nuances and complexities of women's attitudes and experiences, which I will now outline further.

The study of Tiggemann et al. (2009) investigated the body concerns of adolescent girls in Australia using a focus group methodology. The girls most frequently and strongly identified the media as the source of the thin ideal to which they subscribed, including how the barrage of media images impacted on what they considered to be a 'normal' body shape and size. They described how media images made them feel dissatisfied with their own bodies and clearly expressed a desire to look like the models portrayed. The study focused on the girls' awareness of sociocultural influences that result in a desire to be thin, particularly their understanding that media images are unrealistic or manipulated, and its findings suggest that the girls' meta-awareness of the media and other pressures could moderate against these forces. However, I would argue that such pressure may not be as easily curbed in social media, which does not solely consist of actual models and celebrities; rather it is more likely to depict 'ordinary' women that emulate (and aspire to) a media ideal of beauty. Despite the girls listing other reasons for wanting to be thinner – to be more attractive; for self-esteem and confidence; to achieve self-control; to increase popularity; to gain male attention – the study did not sufficiently explore *why* or *how* these reasons affect teenage girls' subjective experiences of body image. As such, there was a lack of attention to how a desire to be thinner is constituted within and by gender-specific discourses, representations and norms in Western culture.

Mooney et al. (2008) undertook a similar qualitative study with adolescent girls in Ireland, focusing on their body image and dietary practices. The results revealed that the girls assigned paramount importance to their bodies' appearance and that media-

idealised images of celebrities and models influenced their quest for thinness. Magazines and newspapers encouraged thinness by overtly focusing on women's weight and appearance, including actively promoting thin as beautiful and bombarding women with information on dieting and weight-loss. It was evident that dieting was not uncommon among the teenage girls; some used unhealthy methods of weight control, such as skipping meals or fasting, in their pursuit to obtain a thin physique. Their desire to be thin involved pressure from their peers; being thin was important for peer acceptance, and they believed it would increase their chances of attracting male attention. This further demonstrates the need to extend research towards gender differences in social acceptability, attractiveness and securing dating partners. However, the findings were mainly situated within the influence of the media and peers, rather than embedded within the gender-specific meanings in society.

An important piece of qualitative research by Diedrichs et al. (2011) showed that young women in Australia were dissatisfied with the restrictive range of body sizes and objectification of women in media imagery. When deciding what they would like to see in terms of appearance in the media, there was consensus in promoting body diversity; however, participants suggested a new but equally narrow replacement appearance ideal, 'average and healthy', which appeared to be derived from a cultural assumption that only bodies defined as 'average' are healthy and attractive. Interestingly, while they struggled to define what a 'normal' body is, it was clear that the category did not include the under- or overweight. A potential barrier to their acceptance of 'average-sized' women in the media appeared to be based on the stigmatisation of being overweight or obese and a set of assumptions about the health of certain body shapes and sizes. Since the fitspiration imagery on Instagram presents a homogenous body ideal that is deemed 'healthy', it would be useful to explore further how social norms concerning 'health' affect body image in young women.

Although Diedrichs et al.'s (2011) study recognised and interpreted the social context within which participants were embedded, it focused on media imagery in consumer culture, such as the fashion and advertising industries, both of which aim to sell products to consumers. The insights from my research could be different because the imagery on Instagram reflects a diverse population (family, friends, peers, acquaintances, models and celebrities). The data from Diedrichs et al.'s (2011) focus

groups included mixed- and single-gender groups; the presence of the opposite gender may have influenced the ideas and opinions participants expressed, especially because the social 'rules' for discussing body image are different for women and men (e.g. Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006); the interview context may have therefore obscured gender-specific meanings.

Lastly, Ahern et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study with young women from the UK, using focus groups to discuss how the ideal body size and shape, and how viewing images of such idealisations in the media, affected how they felt about their own bodies. The women identified the ideal body as thin and were aware of how thinness is idealised in society, particularly by traditional media. However, similarly to the participants in Diedrichs, Lee and Kelly's (2011) study, the women's perceptions of 'normalised' weight was distorted by cultural attitudes surrounding 'normal', 'healthy' bodies and the body sizes they saw represented in the media. Individuals at both ends of the weight spectrum – the underweight and the overweight – were stigmatised; a preference for a 'normal' weight identifies a (narrowly defined) 'healthy' body ideal, with deviations on either side stigmatised. This demonstrates that body image content that is constructed and interpreted as 'average equals healthy' is required, in particular with respect to the influence of culture and society in constructing the ideal feminine body shape and size.

All the qualitative studies mentioned have utilised focus groups, which are helpful to investigate interaction and co-creation among participants sharing similarities and differences. However, a disadvantage is that a small number of individuals may have overshadowed the sessions and less vocal participants may have gone unheard. The presence of others is also influential; any interpretation of participants' responses must consider the impact of peer pressure and impression management. The studies situated the findings within a sociocultural context, in terms of referring to a societal or media thin ideal of beauty; however, there has yet to be a specific focus on the symbolic, cultural and ideological meanings and representations of female beauty as situated and embedded in society. In particular, there is an absence of research into body image that considers the sociocultural and prevailing historical concepts of gender and body image; this is especially important given those social constructions of the feminine body reflect gender ideology and practice (MacSween, 1993; Lorber &

Martin, 2007). It would be helpful to examine how perceptions of the body are imbued with social meanings; consequently, a more culturally specific and gender-specific inquiry into women's body image would be a signification contribution to the field, especially in the intersection between subjectivity and culture.

1.3.2 The Impact of Ethnicity on Body Image

Since negative body image is so intertwined with the sociocultural landscape, cultural forces and dynamics, there is variation in the way that women and girls are affected by societal standards of gendered beauty**.** Women and girls from different ethnic/racial backgrounds may vary in their extent of body dissatisfaction because the meanings and experiences of the body are dependent on cultural and social group belonging (Crogo & Shisslak, 2003). A limitation in existing body image literature is that most studies are conducted with samples of White women and girls, with little focus on ethnic differences (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004). Conventional wisdom has reinforced the perception that body image disturbances are most common in young, Northern European Caucasian females of middle-to-upper socio-economic class (Silber, 1986; Striegel-Moore & Smolak, 1996). The initial clinical data and literature on eating disorders, particularly on diagnosis, profiling and explanation, was grounded in studies conducted with White European and American females (Silber 1986; Striegel-Moore & Smolak, 1996) and further, those studies were conducted primarily in clinical settings, which contributed to White females being overrepresented in body image research (this provided bias in race and class, as only wealthy families were able to afford clinically based treatment). Black and other ethnic minority individuals were viewed as 'immune' to body image difficulties and eating pathology, and this has had serious consequences as ethnic minority women were either misdiagnosed or had delayed diagnoses of eating disorders by clinical professionals because of the belief that such problems were solely restricted to White individuals (Silber, 1986; Root, 1990; Thompson, 1992). Since research has focused exclusively on the experiences of White females, this elitist representation is multifaceted, but at a fundamental level gender inequality was being privileged over other systems of oppression, including racism and classism (Thompson, 1994).

Comparing body dissatisfaction or weight-related concerns among White and Black and ethnic minority women and adolescents is increasingly becoming part of research agendas. Mainly, studies have suggested that ethnic minority groups are at lower risk of body image difficulties and eating pathology, since non-White societies and cultures have generally valued curviness rather than thinness and therefore offered a degree protection against a desire to achieve a lower body weight (Nasser, 1997; Tsai, 2000; Afifi-Soweid, Najem-Kteily & Shediac-Rizkallah, 2002). The focus of most research has been on African American groups in comparison to White peers (Smolak & Striegel-Moore, 2000; Wildes et al. 2001) and has demonstrated that body image difficulties, particularly with regard to the idealisation of thinness, is more of a problem for White females (Harris, 1994; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Nielsen, 2000; Atlas et al., 2002). With other ethnically diverse populations such as Asian American and Hispanic women, the findings have been mixed and inconsistent (see Grabe & Hyde, 2006, for a comprehensive review). For example, several studies have reported higher levels of dissatisfaction in White women than in Hispanic women (Barry & Grilo, 2002; Suldo & Sandberg, 2000; Demarest & Allen, 2000), whilst other researchers have reported that Hispanic women and adolescents demonstrate higher levels of body dissatisfaction than their White American peers (Robinson et al., 1996; McComb & Clopton, 2002). Similarly, several studies have demonstrated that White females are significantly more dissatisfied with their bodies than their Asian American counterparts (Franzoi & Chang, 2002; Tylka, 2004), whilst others have reported similar levels of body dissatisfaction amongst the two groups (Arriaza & Mann, 2001; Siegel, 2002; Cash et al. 2004).

The body image research conducted in the United Kingdom has similarly presented mixed findings. Wardle and Marsland (1990) demonstrated that British Black and Asian female adolescents were less likely to experience body dissatisfaction or express a desire to lose weight. Similarly, Ahmad, Waller and Verduyn (1994) found that British Asian young women were more satisfied with their body and weight than their Caucasian peers. However, many other studies have reported evidence of comparably high levels of body- and weight-related concerns or eating disorder symptomology amongst Black British and Asian minority groups and White British

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females in Britain (Dolan et al. 1990; Furnham & Patel, 1994; Hill & Bhatti, Gordon, 2001; Bhugra & Bhui, 2003; Shoneye, Steptoe & Wardle, 2011).

In a meta-analysis examining ethnic differences in body image literature, Wildes and colleagues (2001) reviewed thirty-five studies of body image disturbances and eating pathology among White and non-White populations. Their study demonstrated that there are higher rates of body dissatisfaction and eating and dieting pathology in White women and girls than in non-White women and girls, although the differences between the groups were small in magnitude. In particular, the weakest differences reported by the study were for non-clinical populations and clinical eating pathology such as restrictive eating and bulimia nervosa. However, the researchers argued that all of the studies examined relied upon Western diagnostic instruments as measures of eating-related psychopathology in non-White and non-Western groups, and failed to take into account different cultural ideals related to beauty, weight and eating practices. Since the research used measures that are standardised using White samples, it is possible the ethnic similarities and 'differences' reflected in the present study and other relevant literature may result from inappropriate definitions of body image disturbances and eating pathology in non-White groups (Wildes et al. 2001). Similarly, Shaw and colleagues (2004) found that levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disturbances across Asian American, Black, Hispanic and White female adolescents and adult females did not differ significantly. These results indicate that women's body dissatisfaction is not strongly differentiated by ethnicity as previously thought and believed. However, further sophisticated research is required to understand the similarities and differences in body dissatisfaction among ethnic groups of women.

Grabe and Hyde's 2006 meta-analysis also directly challenges the belief that there are large differences in body dissatisfaction between White and all non-White women and argues that body image disturbances may not be the 'golden girl problem' promoted in the literature. It appears that although Black women on average do not report the same level of dissatisfaction as White women, it cannot be assumed that they do not experience body dissatisfaction. Rather, ethnicity-specific standards of beauty may help to understand the acceptance of body shape and size among Black women, since Black and/or heavier targets of comparison do lead to body image concerns among Black females (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003; Frisby, 2004). Others have

suggested that Black women who do engage with thin ideals in White-oriented media seem just as susceptible to body dissatisfaction as their White counterparts (Rogers Wood & Petrie, 2010). It has also been highlighted that the construction of gender identity and gender roles in Black communities means that African American women and girls in particular are raised to be strong, independent and self-reliant, which allows them to defer the traditional White feminine gender role (Lovejoy, 2001). Although Black women and girls are able to operate to some extent outside of White norms of beauty, they are still affected by White interpretations and unable to fully reject the White ideals, as they are increasingly exposed to White culture and attempt to be acceptable to both White and Black societies – for example, Caucasian straightened hairstyles or attempts at lightening skin tone (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004). Others have argued that despite Black women's greater satisfaction with their bodies, the body may be still be a source of gender oppression; for example, Black women's eating problems and high risk of obesity and binge eating disorders could be indicative of the various ways that oppression (sexual abuse, racism, classism and poverty) is experienced (Thompson, 1994; Ullman & Filipas, 2005).

Furthermore, Asian American and Hispanic women appear as dissatisfied as White women, but it does not mean that their dissatisfaction reflects the same concerns. For example, Mintz and Kashubeck (1999) found that Asian American women reported less satisfaction with facial features and height, possibly because they signal differences from White culture and its prevailing standards of attractiveness. Similarly, Altabe (1998) found that Black and Asian women reported lighter skin as an ideal trait in higher proportions than White or Hispanic women and in contrast, Hispanic and White women reported a desire for larger breasts, but this was not shared by either the Black or the Asian American women. These examples point to the fact that distinct aspects of gendered body ideals may be particularly associated with ethnic groups (e.g. skin colour and specific body parts).

Another argument is that ethnicity may not be the most salient factor but rather that features associated with ethnicity, such as levels of acculturation, cultural change, improved socio-economic status (SES) and differences in presentations of body image and weight concerns, hold more understanding of ethnic variations of body image among females (Katzman & Lee, 1997; Soh et al. 2006; Gordon et al. 2010). In

exploring this further, issues of role transition, culture clash and generational disparity have been acknowledged in studies of women exposed to different cultures and the extent to which they embrace values and societal norms of the country to which they immigrated (Katzman & Lee, 1997; Gordon et al. 2010). Therefore, it is suggested that eating pathology in this context could be related to disconnection, transition and oppression (Katzman & Lee, 1997). Other studies have reported that women's level of acculturation is connected to the extent to which they internalise or feel pressure to attain the thin ideal, in particular; among ethnic minorities acculturation is associated with higher levels of thin idealisation (Ball & Kenardy, 2002; Garcia-Rea, 2006; Poloskoy & Tracey, 2013). However, Soh et al. (2006) in their review of cross-cultural studies on body image and acculturation note that interpretation is hampered by the fact that only ethnicity is taken into account and the degree of acculturation to Western society is not quantitated, and that time spent in a country is not directly related to the adoption of sociocultural values (e.g. Ball & Kenardy, 2002).

Since socio-economic status has been considered a risk factor for body dissatisfaction and eating disturbances, it has been suggested that as non-White females become more affluent, they will in turn be more at risk of body image and eating related concerns (Soh et al. 2006). Although higher SES backgrounds in ethnic minorities have been associated with similar rates of body dissatisfaction to Northern European and American Women (Polivy & Herman, 2002), high body dissatisfaction regardless of socio-economic status is common amongst women and girls (Walcott et al. 2003; Striegel-Moore & Bulik, 2007). This is possibly because the idealisation of slimness has permeated through the media and mainstream culture and the blurring of socio-economic classes in contemporary times means such associations between SES and body dissatisfaction no longer hold (Soh et al. 2006).

A repeated theme in the research mentioned so far is that body dissatisfaction and eating pathology may present differently in non-White populations because of factors such as differing cultural ideals of beauty, body composition and particular weight-related concerns (Soh et al. 2006; Gordon et al. 2010). By emphasising slenderness and the dominant imagery of the female body that glorifies youth, whiteness, thinness and wealth, it follows that dissatisfaction with appearance can discount real biases faced by women and their limited access to other forms of power of

self-expression (Thompson, 1994). In particular, the over-emphasis on weight preoccupation is unduly ethnocentric and misses the universal power of self-starvation in the task of self-definition and self-control, which means that eating pathology could be more linked to power imbalances (that are more likely to be experienced by ethnic minorities) than gender, which is further explored below (Steiger, 1995).

Shoneye et al.'s (2011) study comprised a qualitative investigation of attitudes to weight in Black and White British women. The findings illuminated how social pressures to be slim, the negative stereotyping of fatness, and the media transmitting a distorted ideal of thinness affected the perceptions of body size in Black women, and how they were also able to specifically differentiate themselves from the target of such pressures that they believed to be 'white' weight and body culture. By extension, Black women were more accepting of being a larger size and viewed this as a sign of wealth, health, beauty and fertility, whereas overt thinness was positioned as unattractive. However, they did acknowledge the negative health consequences of being 'overweight', where the 'gaze' of others was mentioned as a motivator for lifestyle change/weight loss, i.e. looking better in clothes, avoiding negative character traits (i.e. lazy) and improving quality of life. While the Black women in the study were able to reject the mainstream preference for extreme thinness in women, they did not reject 'thinness' in its entirety but rather had a more accepting attitude towards being a 'larger' size than White women.

In offering a more detailed explanation of what it could mean to be 'larger' for Black women and female adolescents, Hesse-Biber et al. (2004) demonstrate through qualitative analysis that the ideal attractive body shape for young Black women is 'thick' – described as being curvaceous with large hips, a rounded backside and ample thighs while remaining slim everywhere else, while being 'fat' was posited as unattractive since it lacked the necessary 'shape' or 'curves'. Similarly, in their qualitative investigation of body image concerns among African American women, Awad et al. (2015) found that participants referred to the optimal body shape as thick/toned/curvy and strived to obtain this ideal. The Black respondents were dissatisfied with their own bodies for failing to meet the expectations of these aesthetics but equally struggled with using exercise and diet to obtain the 'curvy' figure, since they cannot 'starve' themselves into being 'thicker'. They were also aware that

conforming to a culturally dominant White feminine size increased their chance of achievement and success, and thus they also struggled with the counter-cultural Black feminine ideal. Furthermore, hypersexualisation featured heavily in Black women's narratives of how their bodies are perceived and experienced; they felt their bodies were sexualised by being 'more curvy' – where men assume these women are more willing to have sex because of how their bodies are shaped – and were aware of limited media representations of Black women in rap music videos as fuelling sexual stereotypes, which serve to construct and constrain beauty ideals. However, the sexual objectification of Black women as hypersexual – targeting them as sexual aggressors and sexual savages – has consequences for their body image and self-esteem as it links their worth to being sexy and physically beautiful, whilst also demeaning and objectifying them for being 'over-sexed' (Greene, 1994; Gordon, 2008; French, 2013).

Similarly, 'ethnic' features and visible muscularity in Black females are more likely to be labelled as 'mannish' or 'animalistic', which again disqualifies them from White feminine standards of beauty (Cahn, 1994; Boyle, 2005; Awad et al. 2015). (These contemporary social perceptions of Black women reflect historical constructions of race that stem from the slavery era (Hooks, 1992; Collins, 2000)). Thus, William (2000) argues that Black women are under pressure to work harder to obtain a 'hyperfeminine' appearance to subvert discourses of gender or sexuality confusion. It also has been argued that Black women are more invested and concerned with their appearance than White women and many dedicate money, time and attention to achieving and maintaining a feminine appearance (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Citrin, 2004). Thus, the exoticisation of Black women as wild and sexually promiscuous in popular culture and media presents them in dehumanising stereotypes (Kilbourne, 2010); the hypersexualisation by the majority culture could therefore affect body image and self-presentation in Black women (Stephen & Philips, 2003). They also could also be constrained by the negative social perceptions embedded in racism that cohere around their bodies, whilst also facing a backlash for obtaining the idealised body tone or muscularity as it threatens their identity as women, something that White women are exempt from and instead idealised for.

The qualitative study by Brady et al. (2017) focused on body satisfaction in Asian American women (representing a variety of ethnicities: Chinese, Korean, Indian,

Bengali, Vietnamese and Pakistani and mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds). The findings illuminated how their discontent with body shape, size and weight related to their understanding of valued Western beauty norms and that their desire for a thinner, leaner and overall slender physique was also to achieve a beauty ideal that is dominant in White culture. Collectively, the women understood their Asian features to be devalued by Western society and expressed their difficulty in adhering to Western beauty norms, since European physical features were positioned by them as biologically impossible to achieve without resorting to cosmetic surgery. They also described slenderness, thinness and lighter skin tone as highly valued in their country of origin too. In particular, body dissatisfaction in Asian American women was embedded in experiences of racism and sexism. The expectation to be hyperfeminine emerged from their cultural context (i.e. subservient to men) and portrayals of Asian women in Western media as nurturing, submissive, obedient and quiet. In this intersection of racism and sexism, they felt such limiting and racialised expectations of appearance objectified their bodies in ways that were experienced as devaluing to their personhood. Furthermore, the women expressed being exoticised for their racial features and described exposure to race-related teasing and stereotyping about their Asian identity that further contributed to their body dissatisfaction. In particular, unique experiences of racialised sexual objectification, race-related teasing and racial microaggressions may increase body surveillance and monitoring added pressure to assimilate to Western standards of attractiveness to fit in within the dominant White culture.

Studies that have investigated specifically British Indian women and female adolescents' perceptions of physical appearance ideals have demonstrated that they are similarly under cultural pressure to conform to the ideal of a thin body shape, because of acculturation as well as the valuing of slimmer bodies in their original culture (Button et al. 1998; Furnham & Adaim-Saib, 2001; Dhillon & Dhawan, 2011). Earlier Indian beauty ideals were full-figured with rounded curves, with food being a symbol of hospitality and prosperity, but the globally transmitted thin ideal has moved social norms of female appearance towards those of Western culture (Dhillon & Dhawan, 2011). However, British Indian women are faced with the synthesis of traditional values and Western influences – whilst women are glamorised and sexualised in the media, cultural expectations require them to be demure and subservient to men (Bakhski &

Baker, 2011). Although the Western culture of thinness impacted their body image, they also faced pressures to present themselves according to a standard of beauty that meant being fair and slim in order to find a suitable partner for marriage; this pressure was intrinsic to Indian culture, and could be argued to be compounded by Westernised messages of physical attractiveness (Dhillon & Dhawan, 2011). Many women have also voiced that the sexism that exists in Indian culture means that they are encouraged to conform to Indian cultural appearance ideals of being fair skinned and matching the Western ideal of slimness, because beauty is considered much more important when defining women than men and affects their prospects in dating and marriage (Pettit, 2008). Others have reported that British Indian women demonstrate similar desires to lose weight and have a lower preferred weight (similar to White women). They are also just as likely to engage in weight-control mechanisms, apart from vomiting, due to differences in living status, with self-induced vomiting being less common in those living with parents or a partner as this is status is much more frequent in Indian women (Button et al. 1998).

1.4 Feminist Perspectives
1.4.1 The Social Construction of Gendered Bodies
Feminist literature and research have increased awareness of the gendered social constructions of bodies by making visible the social and cultural dynamics that create a profoundly gendered society (Lorber & Martin, 2007). Feminists argue that claims about gendered bodies favour social arrangements and practices, including cultural meanings that constitute gender as a social institution (Lorber, 1994). Gender produces two categories in Western cultures – 'men' and 'women' – with distinct capabilities, characteristics, personalities and body types (Lorber & Martin, 2007). These gendered attributes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' hold men and women to gendered norms and expectations in their society's stratification system (Lorber & Moore, 1997). Thus, feminists argue that bodies are physically marked and separated as 'women' or 'men'; these visible differences, and differences in capabilities, skills, personalities and body types, are not 'natural' but socially produced – creating a gendered social order (Lorber & Moore, 1997). Therefore, claims that women and men are *different* develop and perpetuate a gender hierarchy that favours men over women (for an overview of gender socialisation, see Lorber, 1994). History is a good starting point to unveil the roots of

women's oppression based on idealised beauty standards, especially as historical concepts and social constructs of the female body interact and come to represent gendered expectations about how it should look and function (Păunescu, 2014).

1.4.2 Historical Roots in Gendered Bodies

Feminist theory argues that women have primarily been subjugated through their bodies. It contends that gender ideologies and sexist reasoning stem from biological differences between the sexes, in particular, scientific and common knowledge accounts of female anatomy and reproductive capacities, which are supported by dualist paradigms that have symbolised Western thought from the philosophers of primeval Greece to the Enlightenment period to present-day (King, 2004).

Philosophical and religious ideologies elevated the 'mind' or 'soul' as the defining characteristic that separates humans distinctly from other species (or mere physical animals – a crucial concern of Enlightenment and evolutionist thought; Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). This created a mind/body split, in which the mind and body are regarded as separate from each other, and the body is simply viewed as a crude container for the mind (Grosz, 1994). The dualist paradigm is inflected with gender ideologies; the mind is associated with man (the rational, unified, thinking subject) and women (associated with the body, nature, emotions) are viewed to be ruled by their physical bodies. This conceptualisation is strengthened by biological essentialism and a determinist paradigm, which defines women according to their reproductive physiology and as driven by emotions, instinct and physical needs. Women, therefore, being ruled by their bodily functions and sensations were viewed as inferior for their physical, animal nature that rendered them distant from the Gods (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004). For example, Plato claimed that the body (woman) is a danger to the logic and reason of the mind (man) and the body (woman) is simply a prison for the soul or mind (man); the body (woman) is merely necessary for reproduction and survival but unable to be trusted as it is ruled by unreason, emotion and fragility (Grosz, 1994). Similarly, the doctrine of the origin of sin in Christian theology holds women as the unfallen creation that tempted man into sin – proof that women's nature makes them susceptible to the 'passions' of the body and that they should therefore defer to men, who represent higher morality and reason (Weitz, 1998).

Women have been measured and judged against the norm of men, who set the parameters for what is valued and construct women as 'other' – deviant and biologically (and therefore *naturally*) inferior – in comparison (de Beauvoir, 1974; McKinley, 2002; King, 2004). De Beauvoir (1952, p.189) rightly argues that 'man may be able to transcend his biological materiality, but a woman is entrenched in her physicality – "a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence"'. Feminists argue that patriarchy conflates sex and gender through naturalistic explanations of sex and sexuality; by distinguishing sex from gender, they argue against a reductionist and essentialist perspective that attributes gender differences to biology (Balsamo, 1996). Feminist theorists have argued against fundamental explanations that assumes women's biological composition govern and convey the social meanings for her gendered existence (Butler, 1990). In particular, de Beauvoir's (1952, p.295) famous line 'one is not born, rather one becomes a woman' is rooted in feminist constructions of gender. Although this remains a controversial point, other feminist theorists have provided nuanced accounts that demonstrate that biological sex is *also* a product of *social forces*, with suggestions of challenging, rejecting or re-theorising the binary divisions (see Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1991; Lorber, 2000).

Regardless of stance, feminists continue to fight for equal treatment within the present gender structure and present many different arguments for how to do so, and some contemporary feminists theorists still find value in the original sex/gender distinction (see Stoljar, 1995; Heyes, 2000; Alcoff, 2006). In particular, feminists aim to prevail against patriarchy and the belief that men have the universal right to control women and their bodies (MacKinnon et al., 1983). For this study, the ways in which women rarely exercise full ownership of their bodies, instead experiencing them as objects to be ruled externally, are particularly pertinent (Turner, 1984). A critical look at historical processes is important to show how – despite over a hundred years of feminist reform and revolution – gender-inflected mind/body dualism continues, in both overt and covert forms, to impact the lives of women today.

1.4.3 The Ideal Female Body Before the Twentieth Century

The physiology of the female body has not altered in thousands of years. However, by analysing the body type regarded as ideal in recent eras, it is evident that there have been histrionic changes in what is considered an attractive female body

(Seid, 1994; Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2010). Up until a century ago, female beauty was revered as a symbol of fertility; plumpness was equated with strength and energy and viewed as a sign of good temperament, health, conscience and – above all – sexual love, representing a woman's role as a creator of life (Bonafini & Pozzilli, 2010). The ideal female body was full-busted and full-figured; fat was considered a 'silken layer' that graced the frames of sophisticated women, and dimpled flesh (what we call 'cellulite') was also desirable (Seid, 1994; Wolf, 1991). Today, of course, we have completely inverted these associations – a distortion that we must turn to the sociocultural and historical context to explain.

Slenderness has been revered in other time periods – the ideal female body has been elongated and long-limbed to signify delicacy or feminine fragility (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), or small-waisted (beginning of the nineteenth century) – but neither eras showed bone or muscle; rather, women remained fully-fleshed to indicate their amorous nature (Seid, 1994). Similarly, medieval scholarship argues that control of appetite characterised the lives of medieval women– a symbolic behaviour inflected with Christian ideology: 'goodness by denying the body' (Berkley, 1986, cited in Brumberg, 1988, p.2) – and feminist research has drawn parallels between self-starving medieval saints and late-twentieth-century presentations of anorexia (e.g. Eckermann, 1994).

However, preoccupation with a denial of food in pursuit of an aesthetic ideal emerged from the distinctive economic and social environment of the late-nineteenth century (Brumberg, 1988). The late-Victorian era brought rapid social changes that had consequences for women; it was an era of opportunity and change, during which women began to assert their legal and political rights but old expectations continued to hold a grip on women's bodies – a time that is often referred to as very similar to our own (Hesse-Biber, 1991; Bordo, 2003).

The Victorian era sharply restricted women to the 'private' sphere of domesticity and child-rearing, symbolised by the feminine ideal of domesticity, dependency and delicacy (Bordo, 2003). Industrial, male-dominated capitalist development was nurtured by aspects of bourgeois life: the women's role in creating an idealised version of home, family and religion (including the sexual division of labour) and popular ideas about gender allowed men to seek refuge at home from the harsh

reality of business, capitalist values and the moral taint of commerce (Davidoff & Hall, 1987). Without alternatives to marriage, a woman's role was limited to childbearing and housework; self-sacrifice and altruism represented 'healthy' femininity (Wood, 1973). The oppressive corset was designed to not only control women mentally but also alter them physically to encourage dependency and submissiveness towards men (Ehrenreich & English, 1979). Wives were turned into commodities, trophies of their husbands' riches – objects for others' appraisal; their bodies disciplined to an oppressive ideal of beauty (e.g. corset; Hesse-Biber, 1991).

Advances in science led to the discovery of the function of ovaries and the menstrual cycle. Physiologists argued that this proved there was no biological reason for women to have sexual impulses or desires and – contrary to all previous medical dogma – that women did not need to be sexually stimulated in order to conceive; they simply had to serve as semen receptacles (Porter, 1991). Thus, sexual repression, dependency and passiveness became primary characteristics of women's role. This correlated with the needs of bourgeois culture –the (male) mind was to discipline and control the (female) body in order to *conserve* its energy for production, either of wealth or babies – anything else was wasteful (MacSween, 1993).

In the late-nineteenth century, 'hysteria' swept middle- and upper-class women. This was used as a catch-all diagnosis for symptoms including sexual excitement, troublesome behaviour, nervousness, irritability and any sign of an unfeminine character – 'sexually, aggressive, intellectually ambitious, and defective in proper womanly submission and selflessness' (Wood, 1973, p.36). Thus, the medical community exerted further control; a 'normalising gaze' (Foucault, 1977) diagnosed females as either 'normal' or 'abnormal' on the basis of cultural beliefs concerning 'appropriate' behaviour for women (Hesse-Biber, 1991). Any stresses were put down to disturbances in the womb (believed to central for female sexuality and emotionality), and surgical treatments included the removal of the ovaries and/or clitoris, hot steel applied to the cervix and/or leeches placed on the womb (Wood, 1973). Such treatments were believed to cure rebellion or uncontrollable (distasteful) desire in women, and 'rest cures' were also prescribed: women were encouraged towards domesticity and away from intellect activity (Barker-Benfield, 1975). Although medical authorities noted that 'hysteria' and 'neurasthenia' appeared to be particularly common among young women

who were highly intelligent and sought out greater educational opportunities, they failed to see the contribution of isolation, boredom and intellectual frustration (including little power or control) to the aetiology of such disorders or their connection to the expectation for women to lead monotonous, unexciting, domestic lives (Perlick & Silverstein, 1994; Bordo, 2003).

In the late-nineteen century, the re-assertion of male supremacy seemed to be a response to fears of female encroachment; fears that feminine sexuality and the feminine body could overwhelm and destroy men. Feminine sexuality required legal, medical, social and ideological controls to contain the 'otherness' of the 'delicate' female – the insatiable woman (MacSween, 1993). Bordo (2003) notes that anxieties over women's uncontrollable hunger and lust peak during periods when women are asserting themselves politically and socially. The second half of the nineteen century (concurrent with the *first feminist wave*) saw women depicted in artistic and literary imagery as dangerous and evil, symbolised by vampires, castrator and killers; women were represented as 'all appetite', their bodies dangerous and able to transform from 'a passive vessel to dangerous pump, a dark, hot and open space, perpetually threatening to engulf and extinguish the masculine body' (MacSween, 1993, p.147).

While the Suffragettes fought even harder for legal and political emancipation, fashion and custom imprisoned women's bodies and spirits further with the 'fashionable', tighter, more restrictive 's-curve' corset (Bordo, 2003; Riordan, 2007). When women received the right to vote in the 1920s, the ideal shape no longer had curves; instead, a more linear, masculine form was presented (Porter, 1991). Parallels have been drawn between women gaining the same opportunities as men and these changes in the ideal shape for women, representing freedom from domestic seclusion by de-emphasising their feminine shape and reproductive characteristics (Bonnafini & Pozzilli, 2010).

Similarly, the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of second-wave feminism, which widened women's agenda for political equality to include equal pay and job opportunities, access to contraception and abortion, and protection from sexual discrimination and domestic violence (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Interestingly, Wolf (1991, p.94) writes that Twiggy, the famous fashion model at the time, was quoted in *Vogue* as looking like a 'strong gale would snap her into two'; this became an inverse symbol for

the political fight against women being perceived as weak and powerless. Notably, Orbach (1986, p.75) states that when women demand 'more space' regarding equal opportunity, there is a cultural demand that they should 'shrink'. The argument is that women with childlike bodies are less threatening to men, as 'there is something truly disturbing about the body and mind of a mature woman' (Chernin, 1981, p.110).

The themes, discourses and representations of femininity discussed in the next section thus have deep historical roots. It is important to remember these roots when considering the social practices that continue to subject women to physical and symbolic subordination, while acknowledging recent social and cultural forces that have intensified messages about the female body.

1.4.4 Feminist Perspectives on Body Image

In challenging the prevailing conceptualisation of 'eating disorders' as individual psychopathologies, feminists have re-theorised the 'body image' problems of anorexia and bulimia as representing one extreme on a continuum on which all women today find themselves, insofar as they are vulnerable, to one degree or another, to the requirements of the cultural construction of normative femininity (MacSween, 1993; Orbach, 1986; Bordo, 2003; Malson & Burns, 2009). In dismantling the distinction between normal and pathological, feminists re-theorise eating/body distress as constituted within and by the regulatory norms of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century Western cultures (Malson & Burns, 2009).

In Western culture, discourses and representations of the ultra-thin female body and dieting/weight control are deployed to account for health, beauty, success, femininity, control, achievement and normality; as such, 'eating disorder' cognitions or 'over-valued ideas' are on the continuum of toxic messages that saturate women's lives (Burns, 2008, cited in Gremillion, 2009, p.248). The family and peer group reinforce these contingent messages, and societal institutions and industries exert social control and extract profit from transmitting an idealisation of thinness (Hesse-Biber, 2006). For many women, being thin is a self-evident goal; culturally popular notions of femininity are inseparable from a prevailing discourse of self-management that ties a woman's value and esteem to gendered expectations of self-restraint, which take the form of weight control through dieting and exercise (Brown et al., 2008). The thin and toned

body ideal has become associated with independence through self-improvement and self-control, while the inverse – fatness – connotes laziness, lack of control and moral failure (Hesse-Biber, 2006).

In explaining Western obsession with slender female bodies, early feminist authors draw attention to rapid social and political change, the adoption of market economies and, particularly, the women's movement resulting in changing and conflicting roles for women, linking these phenomena to the sharp increase in body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Hesse-Biber, 1991, 2006; Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 2003). In other words, women's increasing equality in major societal institutions has been met with a new, insidious set of restrictions on their freedom through the promotion and circulation of a body ideal that fosters and perpetuates body obsession (Hesse-Biber, 2006). The fact that women come under intense observation and normative pressure to strive for the ideal through self-imposed controls of diet, starvation and exercise reflects a backlash against women's liberation from male domination (Hesse-Biber, 2006).

Foucauldian (1975, 1977) theory has predominantly influenced feminist theorists such as Bartky (1990) and Bordo (2003) on the modernisation of power, which appropriates the docile bodies paradigm; the transition of power from a central authority (monarch, government, army) to disciplinary forms of power (diffused among institutions) reflects the shift from overt manifestations of women's subordination towards more insidious forms of control. In particular, they draw attention to women's bodies as the locus of control in the social construction of femininity, in which self-surveillance and self-disciplinary practices aimed to produce a feminine subject. The practices of exercise and diet as techniques of femininity to attain the 'ideal' body size and configuration combine to 'produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognisable feminine' and reinforce a 'disciplinary project of bodily perfection' (Bartky, 1988, p.64).

Bartky's (1988, 1990) work illuminates the tyranny of slenderness and its enforcement through patriarchal disciplinary practices. However, it does not adequately account for women's agency and subjectivity, which are both constituted by and reflective of their social and cultural contexts. The absence of subjectivity may reflect Foucault's (1975, 1977) earlier account of the modernisation of power (which does not

explicitly attribute agency to subjects) –remains a useful paradigm to explain women's subjugation. However, without meaningful discussions of women's experiences of their body and appearance, we may be at risk of obscuring the complex ways in which femininity is constructed – especially because differences (e.g. sexuality, race, ethnicity, personal history and life experiences) translate into multiple, plural and diverse variations in women's responses to ideals of femininity and their attendant practices (Deveaux, 1994).

Bordo (2003) does focus on women's relationships to social practices and the ways in which they mediate the demands of culture. However, insufficient attention is paid to 'normal' bodies; these appear to be less appropriate as visual texts, lending themselves less readily to feminist approaches that position the body as *visually* symbolising the gender-political struggles and dilemmas of women (Squire, 2003; Burns, 2009; Saukko, 2009; Holmes, 2016).

The first wave of feminist accounts that focus on biopower and surveillance (e.g. Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003) lack integration of Foucault's (1980b, 1982, 1988) later work on resistance as critical (i.e. essential) to power and would benefit from incorporating 'normalisation' that is enforced both discursively and on the level of practices through bodily discipline by institutions and discourses (Deaveux, 1994; Heyes, 2006).

Hesse-Biber (1991, 2006) and Wolf (1991) argue that the problem of body image and eating disordered symptoms in otherwise 'normal' women (see, in particular, Hesse-Biber, 1991) is best understood from a sociocultural and political economic perspective (see Hesse-Biber, 2006 and Wolf, 1991; both provide a comprehensive review). They argue that an alliance of capitalist and patriarchal interests has co-opted the ideology of women's independence that emerged from second-wave feminism in the 1960s (see previous section 1.4.3). Hesse-Biber (1991, 2006) sees the rising problems of body image concerns and disordered eating as symptomatic of a social problem; through a manufactured conflict between women's body sizes and shapes, specific industries (advertisement, weight-loss, diet, food, fitness and cosmetic surgery) have capitalised on the 'cult of thinness' that mass media promotes, in which women are promised the desired aesthetics through products and services that rarely reap the glorification of 'success' (thinness). Since the ideal is somewhat unattainable, the gulf

between desire and gratification is a lucrative market in consumer culture (Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 2003). 'Improvement' products and technologies (fitness, exercise, diet) engage in post-feminist sentiments of empowerment, self-indulgence or self-care (McRobbie, 2008; Lazar, 2011). At first glance, one may assume that dieting or physical fitness do not aim to subordinate women (in contrast to the corset) but rather enable women to feel powerful (Hesse-Biber, 1991; Bordo, 1993). Yet the energy, time and money that women expend on attaining a thin body not only drains their economic and emotional capital but also detracts from their investments in politics, career and education – advancements that would truly promote their empowerment – therefore substituting temporary power for 'real authority' (Attie & Brooks-Gunn, 1987; Hess-Biber, 1991; Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 2003).

Indeed, Wolf (1991, p.187) argues: 'the great weight shift must be understood as one of the major historical developments of the century, a direct solution to the dangers posed by the women's movement and economic and reproductive freedom. Dieting is the most potent political sedative in women's history; a quietly mad population is a tractable one.' This is what feminists refer to as the 'politics of distractions' – any challenge to patriarchy or meaningful step towards gender equality has to be undermined (Hesse-Biber, 1991). Bordo (2003, p.171) writes: 'female appetite for food is merely the most concrete expression of the general rule governing the construction of femininity: that female hunger – for public power, independence, for sexual gratification – be contained, and the public space women be allowed to take up be circumscribed, limited'.

1.4.5 Feminist Perspectives on Traditional Media

Feminist theorists have very much recognised the significance of the media in propagating thinness as beauty, drawing attention to the fact that women's choices are limited by homogenising imagery that emphasises female bodies as young, white, thin, attractive, healthy and heterosexual (Orbach, 1986; Collins, 1991; Wolf, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Bordo, 2003). A body of empirical research substantiates this argument, exploring how women feel about and respond to such images and the degree to which media constructs are implicated within body/eating distress (see section 1.3.1 on traditional media). Indeed, feminist empirical work has demonstrated that Western discourses, imagery and narratives surrounding the female body effectively construct

women's reality of their own bodies, and shared projections, meanings and biases are ascribed based on conformity to a narrow range of body sizes (Malson & Burns, 2009; Kadish, 2012). For example, Wetherell's (1996) discourse-analytic study of teenage girls' narratives of body image and eating demonstrates that accountability to moral and personal values, which they assigned to food and body size, constructed a fat self as unattractive and shameful and was associated with inadequacy and loss of control; conversely, a thin self was highly desirable and believed to be connected with happiness, confidence and extraversion. Malson and Ussher's (1996) qualitative study identified similar discourses in which fatness was denigrated (construed as ugly, hateful, shameful, unattractive and a sign of greed, excess and lack of control) and thinness idealised (signifying power, control and feminine beauty, and deemed the object of male desire). Although both of these studies provide a gender-oriented and socio-culturally contextualised account of the discursive constructions of the female body, neither focused on imagery, and the latter concentrated specifically on anorexic thin bodies.

Notably, Goodman's (2002) qualitative study examined how Latina and Anglo women in the US negotiated media imagery of thin female bodies. The findings illuminate that, despite *attitudinal* resistance, women's *behaviours* often followed the media ideal; they were aware of and desired the social rewards (positive judgements, attention, male desire) and economic rewards that thinness produces, and 'bodily self-control was their primary means to exert control in the social world' (Goodman, 2002, p.72). But women's attitudes gave way to hegemonic behaviours to varying degrees; although various reasons for this were suggested, it is unclear how the women themselves perceived or interpreted these experiences. Lastly, the women's youth and education were acknowledged as mediating factors, as they were aware of the media and its techniques in producing a 'false' ideal.

Recent feminist work has criticised the methodology employed in mainstream studies of sociocultural influences for being shallow and unsystematic – and particularly for arguing that culture straightforwardly shapes women's body image, which views women as products of culture rather than active agents (Bordo, 2003; Budgeon, 2003; Blood, 2005; Malson et al., 2011). Blood (2005) argues that objective measures of body image assume a woman is 'normal' if she can objectively perceive the size and shape of

her body over time. This not only encourages women to treat their body as separate from their mind but also intensifies and normalises an objectifying gaze, as they are expected to view their body as a series of measurements. It also leaves little space for inconsistency, contradictions or shifting views of one body and assumes a mind/body dualism in which the individual is construed as an objective, rational and consistent object. Blood (2005) goes on to say that body image discourses rest on a split between individual and society; as such, society is *operationalised* as a variable that influences the mind of individual women. This lends itself to arguments that women are 'cultural dopes', in that society invades the minds of 'vulnerable' women who submit to hegemonic appearance norms (see also Bordo, 2003; Probyn, 2009).

Coleman (2008, p.167) has further argued that much feminist qualitative and quantitative work into body image has problematically incorporated a masculine dichotomy of the 'subject who looks' and 'the object looked at', which is unhelpful because feminist work has suggested that women's bodies are often *both* subjects *and* objects of images. It can also obscure how bodies are constituted and experienced through their relationships to and with images. To challenge the binary oppositions of subject and object, recent feminist work incorporates Deleuzian (Deleuze, 1992) theory, in which bodies and images are seen in relation terms; neither are 'fixed' and engages with notions of plurality and multiplicity (unlike media effect models; see Bray & Colebrook, 1998; Budgeon, 2003). Images are thus reconceptualised as presenting possibilities and limitations for constructing the self and concepts of negotiation concur with earlier feminist propositions, which recognise agency as always constrained by dominant cultural norms and discourses that the individual has to navigate.

Coleman's (2008) empirical qualitative study explored the relations between adolescent girls' bodies and images and argued that the findings demonstrate that bodies 'become' through images (body-image). The study focused on how the girls' bodies, their own photographic images and media images limit and extend possibilities; media images were conceived not as isolated but as always in relation with other images, attending to the complex ways in which bodies and images are entwined. This research raises interesting points for further research, in particular its recognition that images produce multiple knowledges of body in relation to the social realities the image produces (Coleman, 2008). The concept of negotiation is particularly focused upon, in

its demonstration that neither bodies or images can precede in the intersubjective and shared space, because for women, these images are ever-present. Yet, this becomes the main focus; most of the analysis is directed towards establishing that neither bodies nor images can be easily and clearly bounded into binary or separate entities. As such, there is insufficient attention to the sociocultural context inevitably implied in the knowledge, understandings and experiences that images produced in the 'becoming' of bodies.

Recently, a number of studies have followed suit, incorporating Coleman's (2008) work to understand young women's interpretations of and relationality to images of women in post-feminist advertisements. This research has aimed to address what Gill (2007a, 2008) describes as a shift in representation of women in the media: from passive objects of a male gaze to the current, post-feminist, neoliberal representation of young women as powerful, beautiful, independent and sexy – both sexually agentic and sexually knowledgeable/experienced (always 'up for it'). However, the qualitative exploration remains limited, particularly in relation to the technologies of discipline and regulation that regulate feminine conduct; little attention is given to the constraining cultural conditions in which media representations are aspired to (and sometimes rejected) or the consequences of such actions for women (e.g. Jackson & Vares, 2013). Similarly, Malson et al.'s (2011) qualitative study focused on how young British women were able to create distance and difference between themselves and the 'other' women in advertisement images; participants were aware of a post-feminist critique that deems female agency as complicit with and reinforcing men, male desires and a patriarchal perspective on women. However, it is less clear how this contributes to 'their/our being "unaffected" by such imagery' (Malson et al., 2011, p.27).

Female agency has become a key issue in feminist literature, especially in the context of Western societies now being seen as 'post-feminist' – implying that any gender differences should be understood as the result of free exercise of individual choice (Gill, 2007b, 2008; see McRobbie, 2007 for an analysis of post-feminist masquerade from a British cultural perspective). However, various studies have found that, despite women's opportunities and entry into social (masculine) spheres from which they were previously excluded, contemporary Western culture continues to subject women's bodies to intense scrutiny and discipline (Gill 2007a, 2008; McRobbie, 2007). Although post-feminist studies have recognised the shift in representations of

female bodies, they have only focused on constructions of beauty and sexiness, and compulsory sexual agency has become the emphasis of post-feminist, neoliberal feminine subjectivities. There is little analysis of how other social and cultural constructions of gender affect young women's body image within a post-feminist 'liberation' of choice and agency.

1.5 Rationale for this Study

The literature reviewed on sociocultural and feminist perspectives on women's body image raises important points for this study. Sociocultural quantitative research into body image, while valuable in showing the sheer number of females affected by media constructs of women, has been criticised for being over-simplistic (e.g. Bordo, 2003; Budgeon, 2003; Blood, 2005; Malson et al., 2011), while qualitative research has paid insufficient attention to cultural and gender-specific meanings of body image, demonstrating why investigation into Instagram is warranted (see my above criticisms of Tiggemann et al., 2001; Ahern et al., 2011; Mooney et al., 2008; Diedrichs et al., 2011).

Recent feminist theorists and empirical work on body image have mainly attended to women's and adolescent girls' readings and interpretations of 'sexualised' representations of women in advertisements; yet, it remains unclear how their subjectivity is impacted, the cultural conditions in which such representations are accepted, resisted or negotiated, and the consequences of such actions (see my above critiques of Malson et al., 2011; Jackson & Vares, 2013). Although the post-feminist shift in media imagery is important to recognise, it points to a particular gap in the literature regarding how social and cultural constructions mediate gendered experiences of body image. Gill (2007a, 2008) maintains that, since there has been a retreat from cultural influence in this field, it is critical that I, as the researcher, focus on how culture and subjectivity interrelate, paying attention to how images may come to discipline, regulate and shape subjectivities of body image – as well as how resistance, conformity and agency are negotiated.

A criticism of earlier feminist work, using Foucault's (1975, 1977) docile bodies paradigm, is its lack of attention to resistance and subjectivity (Deaveux, 1994; Heyes, 1996), which this study hopes to remedy by incorporating Foucault's later work (1980a,

1980b, 1982, 1988). Since agency and choice are critical to feminist research, this research project aims to recognise the relationship between cultural conditions and the social/cultural construction of gender, with a focus on how language (as power) facilitates the relationship between subjectivity and the sociocultural context in which women find themselves.

The relationship between Instagram and body image concerns in young women requires further exploration. To date, reviews of research have mainly been quantitative (with one exception: Chua and Chang, 2016); although situated within a sociocultural framework, this research has yet to account for how women's subjectivities, practices and experiences are not so much *influenced* by their sociocultural context as *constituted within and by* the discursive contexts within which they are embedded.

It is particularly important to recognise the context of the visual-based platform itself, including an awareness of how social media differs from traditional media (see 1.2.2 for the section on social media and 1.3.1 for the section on traditional media); as it is constantly available, it may increase exposure to conventionally feminine bodies, while also having the potential to alter the dynamics and intensity of self-presentation and appearance-related comparisons. The majority of studies on Instagram have specifically focused on fitspiration imagery; this project takes a broader approach, accounting for all and any imagery that the women in the study identified as having an impact on their body image.

This project's social constructionist perspective is highly warranted to adequately understand women's body image within the contexts of their social realities that is embedded in gendered ideologies, imagery and power relations operating in Western patriarchal culture. To answer the research question 'How do young women construct their experiences of Instagram impacting on their body image?', participants will be required to bring three photographs from their own Instagram account that they feel have impacted on their body image, which will be discussed in the interview.

2. Methodology and Procedures

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents the choices and decisions involved in producing a qualitative study to further our understanding of the impact that using Instagram has on women's body image. It clarifies the critical realist epistemological position taken in this research, the rationale and choice of analysis (social constructionist thematic analysis) and the decision to include visual data. It also explains the process involved in gathering data, through semi-structured interviews with eight participants, and discusses reflexivity and ethical considerations.

2.2 Research Aims

I am concerned with the various ways in which participants define, construct and interpret their experiences of using Instagram from the possible meanings in society, taking into consideration the subject positions they occupy when drawing upon particular discourses. The aim is to understand how discourses and representations of the female body, in the context in which participants are culturally embedded, influence their subjective experiences of body image.

I intend to go beyond demonstrating how this research contributes to clinical practice by making suggestions for social change, research and advocacy, which would help us as a society to reflexively question and challenge the discourses used to explain, engage and dismiss women's body image concerns (Thompson, 1994). I hope to do this by investigating the ways in which women's bodies are affected by the demands of culture, which are potentially reiterated by social interactions, societal practices, social structures and socially produced meanings (Burr, 1995). More specifically, Instagram represents possibilities for enhancing and negotiating self-presentation, which further emphasises women's bodies as socially constructed. Since women are more likely to experience eating disorders and body image concerns in Western cultures (Cash & Henry, 1995; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002, Cash, 2004; Monro & Huon, 2005), we need to take into account how Western values, imagery and norms, especially a gendered idealisation of thinness, feature in the rise in body image disturbances among girls and women – of all ethnic minorities, in multicultural contexts and across the rest of the world (Katzman & Lee, 1997; Nasser & Malson, 2009).

Yet, cultural interpretations of the female body are minimised and marginalised within medical and biopsychosocial models of 'eating disorders', failing to take into

account the ideology, imagery and institutional parameters governing the construction of gender in our culture (Bordo, 2003; Holmes, 2016). A social constructionist perspective can call attention to some of the central tenets of gender and body image within our society (Bordo, 2003). I chose to focus on the body image of 'ordinary women' because dominant discourses surrounding psychopathology can normalise their distress. Feminist perspectives argue that the 'pathology' of anorexia or bulimia are prevalent among women in our culture; however, because of societal (mis)conceptions around the body, 'ordinary women' with body image problems are considered healthy or normal – and therefore do not receive psychological help (Bordo, 2003). Consequently, this research project could have implications for wider debates – at the therapeutic, social and political levels – about what facilitates well-being and limits damage for women (see Milton, 2010, for Counselling Psychology's responsibility towards social justice).

2.3 Rationale for a Qualitative Research Approach

I have chosen a qualitative approach because it is capable of producing knowledge that best suits my research question. I do not wish to strip context from the data; instead, I am seeking to understand the sociocultural context participants occupy and to acknowledge their experiences as grounded and structured by their external reality (Burkitt, 1999; Brown, 2001). Neither do I believe in an observable, singular and universal truth. A qualitative approach enables the acknowledgement of multiple subjective realities, which are actively constructed and interpreted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Similarly, I take a critical and questioning stance; I want to consider why participants construct their experiences in the ways they do, and whose interests this serves (Willig, 1999).

Braun and Clarke (2013) propose that qualitative inquiry is useful for acknowledging the subjective experience of marginalised individuals. I would deem the women in this research to be oppressed by gender constructs, which dominant Western discourses obscure. The aim is to construct an 'emic' (insider) perspective from the views of socially and culturally embedded participants. This fits the ethos of Counselling Psychology as it enables a critical view of the culture in which we, too, are embedded (Marcus & Fischer, 1986).

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my position as a cultural member (which I expand on in section 2.9 on reflexivity) and cultural commenter who sees and questions the shared values, assumptions and constructions integral to being a member of a particular society (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I recognise that I bring my own subjectivity into the research process; however, when acknowledged this can be a strength rather than a weakness.

2.4 Ontological and Epistemological Position

The approach to this research project is positioned within social constructionism. A social constructionist position fundamentally rejects 'naïve realism' – the idea that an objective reality exists, which can merely be observed (Burr, 1995). However, within social constructionism it is possible to take different ontological and epistemological positions; the overlaps in and variations between these positions muddy the familiar relativism–realism debates (Burr, 1995). I have found this a challenge to navigate; nevertheless, I reject an extreme relativist position, in which the material world is divorced from reality, and our linguistic descriptions of things, events and mental processes create all objects in our consciousness (e.g. Derrida, 1974).

Instead, I align with a critical realist position, which, as Parker (1992) describes, views reality as existing outside of discourse and ontological status as including all aspects of our physical and social environment. In this way, human experiences are already grounded in and structured by elements of external reality, such as subjectivity, embodiment, materiality, aesthetics and power (Burkitt, 1999; Brown, 2001). Therefore, knowledge is co-constructed among people, and versions or understandings of knowledge are shared and fabricated through discourse (Blumer, 1986).

However, Parker (1998) argues that such social constructions are nevertheless based on reality as it is structured. While I do not believe that existence determines knowledge, it can impose restrictions on the variety of ways to construct the world. Willig (1999) therefore argues that taking a critical stance within social constructionism makes it possible to challenge our underlying assumptions about the world – and can also function as social critique. Drawing on Parker (1992), she suggests that the existence of these structures and the events that they produce means that some constructions are more likely than others. Thus, I propose that the women's

constructions of body image will be situated within, and structured by, their external reality, mediated through the possibilities and constraints of their lives and influenced by their experiences and interpretations of gender and body, as well as the socio-political and cultural domain in which they exist. As such, how we commonly understand our reality and the categories and concepts we use are influenced by social structure, social practices and their associated discourses, which are situated within the historical, social and cultural context in which we live (Burr, 2003).

I do not solely believe in the determining effects of discourse. Rather – and similarly to Willig (1991) and Burkitt (1999) – I argue that, while people are exposed to knowledge(s) from their social environment, they are also rhetoricians, arguers and active thinkers, capable of exercising choice and making decisions about their social values and ideas. I believe that, as human beings, we are interested in constructions that offer us validity, legitimacy and advantage; yet, I still consider such representations to inevitably derive from inequalities and patterns of domination in broader society (Burkitt, 1999).

Lastly, knowledge changes over time, being provisional and ever-evolving (Burr, 1995). All knowledge is relative to time and space; as we and our social world change so does our subjective reality (Charon, 2010). Discourses act as a system of meaning; they provide ways of representing ourselves and constitute not only what we think, say or do, but also what we feel and desire (Foucault, 1980b). Other influence us, and our interactions with others determine the meanings we assign to ourselves and our relationships. These meanings are dependent on social interaction; the historical, cultural and social context; the use of symbols (such as language); and our values, beliefs and prior experiences (Mead, 1934). Therefore, these meanings are intersubjective and perceived, and are socially negotiated, reproduced and reinterpreted among individuals (Burr, 1995).

2.5 Method

A critical realist stance, influenced by constructionism, informed my decision to use thematic analysis (TA) – and specifically, the social constructionist model of TA (Burr & Clarke, 2006). Foucault's (1975, 1977, 1980a, 1980b, 1982, 1988) work informed the method too.

2.5.1 Overview of Thematic Analysis

TA is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is unusual within qualitative analytic approaches in that it offers a method (a tool or technique), which is unbounded by theoretical commitments, rather than a methodology, which is theoretically informed and provides a framework for research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA can therefore be perceived as less established than methods that stem from a theoretical position (such as conversation analysis or interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)), which are conducted within the parameters set by that framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, TA is not theory-less; rather, it can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and research paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Consequently, many versions of TA exist, with differences in underlying assumptions and procedures that impact their applicability (Braun & Clarke, 2016). There are two broad approaches to TA: those developed within a (post-)positivist framework, which emphasise 'code reliability' (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998; Guest et al., 2012; Joffe, 2012), and those more suited to qualitative research, which emphasise an 'organic' approach to coding and theme development and highlight the active role of the researcher (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006). I have chosen this latter version.

TA can be positioned as method for realist or experiential claims. However, it is well-suited with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms, as well as a critical framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Its theoretical freedom means it is compatible with this research project, which fits within a social constructionist and critical realist paradigm. TA is a flexible and useful research method that can provide a rich, comprehensive and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It also provides an accessible and systematic procedure for generating codes and themes from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes refer to the smallest units of analysis; they capture the raw, interesting and meaningful features of the data (Boyatiz, 1998) and produce the building blocks for themes, which characterise a level of patterned meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes provide a framework for organising and reporting the researcher's analytical observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight that the researcher should be clear about their epistemological stance and assumptions, including what was done, why and how. I explain these decisions below.

2.5.2 Social Constructionism

It is generally agreed that a social constructionist inquiry is concerned with the processes by which people come to define, explain or account for the world, including their own lives and selves (Gergen, 1985). In this framework, a 'discourse' refers to a set of statements, meanings, metaphors, images and representations that construct a particular version of events and the ways in which events and persons, or a class of persons, are depicted; that is, a specific way of representing them or it in a certain form (Burr, 1995). However, any object is surrounded by numerous discourses and each discourse strives to represent or construct the meaning of material differently; therefore, each discourse raises its own distinctive issues and implications (Burr, 2003). As such, any discourse can claim to be the 'truth' by describing what the object 'really' is – this is important when considering issues of identity, power and change (Burr, 1995). Certain descriptions and explanations sustain various social patterns to the exclusion of others; however, the extent to which such understandings continue depends on social processes (e.g. communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric), and it is therefore possible for descriptions and explanations to alter, threatening certain actions but inviting others (Gergen, 1985). From this perspective, discourses constrain and limit what we think and say, what we can do and what can happen to us (Willig, 1999).

When considering identity and the individual, I draw on Gergen's (2011) concept of the 'relational self', which reconceptualises the mind – and the self, in particular. The attempt is construct an ontology that envisions a psychological self as emerging from relational processes that exist in the social world. Gergen (2011) expands on the concept of a relational self with the following propositions. First, the self as discursive action does not view discourse (for example, 'I am upset') as a manifestation or outward expression of an inner world. Rather, the meaning of such discourse depends on its use in relationships and plays a specific social function; for example, it may secure others' support or encouragement. Both the condition and function of discourse are restricted by social convention (a report of depression cannot easily function as an invitation to laughter or admiration). Second, discourses act as

performance – one's talk is essentially performative in function, in that it performs an action within a relationship (it is culturally bewildering to perform 'anger' in Western culture without the performative actions, such as a stern face and voice intensity or volume). Lastly, discursive actions are relationally embedded – one draws on the words, actions and patterns that exist in culture. Therefore, when looking for explanations – in terms of what individuals do or feel, or in terms of groups, classes or societies – attention is directed towards the linguistic space in which they share with other people (Burr, 1995).

In Gergen's (2015) view, personal identity and individual psychological states are wholly social constructions. It can be said, then, that our identity is constructed out of the discourses that are culturally available to us, and which we draw on in our interactions with other people (Burr, 2003). As such, individuals are the 'end-product' of the combination of available discourses; for example, discourse of age, gender and sexuality (Burr, 1995, p.51). It is important to consider how a limited number of discourses surrounding an aspect of identity (e.g. previous concepts of sexuality) sometimes leaves us with few alternatives; we have no choice but to adopt the forms of representations or discourses that surround us (Burr, 1995).

Thus, social constructionism views discourses and representations as intimately tied to power relations, and therefore as having political effects. To understand power inequalities in society, it is important to examine how particular discursive practices create and uphold particular forms of social life; here, I am particularly interested in the discourses and representations that uphold inequalities that affect women (Burr, 1995). It is important to mention that 'common sense' or 'truthful' constructions or representations will vary, because discursive practices depend on the historical, sociocultural and discursive context in which they appear, and, by offering particular subject positions, have implications for the construction of meaning and experience (Parker, 1992).

To go into further detail about power and discourse, I draw on the work of Foucault (1980b), who tells us power comes from 'down below' rather than being held by a dominant group. Foucault (1980a) argues that disciplinary power operates systematically within the micro-level of everyday life in modern society; it is dispersed, exercised and embedded in social practices, institutions and technologies. For Foucault

(1980a, 1988), the body is the site of power, subjected to and constituted by discourses and norms in everyday practices that sustain and reproduce power relations. Power and knowledge imply one another; power is deployed through knowledge, and as such, power cannot be possessed but instead operates as an effect of discourse (Foucault, 1980b). Foucault (1980b, p.194) emphasises power not as repressive but productive: 'power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.' Therefore, the types of knowledge produced represent particular meanings, representations, conventions and motivations, influencing our behaviours and actions (Pylpa, 1998). In this way, knowledge is not objective or neutral; rather, it refers to a prevailing 'common sense' construction or version of a phenomenon that receives the authority of 'truth' in a culture, such that knowledge is intimately bound to power (Foucault, 1977, Burr, 1995). Discourses allow us to exercise power by providing legitimacy and authority for certain kinds of knowledge while undermining others, and, in their capacity to form subject positions, enable people to be effectively controlled (Foucault, 1980b; Burr, 1995; Pylpa, 1998). This perspective allows me to comment, in the Analysis chapter, about the subject positions available for participants to occupy when they draw on a particular discourse as well as their possibilities and limitations, dependent on how one is positioned within prevailing discourses (Burr, 2003).

Foucault (1980b) argues that conformity is achieved not by coercion but through desire. By constructing conceptions of normality and deviance, power operates as major source of social discipline and conformity; it makes norms appear 'moral', 'acceptable' or 'right' and creates the desire to conform to these norms (Pylpa, 1998). Burr (1995, p.65) offers a useful insight into Foucault; namely, that the forms of the knowledge that produce the contemporary 'individual' – 'a person inhabited by drives and motivations, possessed by traits and characteristics and whose freely chosen actions are monitored by conscience' – are very powerful, because they effectively manage the control of society and its members, without force, through 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1980b).

Foucault (1977) expands on this in his observation of the 'panoptic' gaze, which members of society internalise; they are compelled to regulate, monitor and control their own behaviour towards prevailing standards of 'normality'. This means individuals voluntarily control themselves through self-imposed conformity to cultural norms. Foucault (1980a) refers to this as 'biopower': a form of power that operates on our

bodies by regulating them through self-surveillance and self-disciplinary practices – practices that, if adopted, lead to subjugation. This form of power is only effective because it is based on the assumption that people do not recognise they are being controlled; instead, they believe they enter such processes willingly and that their self-monitoring and self-disciplining is their own choice and for their own well-being (Burr, 1995). Therefore, Foucault (1980a) argues that an essential function of power is its ability to mask itself; its success lies in its ability to hide its own mechanisms.

Lastly, I acknowledge Foucault's (1982; 1988) notion of agency. I am keen to retain some sense of choice and agency; I see the 'person' as one who can take up or resist positions within discourses, including being able to critically reflect on and analyse the discourses that frame their lives. As such, I have thought about how the participants resist, reject or challenge particular constructions of body image, and whether they are able to draw on repressed or marginalised discourses. Burr (1999) argues that social constructionism needs to allow for some notion of choice or agency, because the absence of either makes any debate or argumentation futile. However, the concept of agency in social constructionism requires a great deal more thought, and has yet to be fully addressed (Burr, 1999). Social structures are said to regulate the thoughts and behaviours of individuals in accordance with the rules and norms that discipline them. In contradiction, agency is presented as a possibility to stand outside of the social formations that produce and constitutes us, and – to some extent – to freely alter those structures. Burr (1995, p.153) therefore argues for an alternative view: 'that we both actively produce and manipulate, and are products of [discourse]; discourse allows us the possibility of personal and social change through our capacity to identity, understand and resist the discourses that we are also subject to'.

Resistance is part of Foucault's (1980b) definition of power: all power produces resistance in the form of counter-discourses, which produce new knowledge, speak new truths and thus constitute new powers (Ramazanoglu, 1997). Prevailing discourses are therefore always under threat from alternatives, which can extricate them from their position as 'truth' (Burr, 1995). Any 'truth' is not totally secure, opening up the possibility of change through resistance. To take advantage of the unstable nature of knowledge and power, we need to examine the discourses that constitute ourselves and our subjectivity. This is not to say that change is easy; dominant discourses are often

tied to social arrangements and practices that support the significance and position of powerful groups, so one is implicitly challenging their associated practices, structures and power relations (Burr, 1995). However, the social and historical constitution of the subject is not a limit on agency but rather the precondition for taking action (Bordo, 1999). Individual actions are not caused by societal conditions, but they are grounded and mediated by them; thus, the conditions of life that constitute the individual's subjectivity provide reasons for individuals' actions (Willig, 1999).

2.5.3 Social Constructionist Thematic Analysis

For this research, I have chosen to employ a social constructionist TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006), situated within a critical realist framework (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). This allows the research project to acknowledge socially produced meanings while still understanding them as having a relationship to participants' material or experiential reality (Braun et al., 2013). A social constructionist TA fits within a critical realist framework, as it can both 'reflect reality and unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81). The flexibility of TA enables it to be informed by social constructionism and Foucauldian principles.

Social constructionist TA examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences are socially constructed and are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society, rather than reflecting a self-evident or inherently true physiological reality (Braun et al., 2013). A critical realist understanding of the body is adopted; meanings of the body are presumed real, in that they represent a perceived truth for people and society (Frauley & Pearce, 2007). Participants' responses and sentiments were therefore treated as real *for them* but theorised as stemming from available meanings in society. However, I take the critical perspective in that 'people's talk is not treated as a transparent window into their world' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.95).

The analysis is inductive in nature as the themes are strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using an inductive approach informed my decision to not undertake a comprehensive literature review prior to the analysis, so as to negate the risk of narrowing or focusing the data before analysis. Instead, I carried out a preliminary literature review to acclimate to the nuances that may appear in the data

(Tuckett, 2005). Consequently, I focused on participants' talk to look for constructions of objects, events, meanings and experiences.

'Data corpus' refers to all the data collected within TA, while 'data set' refers to the data that will be used in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is possible to provide either a comprehensive thematic description of the data set or a more detailed, nuanced account of a few themes therein (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I am concerned with shared meanings, I have chosen to provide a rich, thematic description of the entire data set; as such, the themes identified and analysed reflect the content of the data. When analysing the data, I considered the codes and themes to capture a level of pattern response or meaning. I did not take the quantitative approach of assuming that the prevalence of a code/theme in the data meant that a code/theme was more significant; instead, the importance of a code/theme depended on whether it captured important elements of the experience being shared in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In social constructionist TA, themes are typically analysed at a latent, interpretative level (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, Ely et al. (1997) argue that themes do not simply 'emerge' but rather are created by our own thinking about, and linking of, the data. I therefore took an active role in identifying patterns/themes, from which my own subjectivity cannot be separated. To acknowledge this, I was reflexive towards my own biases and role in the research process (see reflexivity section 2.9).

At the latent level, TA analyses the underlying meanings, ideologies, conceptualisations and constructions that are theorised as informing or underpinning the semantic content of the data (what is being communicated by the participants; Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the underlying epistemology of this research is not essentialist, there is no attempt to identify an objective, singular or universal truth that resides within the participants. Instead, focus is shifted towards acknowledging multiple subjectivities (with the corresponding implication that meanings are complex, layered and shifting) and how participants' constructions, situated in their specific sociocultural contexts, enable these subjectivities (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

2.6 Rationale for Choice of Methodology

Initially, I was interested in participants' subjective experiences and intended to employ IPA. However, after reviewing the data set, I believed that such a focus on

inner experience would not allow for adequate analysis of crucial aspects of the phenomenon – especially theorising the broader assumptions, structures and meanings that underpinned the data. The meanings participants ascribed seemed less attributable to underlying cognitions, motivations or individuality than to their sociocultural context, societal practices and structures, and discourses in which they were embedded. IPA *does* subscribe to light social constructionism as it endorses sociocultural and historical influences as implicated in the experiences of individuals and examines how a person's context affects how their world is discursively constructed (Eatough & Smith, 2006; 2008). Meaning and interpretation given to experience is important to this research project, however, IPA's experiential focus means it provides detailed accounts that emphasis meaning and sense-making as related to cognitive processes - this was incongruent with the data that appeared to focus on shared, socially produced meanings that emphasis experiences of body image as socially constructed. The project, therefore, recognised the importance of identifying what is common to the phenomenon in the way that it is constructed and making sense of these commonalities (as related to socio-political, historical and cultural processes), rather than focusing on unique and idiosyncratic meanings at an individual level – which very much aligns with the aims of Thematic Analysis, instead of IPA (Braun and Clarke, 2013). TA offered unique flexibility in that it enabled the research project to be used within a constructionist framework and allowed focus to be directed towards the representations and constructions of female body image; the method offers a way to present an interpretative and conceptual analysis that offers insight into shared meanings and experiences that are most relevant to the phenomenon. TA also facilitated the analysis to be informed by Foucauldian principles (as referred to in section 2.5.3) which meant issues related to power and agency could be highlighted; the method offers a way to examine discourses as intimately tied to power relations and therefore as having political effects, and this means the research can make implications beyond academia and into policy or practice arenas. As such, the data was much more amenable to social constructionist TA and was chosen to remain faithful to the data and the participants' narratives. I have explained my reasoning for ruling out other methods that would lend themselves to a social constructionist approach down below.

The constructivist approach of grounded theory, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed, would suit my constructivist–interpretative stance. However, I decided against this method because I wanted neither to develop a theoretical analysis to explain the data nor to lose nuanced aspects of the data by illustrating a theoretical claim. Furthermore, it seemed that the analytic procedures of grounded theory were too conceptual and could result in the data being forced into preconceived categories.

I considered discourse analysis (DA) as a method. However, I disagree with discursive psychology's relativist outlook on reality and view that phenomena are discursive processes (Willig, 2008). I am more aligned with a critical realist perspective, which considers our perceptions and sensations to reference the real world in some way; they are neither independent of it nor produced entirely through language (Hruby, 2001). Although I draw on aspects of discursive psychology that position talk as performing certain functions, I do not ascribe to focusing on grammar in language (such as Harre, 1983) In particular, I believed the data would benefit from examining constructions of shared meaning rather than lexical comparability.

Another potentially appropriate method is Foucauldian DA. However, I ultimately rejected this because I was not exploring genealogy, governmentality and/or broader institutional practices to the extent that would necessitate a full Foucauldian DA (Willig, 2008). While I draw on Foucauldian principles (such as power implications, subjectification and agency) because they are applicable to the data, Foucauldian DA lacks the theoretical flexibility of TA, and the latter gave me the freedom to produce an appropriate method by which to analyse participants' accounts. I therefore chose to use social constructionist TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and to enhance this with Foucauldian-informed principles, enabling me to explore how the participants' accounts are being constructed and positioned.

2.7 Visual Methods

Participants brought three photographs from their Instagram accounts to the interviews that impacted how they felt about their own body image. This section provides a rationale for the inclusion of visual methods in the context of a critical realist ontological status and constructionist paradigm.

2.7.1 Rationale for Visual Methods

Photographs that participants chose from their own Instagram accounts – that is, 'found' (pre-existing) data – were used as an elicitation tool in interviews to enable a collaborative process; participants' chosen images stimulated and guided the discussions (Harper, 1987). This differs from how photographs are typically used within sociology and anthropology, in which the researcher tends to use images to demonstrate *their own understanding* of the participant's social world (Harper, 1987; Gold, 1991). Indeed, in this research project the roles are reversed: participants interpreted and gave meaning to the photographs to communicate how their social and cultural context affected them. This enabled participants to confront my own and others' preconceived notions of the sociocultural information contained in the photographs.

Instagram is suggestive of the 'hyper-visual' in mass culture that is embedded within our daily lives (Mellor & Shilling, 1997). The visual is prioritised within post-industrialised and Western cultures, and Instagram meets the category of 'visual culture', which includes any visual form designed to be looked at and to give information, meaning or feeling to the viewer (Mirzoeff, 1998). It is therefore important to demonstrate a level of attentiveness to what is being *seen*; sighted individuals navigate visually and seeing is an important part of existence and being in the world (Banks, 2007). In addition, I am concerned with the images that the women see on Instagram, so it is important to recognise the imagery and ideology that mediate their construction of the female body. Participants' chosen photographs of other women are significant in that they are also seen to represent carriers and re-producers of culture (Bordo, 2003).

A photograph can be held as objective 'truth', because it holds a visual moment, but in fact all images are technically and socially constructed (Harper, 1987). From a social constructionist perspective, a photograph can only represent a 'partial' rather than a 'complete' truth because culture is not boundaried; rather, it is constantly evolving (Becker, 1986). This is crucial for the analysis, as I do not wish to provide an accurate 'truth'; rather, meaning and experience are seen to be socially produced and reproduced, and the research aims to provide a snapshot of how participants' sociocultural and historical contexts influence their experiences.

Lastly, including visual data affords agency and empowerment; participants actively select their photographs and enable the researcher to see the world through their

eyes (Pain, 2012). This fits my epistemological stance, which acknowledges that the purpose is to understand the participants' experiences and recognise the physical, cultural and social world in which they are situated. In this way, visual experience is understood to be embedded in social and cultural practices.

2.8 Evaluating the Research

Given the flexibility of TA, general qualitative research assessment criteria can be applied to this research project. I have therefore used Yardley's (2008) broad and pluralistic stance to demonstrate the validity of the research, which defines four principles, considered below.

2.8.1 Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2008) suggests that sensitivity to context can be demonstrated by having an awareness of existing literature on the research topic. I have engaged in an extensive reading of experimental and theoretical literature in psychology and sociology, and have stayed informed on discourses on body image, women and Instagram.

Also, in line with social constructionist and Foucauldian (1972, 1980b) principles, the literature reviewed traces and uncovers the conditions in which slenderness emerged as a culturally specific ideal of femininity, in particular at the intersection of gender and culture arising from the social and material conditions of the 19th century (Brumberg, 1988; Bordo, 2003; see section 1.4.3). Furthermore, I have exposed how certain ideas that cohere around women's bodies are accepted as 'truth', while examining the conditions that contribute to slenderness as an ideal status, including how it is constituted in contemporary discourses, and continues to exist and have value for us in Western society (Foucault, 1982; Terry, 1999; see section 1.4.4).

In addition, Yardley (2008) suggests to consider the participants' contexts too. In the interviews, I was empathetic and sensitive to ensure participants felt at ease and comfortable enough to share their experiences. I used a semi-structured interview format with open-ended questions to encourage participants to speak freely and respond to what was important to them. I aimed to demonstrate to each participant that I was interested in hearing their own thoughts, and I was aware if any part of the discussion was difficult. Furthermore, I showed a sensitivity to participants' contexts and the

sociocultural influences on their experience. In line with a social constructionist perspective, I took into consideration not only how and why participants expressed their views but also why they did not express particular views (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I acknowledged my own subjectivity as a researcher and as a woman who uses Instagram, as shown in section 2.9 on personal reflexivity.

2.8.2 Commitment and Rigour

I showed commitment by being attentive to the participants during data collection and analysis. Guest et al. (2012) argue that the interview process should be taken seriously; for example, the researcher must prepare, especially if they are new to the experience of interviewing. I followed this advice, including conducting an informal pilot interview to inform me of any questions that could be reworded and moments that could have been better handled.

I conducted the analysis thoroughly and systematically to give sufficient attention and detail to coding each participant's account. I ensured the themes were coherent, distinctive and consistent by checking them against the extracts and transcripts. I hoped to offer the reader a well-organised and convincing story about the data and topic. I further aimed to demonstrate commitment and rigour by gaining feedback from my supervisor and research colleagues from which I made minor adjustments. Such feedback helped to make sense of the data when I became too fixated. I have gone beyond the 'surface' of the data to demonstrate an interpretation that shows depth, detail and insight into the topic.

2.8.3 Transparency and Coherence

I have intended to be transparent by showing the reader how I have conducted this research project, including reflecting on my methodological choices and making visible my role in the construction of knowledge (see section 2.9 on personal reflexivity). In the next section, I describe how I selected participants, developed the interview schedule and carried out the interview and analysis, with the aim of showing coherence between the described method and reported analysis, as well adherence to the principles of social constructionism within a critical realist perspective. In the write-up of my analysis, I have been transparent by including illustrative extracts, ensuring the analytical narrative remains grounded in the data. I have also intended to make my role

in the research process visible by being reflexive and keeping a research diary, which show that my own experiences, feelings and thoughts are inevitably part of the research (see Appendix 1).

2.8.4 Impact and Importance

Yardley's (2008) final evaluation criteria is that research should be impactful and important. I have chosen an area that remains under-researched in psychology and that could contribute to key issues surrounding image-based social media, body image and women. This study's provision of a sociocultural perspective on women's experiences could further contribute to our understanding of body image. I expand on this further in the Discussion chapter when considering the relevance of the findings for Counselling Psychology.

2.9 Personal Reflexivity

TA acknowledges the active role of the researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this section, I therefore give an account of how my own experiences, values and positions have influenced my research interests and the ways I have chosen to undertake the research and represent its findings (Harrison et al., 2001). I have also influenced the research as a theorist/thinker, which I have outlined earlier by delineating my epistemological and theoretical positions.

Following Willig's (2008) advice of transparency in qualitative research, I identify myself as coming from an Indian British background and a Western (UK) culture that demonstrates a preference for thinner female bodies. Within Indian culture, women who reflect the ideal standard of beauty *also* adhere to Eurocentric norms of fairness and thinness. The globalisation of Western media has influenced women's body-shape ideals portrayed in Indian televisions, films, magazines and advertisements, and is compounded by Indian mythology that aligns with religious and cultural beliefs that privilege fair and thin (but curvaceous) women. The cultural contexts in which I am embedded have unified beauty norms to reflect similar gendered aesthetics. In particular, the ideal that is most accessible to myself is the desire for ethnically ambiguous women with curves – but only in *certain* places – and therefore as a woman of colour, I have 'parts' that are deemed worthy and beautiful, but in order to be accepted I am (still) required to be thin. This aligns with feminist thought that views

'empowered' (marketable) women of colour as evidence of Brown (and Black) female liberation. Furthermore, my social class and educational attainment have fostered the ideology of 'successful' women to mean intelligent, independent and *thin*, especially since my female mentors and role models (both Indian and White British) have encapsulated this message too. I believe that culture, ethnicity, religion and societal expectations have determined what I, as a British Indian woman, believe is beautiful and by extension, what appearance I strive to attain.

Being a young woman, aged twenty-seven and a millennial, I have grown up in a generation that actively uses social media platforms like Instagram and I was curious about the psychology of Instagram and its impact on mental health. My initial reasons for selecting this research topic were, therefore, based on my own experiences of using Instagram. I felt captivated by visually appealing and attractive photographs of other women and found myself scrolling through these images at any spare moment. My feed became populated with a thin and attractive Western ideal of beauty that is similarly reflected by Indian cultural perspectives on beauty to mean thin and fair women. I realised these women were not just celebrities or models but my friends, peers and acquaintances. It seemed to me that these 'everyday' women that replicated an image of beauty and success by demonstrating thinness, and reinforced the ideology that being thin is normal, central and expected for female attractiveness. This created anxiety and envy within me as I struggled not to compare myself to the images. The photographs affected how I felt about my own body, especially if I considered whether I met such expectations of appearance. Talking to other women about Instagram, I realised I was not alone in this experience. I felt Instagram created a perception that women I considered my peers were meeting this standard – and therefore, so should I. In personal therapy, I explored my own feelings towards an archetype of thinness. Although this is a complex and difficult subject position to inhabit, it is plausible that my research participants may have seen me as meeting the societal standard of being thin and attractive, and I felt it was important to recognise how this could affect our interactions. It was possible that I could encapsulate participants' challenging, difficult and complicated feelings towards an 'ideal'; a challenging contention that I was aware of in the interview process and when reviewing the data. Ethically, I was aware of the importance of the debrief session and seeking supervisory consultation if necessary.

On reflection, I felt that Instagram warranted more attention in psychological research. I was aware of wanting to provide a 'voice' to my participants, who felt impacted by their experiences of Instagram, and I was inspired by individuals who shared discourses of these experiences online. However, I do not subscribe to a 'naïve' realist view; I acknowledge that 'giving voice' involves making decisions in terms of selecting, editing and using narrative evidence to support my argument (see Fine, 2002). I recognised that my own experiences of and attitudes towards Instagram would influence this research, and I have reflected on my own assumptions and attitudes during the research (see Appendix 1 for excerpts from my research diary).

I have tried to maintain a stance of openness and curiosity towards how the analysis may emerge. However, I was aware of making some assumptions; in particular, that participants would describe Instagram as having a negative impact on their body image. This is based upon my understanding of the literature, prevailing discourses in society and my own experience. I therefore needed to remain flexible in my understanding of participants' accounts, as well as to preserve my own subjectivity.

Braun and Clarke (2006) acknowledge that the dialectic position that researchers take as both cultural members and cultural observers needs to be thought of and addressed. This is particularly important because I am a woman, which affects my relationship to my own body, and because I use Instagram. Parker (1997, p.48) believes that personal experience reminds us that 'we understand and share, partially at some level the story'; as such, my own reflections may provide insight into participants' social realities. Thus, being aware of my own subjectivity was a necessary and important part of understanding the production of knowledge.

2.10 Data Collection
2.10.1 Sampling
Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that the flexibility of TA means sampling size can vary dependent on the research design. I followed their advice of using a small sample size (eight participants) to capture the complexities and nuances in the data.

Boyatzis (1998) advocates using a homogenous sample to offer insight into a particular experience within a particular context. This logic has consequences for the applicability of findings, which should provide rich, transparent and contextualised

accounts of the participants and enable readers to evaluate the findings' transferability to people viewed as similar. The inclusion criteria is listed below.

2.10.2 Sampling Inclusion Criteria

As I wished to identify and comment on shared meaning in society and culture, the sample was restricted to a specific group of people who share a similar physical environment, allowing for meanings and responses to be understood as socio-culturally located and produced. Therefore, only women who live in the UK were included. No restrictions were placed on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability.

I chose to concentrate on women aged between 18 and 25 years old, as they are recognised as Instagram's biggest users (Poushter, 2016), and also seem to be the most affected by their experiences of using Instagram (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). To gain in-depth and rich data, participants must have used Instagram for a minimum of six months.

A non-clinical population was chosen to shed insight into the blurred line between 'normality' and 'pathology' in body image disturbances. I wished to explore how women in many different forms, with bodies of different sizes and shapes and considered to be 'well-adjusted', can also be at risk of such disturbances (see Bordo, 2003). Also, within my role as a Counselling Psychologist in Training I am bound by ethical practice, and I felt that interviewing individuals with a current or historical diagnosis of an eating disorder about their body image could be traumatising.

2.10.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Finlay (2008) proposed that, to enable rich and detailed data to emerge, qualitative data collection should allow the researcher to be attentive and curious to participants' first-person accounts. I wanted a method that would allow participants to speak freely; to share and develop their ideas, concerns and feelings. I therefore decided to use semi-structured one-to-one interviews, which is a preferred method for facilitating interaction, engagement and understanding of participants' experiences (Finlay, 2008). One-to-one interviews give participants space to reflect, think and be heard; they also offer the flexibility to ask questions that respond to participants' responses or concerns, and to explore any other interesting areas that arise (Willig, 2013).

Willig (2013) suggests the importance of establishing a rapport so that participants feel comfortable talking about their experiences, and emphasises holding a naïve position to enable participants to give voice to otherwise implicit assumptions and expectations. As Polkinghorne (2005) suggests, the skills and training I have developed as a Counselling Psychologist in training mean I should be well-suited to eliciting in-depth information from an interview.

2.10.4 Preliminary Interview Schedule

My preliminary interview schedule (Appendix 2) consisted of questions covering the areas of Instagram and body image. These questions were developed from an overview of research on body image and social media, as there is little qualitative psychological research specific to Instagram. As Finlay (2008) recommends, the schedule was guided by my research question and I tried to use a combination of guiding questions and prompts. I thought about the range of topics I wanted to cover, which helped me to organise and create a sequence to the interview structure. I chose to work gradually towards more sensitive issues.

I re-appraised my interview schedule, which was initially quite long, I recognised an overlap between questions relating to Instagram use in the demographic questionnaire and similar questions in the interview. I subsequently made the questions relating to Instagram brief, concise and open-ended to allow participants to share what they felt was most salient to their experiences. I practised the interview informally with a peer, who uses Instagram regularly. This was useful to check the flow of the interview and establish which questions needed further prompts, and, following feedback, I reworded confusing questions. These changes are reflected in the final interview schedule (Appendix 3).

2.10.5 Pilot Interview

I chose to conduct a pilot interview, as this was my first research project using semi-structured interviews and social constructionist TA. I wanted to see if the interview schedule was clear in its aim and sequence of questions, and if any further revisions were required. I also wished to gain feedback on my of interviewing style, how the interviewee felt and whether they felt their experiences were sufficiently explored.

An acquaintance, who met the aforementioned sampling criteria, expressed an interest in this research project. I wanted to give the participant and myself the experience of the complete interview; as such, I carried out pre-interview and post-interview procedures.

The pilot participant felt she had been heard and liked the use of photographs to help her reflect on her experiences. I reviewed the data where it seemed complex in material for most areas. I noticed a few missed opportunities to explore certain aspects or elicit more information; therefore, I recognised I needed to stay more attuned to what was being said. The changes I had made earlier to the interview schedule seemed to create a better flow and structure. However, I believed that being more relaxed with the itinerary could allow the participant to speak more freely and allow me to respond to unanticipated aspects.

2.11 Procedure
2.11.1 Recruitment

After receiving ethical approval (see section 2.13 and Appendix 4), I recruited eight participants. To do this, I prepared a flyer (Appendix 5) and placed it in various public spaces, such as gyms, coffee shops, libraries, nightclubs, shopping centres and shops in London and the County of Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. However, this did not yield many responses, so I posted the flyer on Facebook and Instagram and individuals in my public network shared it, which returned more responses. For fairness, I selected the first eight participants who responded to the flyer.

2.11.2 Initial Telephone Contact

The advertisement included an email address and a dedicated research telephone number to allow respondents to express initial interest. When respondents made telephone contact, I gave them further information about the research and the requirements for participants' involvement. The advertisement did not state the sampling inclusion criteria, so I also checked whether the respondent met these requirements, first ensuring that the respondent was in a confidential space. In hindsight, the use of a pre-prepared telephone schedule would have made this part of the discussion more uniform. At the end of the telephone calls, I arranged to send interested

respondents a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 6), which outlined the research in more detail, so they could make an informed decision about whether to participate.

2.11.3 Pre-Interview Discussion

For two participants, I pre-booked rooms within a charity's offices for our initial meeting; the remaining six requested me to meet them in their home. I checked the participants were comfortable before asking them to read the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 6). I allowed time and space for them to ask any questions. A few wondered how the interview process would occur. I therefore explained my interest in understanding their experiences, assured them that there were no wrong answers, and clarified that although I may say very little in the interviews, I would be listening and asking appropriate questions in response to what they shared. I explained that at the end of the interview there would be a debrief in which they could share their experiences of participating and ask any further questions. After this, I gave them the consent form to read and sign, which I also co-signed (Appendix 7).

2.11.4 Background Demographics Data Collection

After the consent form was signed and before the interview began, I asked each participant to complete an optional background demographic data collection form (Appendix 8), which they all agreed to complete. The purpose of this was to enable readers to understand participants' backgrounds and thus contextualise the sample. The form included questions about age; ethnicity; sexual orientation; relationship status; education; employment and Instagram usage.

2.11.5 Interview

Interviews ranged from approximately one to two hours in length. They were recorded on a digital voice recorder; the data was subsequently transferred onto an encrypted USB and stored in a locked cabinet in my home. The recorded material will be destroyed once the evaluation of this research is completed.

I memorised the interview schedule, which helped me to feel prepared and eased my nerves before meeting each participant. I adopted a relaxed and open manner that enabled a rapport to be built. Asking about the participant's Instagram usage seemed to

be an easy and innocuous way to begin, helping them to assimilate to the interview process before introducing the substantive topics of the schedule.

In the first interview, I initially struggled to ask for more detail in a spontaneous manner, and feel that my approach was too formal. This improved in the subsequent interviews as I became more adept at listening attentively rather than focusing on what to ask or say next; hence, I was able to respond more flexibly and revisit areas of interest later on. Each interview was different; however, I found it helpful to allow the conversation to proceed with some fluidity and spontaneity. I learnt to use pauses to allow the participant to expand on their points naturally, as this allowed for reflection and richer, fuller answers. Similarly, some participants said the interview itself helped them realise something about their experiences that they had not fully thought of before.

In a few interviews, I noticed the participant was unsure or nervous of how I would receive their answers. However, the topic itself may have helped here; the focus on feelings towards the body and self may have implied I would not judge, disregard or be insensitive towards their views.

2.11.6 Post-Interview Debrief

At the end of the interview, a verbal debrief was undertaken with each participant. I asked them how they found the interview and whether they wished to ask any further questions. All participants said they had found the experience positive. A few asked if I used Instagram myself, and I answered accordingly. The debrief pack, provided to all participants, was useful in signposting them to relevant agencies, if they required any additional support (Appendix 9).

2.11.7 Post-Interview Reflexivity

After the end of each interview I made notes on the thoughts, reflections and emotions I had experienced therein. I also jotted down my initial impressions of the participant and the interview. To re-ground myself in the experience of the interview, I re-visited these notes before I began the analysis.

2.11.8 Transcription

I used Audacity audio software to transcribe each interview. I maintained a level of detail in the transcription, reflecting pauses, hesitations and deviations in speech, to

preserve the richness of the data and ensure it remained as true as possible to its original nature for the analysis stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.12 Analysing the Data

I followed an organic and inductive approach to coding and theme development, and acknowledged my own active role in these processes. Given the limited amount of existing research on body image and Instagram, an inductive approach seemed more appropriate to explore this new terrain and to further develop an understanding of women's experiences of Instagram. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis involved searching across the data set to find patterns of meaning that would enable me to understand the women's experiences, views and perspectives. Analysis operated at the latent and constructionist levels, exploring aspects of possible discourses informing the semantic level of the data, which involved more interpretative work. The analysis was not linear but rather a recursive process, involving a constant movement back and forth between the entire data set, coded extracts and the potential themes and subthemes, and in relation to the analysis of the data being produced. Below, I outline the steps taken in the analysis, which were informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to TA and a set of Foucauldian principles.

2.12.1 Familiarisation with the Data

At this initial stage, I focused on immersing myself in the data: reading and re-reading the transcript as well as listening to the audio recordings. While reading, I was aware of my emerging understandings of narratives, meanings and patterns; I paid attention to these, noting initial ideas for coding that I returned to in subsequent phases.

2.12.2 Generating Initial Codes

In this phase, I formed initial codes for each transcript. The codes consisted of features of the data that I had identified as interesting, or as representing basic or raw elements that were meaningful to the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998). I added further semantic (explicit or surface meanings of the data) and latent (underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations that formed the data) codes in further readings. I kept in mind the objects, events and experiences that were being constructed, as well as the subject positions occupied in participants' talk. I coded for as many patterns as possible,

coding individual extracts for as many patterns as they fitted (see Appendix 10 for a brief example). I repeated this process for each account, giving full and equal attention to each data item and identifying aspects that could form the basis of themes across the data set. It was also important to retain inconsistencies, tensions and deviances from the dominant narrative within and across the data items.

2.12.3 Searching for Themes

I collated a long list of the codes I had identified across the data set. In this phase, I concentrated on sorting the codes into potential themes, considering how different codes may be combined to form an overarching theme. I found that using visual representation made this process easier; I typed and printed the codes and then cut them out, so that each code (with its brief description and an identifying line number) was separate. I then moved the codes around on a large surface, organising them into theme-piles, for which I tried out different variations. Adopting a social constructionist interpretative lens, I began to think about which arguments participants had made about the phenomenon. I also considered the discursive resources participants had drawn on and deployed, as well as recognising subjugation. I allowed the themes to be data-driven by focusing on the relationships, meaning and connectedness between and within the codes; this helped to form the themes and their different levels (main overarching themes and sub-themes therein). At the end of this phase, I had themes and sub-themes, as well as relevant data extracts coded in relation to these.

2.12.4 Reviewing the Themes

At this point, I refined the themes and sub-themes – discarding sub-themes with insufficient data to support them and collapsing sub-themes to form one theme. I reviewed the coded extracts to ensure they formed a coherent pattern. In this phase I also reworked the themes, considering whether the extracts belonged somewhere else (which did occur) and discarding some from the analysis altogether. At the next stage of review, I checked whether the individual themes reflected the meanings evident across the data. The interpretations of themes were checked through a process of reading and re-reading with reference to the coded extracts and transcripts. At this point, I reviewed the themes with my research colleagues and research supervisor, which was helpful as I made minor suggestions based on their feedback. I checked again whether the themes

adequately captured the coded data and then developed a thematic map (see Appendix 11).

2.12.5 Defining and Naming Themes

I defined each theme according to the essence of what they captured and thought about the 'story' each theme told. The sub-themes helped to structure the complexity of each theme. I followed Breakwell's (1995) suggestion of using direct quotes from participants to illustrate the data classified by each sub-theme. At the end of this process, I had a complete thematic map (see Appendix 11) and a table with the master themes, subthemes and data extracts (see Appendix 12).

2.12.6 Producing the Report

Before writing the report, I thought about what each theme meant and the assumptions underpinning them. I also considered the implications and nuances of each theme, wondering why, for example, participants chose to talk about certain issues in a specific way rather than in other ways. These questions guided the write-up process. I wanted to provide a compelling narrative that went beyond merely describing the data to make broader analytic statements that demonstrated an argument in relation to my research question.

2.13 Ethical Considerations

This research project was granted ethical approval by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at City University (Appendix 4). I used the Code of Human Research Ethics as a guide to ethical review and practice (British Psychological Society, 2010). This project was conducted without prejudice or affiliations.

Underlying the ethical stance was respect for participants and concern for protecting their rights to self-autonomy and liberty. I considered how the media and psychological literature are concerned with the negative effects of Instagram and body image; this influenced my own opinion, as I assumed the same. Also, my claim to study the phenomenon from the position of 'psychologist' was validated by developing understandings of 'psychological distress'. I therefore chose to keep the research questions open-ended, and aimed to respect *all* experiences of body image being

affected by Instagram use. This was a stance I maintained in the data collection, analysis and write-up.

I considered the principle of avoidance of harm – a value I did not feel this project violated, as there were no anticipated risks to participants' physical or psychological wellbeing. However, I did feel that, given the sensitive nature of the topic, participants may find it difficult to discuss certain aspects of their experiences. I therefore allowed participants to lead the interviews and asked any further questions sensitively, maintaining an awareness of whether a discussion was raising difficult or painful feelings. This situation did not arise; however, if it had, I would have dealt with it with empathy and understanding towards the participant, while maintaining their right to stop the interview or not disclose anything further.

The information sheet distributed to participants in the pre-interview discussions (see section 2.11.3 and Appendix 6) explained that the research project would include verbatim extracts and that the published report would be accessible via City University's library. Before co-signing the informed consent form (Appendix 7), I checked with each participant whether they anticipated any potential harm by taking part in this research project. This was important both to minimise the potential for harm and to shed light on the responsibility I held if risk issues did emerge. The consent form also stated participants' rights to withdraw from the project at any point prior to write-up.

I allowed time for a post-interview debrief at the end of each interview (see section 2.11.6). I ensured participants were not distressed as a result of discussing their body image and sense of self, especially if they disclosed experiencing body image difficulties. The debrief information pack (Appendix 9) that I gave to each participant contained contact information for several organisations that offered professional advice, should they experience any distress later. I had decided to seek supervisory consultation if I believed any participants met the clinical criteria for an eating disorder; however, this did not occur.

I attended to my personal self-care and took precautions prior to meeting the participants, who were previously entirely unknown to me. Participants were only able to contact me through a dedicated research phone number and email address. I notified an appropriate individual of the time, date and location of my meetings with each

participant; if this individual did not hear from me by an assigned time after the interview, they were responsible for notifying the police. Fortunately, this was not necessary.

I honoured participants' rights to privacy by ensuring that identifiable personal information remained confidential. During the transcription process, I anonymised any personal information and assigned each participant a pseudonym. The transcripts and analysis were kept on a password-protected computer to which I had sole access, while consent forms, audio recordings and the key to the pseudonyms stored on a password-protected USB were kept in a locked cabinet. Any paper documents relating to the analysis were also kept in the locked cabinet when I was not working on them. After this research project has been evaluated, all paper and electronic data will be destroyed.

Using visual data raised two ethical considerations. First, Gleeson (2010) notes the importance of explicitly stating the procedures used to examine or analyse visual data. I adhered to this by outlining the analytical procedure in this chapter, and demonstrating that the visual data was analysed in the context of the participants' verbal accounts. Second, key issues in visual methodologies are confidentiality and anonymity. As participants brought photographs from their Instagram accounts that belonged to other Instagram users, I was unable to gain the consent of the image owners to publish the photographs within the report. The British Psychological Society (2010) forbids the reproduction of images without consent or permission from their rightful owner; as such, the photographs were only viewed and discussed in the interviews.

3. Analysis

3.1 Introduction to the Analysis

This chapter presents participants' understandings of their experiences of Instagram and body image. In order to help the reader, contextualise the sample, the participants' demographic information, including information on their Instagram usage is presented in Appendix 13; and see Appendix 14 for brief descriptions of the participants. I use theory to present these understandings as shaped by social constructions and situated within participants' historical, social and cultural contexts. The Discussion chapter expands on the theory introduced here.

Three master themes emerged from the analysis (see Appendix 15 for a summary of master themes and subthemes) each with three subthemes. Master Theme 1 is 'Shaping a woman: Am I meet expectations?' This consists of subthemes 1(1): 'This is the body I should have', which describes a recognition of the sociocultural standard of feminine beauty that women reached in their chosen photographs from Instagram; 1(2): 'Looking for body inspiration', which relates to societal pressure to emulate an 'ideal' body; and 1(3): 'Comparing myself against these women', which reflects participants' feelings that their bodies are inadequate in comparison to the women they see on Instagram. Master Theme 2, 'Feeling the pressure: The gap between my body and "her body"', comprises of subtheme 2(1): 'Fear of not meeting others' expectations', 2(2): 'Desire to exercise' and 2(3): 'Problems with eating'. Finally, Master Theme 3 is 'An illusory ideal: Limiting the damage to my own body image'. Here, subtheme 3(1), 'Mythical girls', shows how participants drew on critical discourses to construct idealised representations of women on Instagram. Subtheme 3(2), 'Working to regain control', reflects their hard work to enact a form of resistance against the dominant bodyweight ideology. Finally, in subtheme 3(3), 'Warning others', participants drew on resistant and critical discourses to caution others of how they could be similarly affected by photographs of women on Instagram. The main themes and corresponding sub-themes in the Thematic Map are set out below in Table 1.
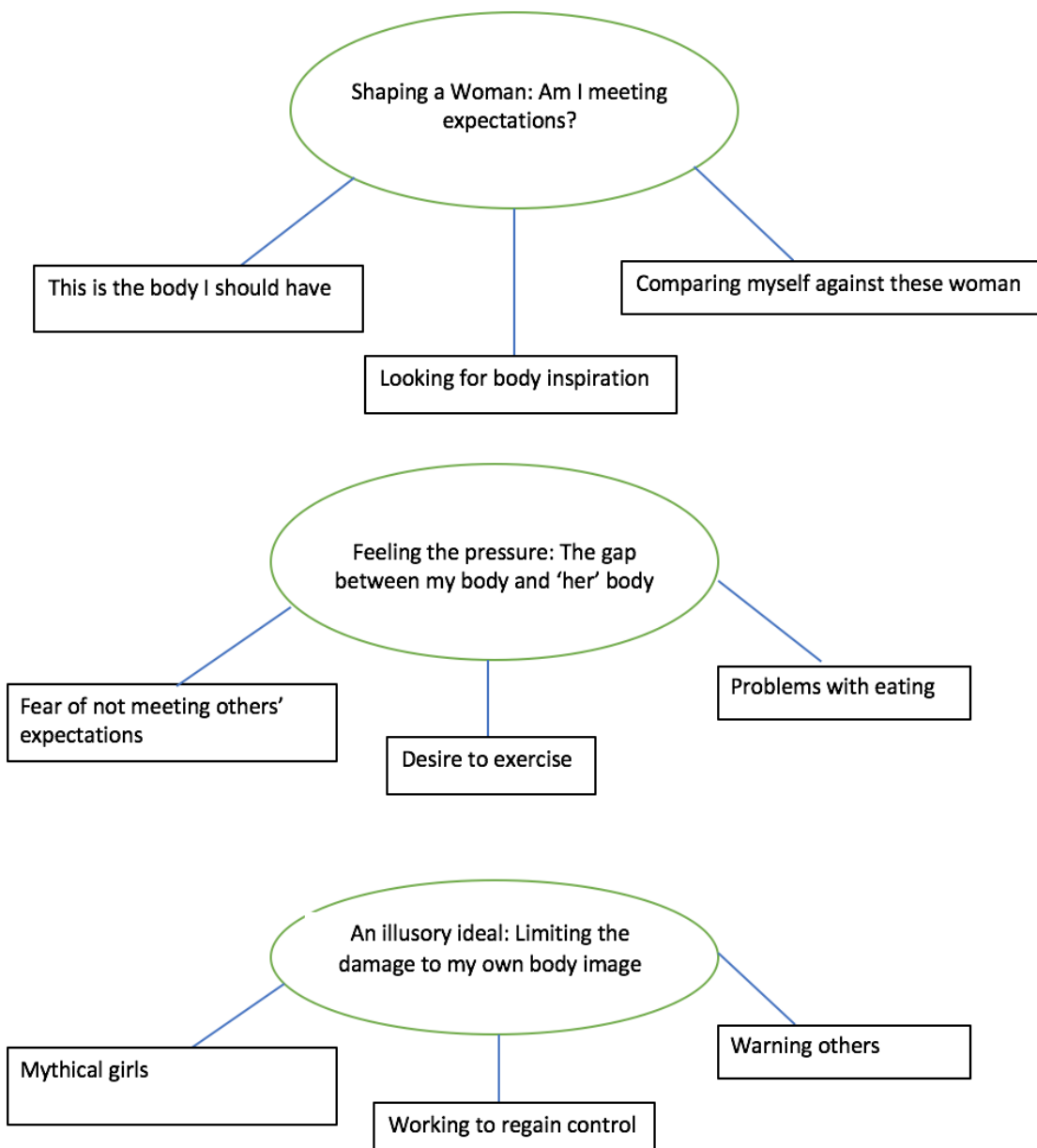
Diagram 1: Thematic Map of Main Themes and Sub-Themes

This chapter includes direct quotes from interview transcripts (citations give the line numbers from the transcripts). Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' anonymity, and any identifying details have either been altered or omitted. The quotes include grammatical errors where these were present in the recorded data. Text in brackets is used sparingly to provide missing words when deemed essential to aid the reader.

3.2 Master Theme 1: Shaping a Woman: Am I Meeting Expectations?

In this theme, participants constructed the bodies of women they admired on Instagram as meeting a sociocultural standard of feminine beauty, which reinforced a

pressure for participants' own bodies to meet similar expectations. In addition, participants constructed their chosen photographs as providing inspiration and motivation to transform their bodies to emulate the ideal. Finally, participants positioned their own bodies as inadequate, flawed and in need of improvement for not reflecting the same ideal of physical beauty as the women on Instagram.

3.2.1 Subtheme 1(1): This is the body I should have: 'You're supposed to look a certain way' (India, 166–167)

All participants described how seeing photographs of other women's bodies on Instagram created an awareness of an expectation of how women's bodies *should* look. Viewing the photographs therefore constructed participants' own body image in relation to cultural and societal standards and expectations that delineate normative notions of the female body. Exposure to narrow beauty standards on Instagram constructed only certain body types to be attractive, valued and accepted. This ultimately shaped a pressure to conform to a sociocultural standard of feminine beauty emulated by the women they saw on Instagram.

> *Well, I guess it's mainly because these pictures, when you see them, it's like every certain post that you're seeing on Instagram it's going to make you think that you're supposed to look a certain way and that's what comes across. So, when I see these pictures, I'm thinking this is how I am meant to look. (India, 163–169)*

India regularly sees gendered idealisations of 'thin and toned' women (India, 192), which become normalising and homogenising in both their imagery and their message: 'this is how I am meant to look'. By drawing on dominant societal and media-promulgated idealisations of female slenderness (Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 2003), India delineates that being thin and toned is not only normative but also inextricably linked to femininity and being a woman. From this position, her choice for her own body is undoubtedly overdetermined by culturally dominant ideologies of gender. In this way, the normalising observing gaze is powerful (Foucault, 1977) because India wishes to emulate a body ideal that complies with sociocultural expectations of how women's bodies should look:

Yeah, because it looks like - that she looks that sort of way for like the men maybe. It's like maybe you should be looking - like not only looking good for yourself but looking good for others to see you. (India 210–212)

India recognises the thin and toned women on Instagram as desirable, appealing and sexually attractive to men. For her, the women present a specific visual display in order to be desired. As such, India constructs women primarily as objects for male consumption and pleasure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and objectifies herself in light of the dominant gaze – a gaze she is motivated to act in accordance with. By drawing on a dominant discourse of heterosexual femininity, she positions 'looking good' as a project concerned with making oneself desirable to others (men), which could amalgamate with her personal responsibility to maintain her appearance.

The women India sees on Instagram convey overt and covert messages to conform to the thin and toned ideal, not only because it is the conventional standard for the female body but also because it exemplifies attractiveness, desirability and beauty in women. She wishes to embody these characteristics in order to be accepted, valued and desired.

Ava focuses on the women's appearance in the images that she regularly sees on Instagram and constructs the definition and tone in their bodies as signifiers of normalised feminine beauty. In this way, she positions the normative body aesthetic as part of a broader cult of perfection that governs women's expectations around ways their bodies should 'appear'. Therefore, Ava suggests that the images of thin and toned women on Instagram contribute to a pressure to create a similar look with her own appearance (see Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Thus, similarly to India, Ava is affected by the normalising observing gaze in a powerful way, as it produces the perception that the body ideal is *expected* to be achieved by all:

When you look at this image or when you think about this image you think of her body only. You see only her body definition, her abs or something but you think, 'Look at that. That's what's normal. That's what you're basically supposed to look like' (Ava, 212–217)

Similarly to the other participants, Frankie suggests that Instagram reflects current expectations of how women's bodies should look. She describes how Instagram images have changed over time to fit what is currently seen as attractive for the female body:

> *So before, it was -- actually, probably when Instagram started about four years, five years ago, it was like skinny is great, so I was like -- it was probably like long legs, skinny model and that's still around, but like everybody knows that. And then I think after this whole like -- like epidemic of clean eating and like looking good, it's become more like muscles and fitness and healthy life and that's what I look for now. (Frankie, 28–37)*

By referring to an 'epidemic', it is as though Frankie feels that the trend of clean eating and fitness is contagious to other women and that it is difficult not to be 'infected'. Seeking out 'muscles and fitness' rather than being 'skinny' suggests that the images she has seen have also influenced her expectations for her own body. For example, Frankie particularly sought out photographs of women who she described as 'thin and toned' (Frankie, 8–9), which is equated with health; fitness and clean eating are constructed as the means to achieve these desired aesthetics. The dominant discourse of a healthy lifestyle as self-improvement or self-care – whereby the visibility of the thin and fit body not only represents a robust marker of physical health but also embodies the signifiers of feminine beauty and success – resonates with Frankie, who is under scrutiny to achieve these gendered constructions.

Ella identifies the images on Instagram as part of an intense normative pressure to construct an appearance that is 'mainstream', in which her body must be worked upon towards norms of slimness and perfection (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleemans et al. 2018). The perfected bodies on Instagram present limited possibilities for Ella as her 'body' must be subjected to regimes, technologies and practices to approximate an ideal of feminine beauty. This pressure is heightened by Ella experiencing the image as an expected aspirational possibility for her body:

> *I should be looking like that because it's becoming so mainstream in the sense to have a body like this (Ella, 153–155)*

Ella elaborates on this point:

It's because of seeing pictures like this and thinking this is attractive but it is so normalised now. This is what the benchmark is and this is what you have to look like (Ella, 258–261)

Ella suggests that the idealised images are responsible for a normalised pressure to be 'attractive', as the expectation is being met by 'normal' women on Instagram. In this way, the thin and attractive women on Instagram align to social and cultural norms of feminine appearance; however, this may make it difficult for Ella to discern between the appearance of unknown peers and models or celebrities showing well-known unattainable beauty standards (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). Ella positions the 'ideal' image as the 'benchmark' for what she must also look like, since being thin and toned is highlighted by the images she sees as being within the sphere of achievement for ordinary women.

In contrast to the other participants, Clara chose photographs of women's bodies that were curvaceous in the desired places – 'boobs and bums' (Clara, 229) – but maintained a thin and toned physique:

I think that this body at the moment is so fashionable and that skinny is kind of out and this is really in. (Clara, 231–234)

Clara suggests that a 'skinny body' has been usurped by what she calls a more 'curvaceous' body type. She is drawn to an aesthetic that embodies 'womanly' curves while maintaining the 'necessary' constructs of being thin and toned. The 'fashionable' body is visibly recognisable in the women she views on Instagram, which suggests that 'fashion' dictates the latest 'look' for women's bodies. Her acceptance of the current culturally normative feminine ideal influences how she admires this body type, which fuels her desire to emulate its aesthetics with her own body.

But the way I look at her body, I love that; the way that she goes in and then out, the curvaceous thing at the moment. (Clara, 66–67)

Clara's gazing admiration suggests she finds these women attractive; her focus on their curves demonstrates an alignment with relegating women to the status of objects, valued for their body or the sum of their bodily parts ('goes in and then out'; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). By drawing on this cultural practice of objectification, she highlights the observer's perspective towards women's bodies. From this position, she may feel that achieving such a body would lead others to view her body in a similarly desirable way.

The women's preferences for their own bodies was shaped by prevailing beauty standards – which remained limited to the thin and toned ideal of a feminine body. They drew on dominant societal discourses that construct this body ideal as a symbol of feminine beauty, success and health. They had come to view their own bodies through an objectified lens, one effect of which may be wanting to be seen as objects of pleasure – like the women they admired on Instagram. Their repertoire of body ideals limited their options in terms of what they felt was available for their own bodies, which was heightened by the way in which women are particularly valued for their appearance. As such, participants constructed the cultural privilege attached to complying with current cultural standards of beauty.

3.2.2 Subtheme 1(2): Looking for body inspiration: 'That's what I want to look like' (Ava, 457–458)

Participants deployed various accounts that constructed their photographs of women on Instagram as inspirational, in terms of what participants wished to achieve with their own bodies. All participants described being encouraged towards health and fitness to improve their appearance under the dominance of 'healthism', which associates good health with slim, attractive bodies (Crawford, 1980; Rose, 1999). Although fitness has health benefits, participants focused on aesthetic reasons; the visibility of the healthy, thin and toned bodies on Instagram was constructed as 'evidence' for the possibility of achieving the ideal body themselves.

In the following extract, Ava describes using Instagram to find inspiration to transform her body towards a cultural ideal of feminine beauty:

And as I care about my health, so if I was like looking for inspiration,
then I'd probably look at that and be like, 'That's what I want to look
like'. (Ava, 455–458)

Ava's increasing preference for a toned and fit female body was reflected in her choice of photographs; her shift away from a solely 'thin' ideal (Ava, 448) is consistent with the increasing popularity of toned/defined muscles *in conjunction with* slenderness, which is becoming more ubiquitous in representations of the ideal female figure (Bozsik et al., 2018). In this extract, she draws on a dominant ideology of 'wellness', in which the pursuit of health is implicit in the form of self-care and signified by the appearance of physical fitness in a toned body (Fullagar, 2002). In doing so, Ava subjects herself to the dominant discourse that the outer body reflects an individual's 'health'; within this guise, she is (allowed to be) inspired to change her bodily appearance because doing so bears the values of healthism (Crawford, 1980; Rose, 1999). Yet, Ava's focus on bodily aesthetics ('that's what I want to look like') captures how 'health' is used to justify improving one's appearance, which enables a socially acceptable narrative through which Ava can be inspired and motivated to change how she looks.

That looks more natural to me and that's more similar to my body type,
which is why I'd look at that and rather than someone who I know has
completely different shape to me. (Ava, 486–489)

As the above extract implies, Ava implies a level of agency by seeking out women on Instagram with bodies that are both more 'natural' and similar to Ava's own body shape. By seeking out women with a more 'realistic' presentation of the desired aesthetics – not as thin, but still toned (Ava, 461) – she hints at a critique of the attainability of the dominant thin and toned body, while also feeling able to emulate her repertoire of thin and fit women with her own body. She positions herself, and other women on Instagram, as adapting and reinterpreting highly salient depictions of the female figure to suit themselves and their own bodies. However, at the same time Ava does not have an alternative representation or discourse to effectively challenge the privileged terms for a thin and toned body as desirable, feminine, normal and healthy. Possibilities other than the dominant conception are therefore implausible; instead, Ava's logic of choosing a 'realistic' ideal – a similar body type to her own – points to

the use of 'agency play': a strategy to adapt to, circumscribe and invent certain ways of achieving her desired outcome (Warin, 2010, p.79).

Similarly to Ava, Frankie sought out photographs of women with thin and toned bodies on Instagram:

> *More like delicately fit, and I like that idea. And that's the kind of idea that -- that's what I want to look like. So, I think that I use Instagram to look at people and get inspired but also know that can be done, because I think that it's much more relatable when I can see people were like actually sweating out in the gym. (Frankie, 42–48)*

Frankie's attraction to a 'delicately fit' body suggests a sensitivity to the cultural demands of hegemonic femininity: ideally, a woman should be thin and toned but remain 'delicate' – avoiding a muscular body, which is discouraged because it symbolises strength, power and masculinity (Krane et al., 2004). Frankie's chosen bodily ideal conforms to the petite size and shape of the female body that Western femininity situates as desirable. She may be aware of the prevailing discourse of female fitness, which encourages muscle tone only insofar as it enables weight loss, gives the body shape (i.e. toned arms, toned stomach) and – most importantly – reduces the body to give it a smaller appearance (Choi, 2000). Under the normalising gaze, which perceives 'fat' as unfeminine and unattractive, Frankie is motivated to discipline her body (Foucault, 1977) through constructing an appropriately feminine level of fitness. She embraces the slim, lean and hard body, which symbolises feminine strength and power in its emphasis on physical fitness (i.e. being physically 'strong') and signifies a move away from 'thinness' in favour of 'healthy' bodies in recent decades (Kilbourne, 1994).

Frankie uses Instagram for bodily inspiration; she looks at 'normal' women (Frankie, 51) who have achieved the desired status with their bodies. It is possible that this gives her the impression that such an appearance is personally attainable, because she recognises these women as similar to her, including in lifestyle and resources. For Frankie, women on Instagram offer hope and promise through their own 'perfect body', which becomes both the standard and a goal for her to work towards with her own body. She implies the attainability of the ideal body through 'seeing' the discipline required ('sweating out in the gym'), which demonstrates what she needs to do to achieve a

similarly thin, fit and toned body; the 'evidence' is positioned as *visible* in the women's improved physical appearance. Thus, Frankie is disciplined by the dominant representation of the slender body (Foucault, 1977), which is not only an emblem of feminine beauty but also embodies – through its contained, thin and toned figure – the admired (masculine) qualities of self-discipline, self-control and hard work (Bordo, 2003).

Similarly, Ella positions the bodies of the women she views on Instagram as attainable for herself:

But even though, it would take a lot of effort and more work than I probably am doing now – I could look like that (Ella, 389–391)

Ella constructs the lean, thin and toned bodies as the ideal body inspiration for her own appearance. Her positioning of effort and work as necessary in bodily transformative work highlights self-improvement as central to consumer culture and Western modernity (Featherstone, 2010). For Ella, the images identify body maintenance and fitness regimes as the 'work' required to achieve a 'successful', beautiful and healthy body. The transformation of appearance is being seen as an increasingly acceptable and worthy pursuit by the public and media – not only for celebrities and models, but for ordinary people too (Featherstone, 2010), and this reinforced largely, as Ella experiences, by the rise of fitness influencers who use the platform to inspire and motivate others to achieve the 'ideal' body (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleeman et al. 2018). These images have a powerful susceptible effect on Ella as she is directed towards body reconstruction through fitness technologies and regimes that the dominant ideology promotes (Foucault, 1977).

Clara identifies the 'body' as most important in the cultivation of appearance:

You've got your own face; you can't change it. Whereas your body is something I guess you can change if you work hard at it (Clara, 595– 598)

Clara characterises her body as a way to improve attractiveness through self-discipline and self-control ('work hard') as clearly portrayed by the images of thin, toned and self-contained bodies on Instagram. She positions her body as the mechanism to improve her physical self, something that strongly highlights the gender dimension in which greater scrutiny is given to female bodies (Rubin et al. 2004). It is possible that fitness imagery on Instagram highlights an accessible form of beauty for Clara as altering the composition of facial features requires cosmetic surgery, and although readily available, this seems to be an inaccessible option for her ('you've got your own face, you can't change it'). Therefore, the common aesthetics norms that are strongly marketed on the platform (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018) are aimed at Clara, who is expected (and under pressure) to construct femininity through her body. Possibly, Clara is afforded agency in being able to negotiate the pressures to change her appearance through fitness rather than cosmetic surgery, which itself also remains a complex dilemma within the discourse of feminine inferiority (Davies, 1991).

Natasha described using Instagram to access fitness motivation accounts that serve her goal of being healthier:

It's just like it's a fitness motivation page. And I look at them sometimes when I have these spurts of thinking I need to be healthier. (Natasha, 37–38)

Natasha draws on the aforementioned dominant discourse of 'healthism', which links a certain body shape (thin, fit and toned) with good health and implies a responsibility to self-monitor to achieve these standards (Choi, 2000). The imperative to be healthier is exercised by cultural norms, which, under a disciplinary regime, become a part of Natasha's thinking and conduct; a powerful set of health imperatives demands self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of such norms (Crawford, 1980; Foucault, 1988). The women on Instagram provide the inspiration that Natasha desires to emulate with her own body; they represent the healthism discourse, coupled with a discourse that associates thin, toned, attractive bodies with greater social capital – including a moral alignment to personal care (Rysst, 2010). As such, Natasha is aware that her physical appearance is important in depicting her individual value as a person

(Featherstone, 1991). She is motivated by culturally sanctioned knowledge, which is appealing because it offers her personal and social advantage – if she adheres to a health-disguised beauty standard. Consequently, health is constructed aesthetically and becomes a new form of patriarchal control that governs women's thoughts and behaviours (Rysst, 2010); the cultural ideal of femininity has become so closely interlinked with that of a 'healthy' weight that 'health' and 'beauty' are now often conflated (Malson, 2009).

3.2.3 Subtheme 1(3): Comparing myself against these women: 'I will never look like that' (Natasha, 138–139)

Participants deployed various accounts to construct their bodies as in need of improvement to meet a cultural representation of hegemonic femininity. Through acts of self-objectification and self-surveillance, they positioned their own bodies as inadequate in comparison to the women on Instagram, who emulate the perfected ideal of female attractiveness.

> *I think that it's annoying because I know I will never look like that. And that does upset me sometimes and makes me think that men might never find me as attractive as they find these girls on Instagram. (Natasha, 289–291)*

Natasha's talk demonstrates her culturally constituted investment in being attractive by having a thin and toned body and problematises her deviation from the culturally normalised ideal of physical beauty. From this position, she is left with few alternatives; in Foucauldian (Foucault, 1980b) terms of constituting her subjectivity differently, without a competing discourse or representation of cultural beauty she is frustrated, upset and despondent.

Natasha's comments are consistent with the script of compulsive hegemonic femininity; she deems herself responsible for working on her body in order to be a desirable sexual subject for the heterosexual male. Accepting the dominant power of such a discourse, she scrutinises her own body, finding it imperfect under the normalising panoptic gaze (Foucault, 1977). Drawing on the assumption instilled into women and men from an early age (Wolf, 1991) that male desire is based on being visually aroused by women's bodies, Natasha positions herself as at a disadvantage in

the social arena of heterosexual dating and accepts that men prefer the (subjective) beauty of the slender, toned women whose bodies are presented on Instagram. On some level, she is aware that the cultural ideal is impossible to achieve ('I will never look like that'); but she cannot reconcile this with the desirability that achieving such a look rewards, and this seems to intensify her problematisation.

At the same time, Natasha expresses annoyance, which could be constructed as resentment – both of the imagery of women and of being or feeling inferior. The idealised imagery of feminine beauty limits her attempts to achieve something she desires, especially considering that heterosexual romantic relationships are important signifiers of feminine achievements (Segal, 1997).

Similarly to Natasha, Katy's (62–63) talk reflects the dominant and normalised construction that being thin and toned is beautiful, and she positions her own body as inferior for not conforming to this representation:

> *Because she does have a really nice body. And it makes you feel a bit like*
> *rubbish next to her if I was next to her. (Katy, 182–185)*

Katy illustrates the subjective nature of being-as-object. She views her own body through the judging gaze, thereby feeling inadequate for not meeting a societal standard of feminine appearance. Her 'proof' is in the *visibility* of Western gendered conceptualisations of the always-already socially and discursively constituted female body; the explanatory power of thin as beautiful is assumed as an unquestioning law of aesthetics (Malson & Ussher, 1996).

She goes on to say:

> *Like you're happy for her but then it's 'I want to look like that'. So, yeah,*
> *it's frustrating and annoying. I feel jealous I suppose. (Katy, 96–98)*

In the above extract, Katy does not draw on a discourse that offers resistance to the concept of the ideal female body, *instead* speaking from a discursive position of female solidarity. However, she contradicts this by simultaneously being in competition with the 'beauty' of other women, making her frustrated and resentful of others for looking too 'attractive' (Wolf, 1991). Although Katy speaks from a position of resistance by trying to 'be happy for' the women, she appears to be conflicted about

their threatening beauty, which prevents her from celebrating their shared femaleness (Wolf, 1991). This conflict isolates her from not only 'unknown' women but also her own body, symbolising her own subjected judgement and resentment.

In the following extract, Rose enacts a form of body surveillance, monitoring her appearance in comparison to the idealised thin and toned women on Instagram:

> *But I just remember maybe feeling a little bit sad that I might never look like that, like be that thin and look that toned and things like that. (Rose, 136–139)*

Here, Rose draws on the dominant discourse that her femininity is defined by the size and shape of her body; it is her appearance that counts. Her subsequent sadness stems from her failure to meet the image of culturally desired femininity, which she is reminded of when looking at images of women on Instagram who espouse the ideal of female perfection and is intensified by her realisation that the thin and toned body may be unattainable for her. This construction leaves her with few options, especially given that the converse of her talk is suggestive of the dominant discourse: that thinness is a vehicle and proxy for success, confidence and happiness, and that changing her appearance would reveal 'authentic' feelings of contentment.

Ava positions the idealised images of other women on Instagram as contributing to her experiences of body dissatisfaction:

> *And it's like the way you're seeing all these pictures, everyone's got it but you feel like you don't and you're meant to sort of have that (be thin and toned) (Ava, 467–469)*

The deluge of images of thin and toned bodies that Ava is exposed to on Instagram heightens the normalisation of slimness and this focus is problematic to the extent it makes her feel inadequate about her own body (Fardouly et al. 2015b; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). She constructs the images as engendering an excessive focus on her appearance and monitoring of her own body in comparison to the images, which positions her own body as failing to meet a standard of feminine beauty achieved by other women on the platform. Ava's despair with her own appearance is not only constructed in relation to a discourse of feminine beauty, but is also impacted by the

fact she positions her body as not 'ordinary' or 'normal' ('everyone's got it but you feel like you don't'). It is possible that Instagram, with its heightened focus on thinner bodies, has caused a recalibration of the range of body sizes that are perceived by Ava as being 'normal'; since her status as a woman is judged relative to visual body norms, the shifting visual threshold of being identified as thin means she is placed under pressure to discipline herself to achieve current cultural beauty norms ('you're meant to sort of have that'; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

India's positions her own body as inferior after comparing herself to others on the platform who are 'more attractive':

> So, like looking at a picture like this would make me feel kind of upset in myself and my body image, I guess in the sense because her body is so amazing and I feel like mine doesn't measure up (India, 45–50)

India subjects herself to the externally imposed demands to assess her own appearance against other 'attractive' women, which fuels dissatisfaction with her own body for not meeting the beauty standard created by the 'ideal'. She constructs her own body's value as contingent on the evaluative standard of feminine beauty; therefore, her experiences of appearance are restricted to being negative, *until* she self-enhances towards social norms of slimness. This is reinforced by her feelings towards self and body as dependent on attaining certain outcomes like being thin and toned, since this is also intertwined with specific cultural constructs of femininity that appropriate her identity as a 'woman' – her agency is limited by the ideal female image.

Similarly, Clara positions her own body as inadequate in comparison to the idealised representations of women on Instagram:

> *I'd never look at a photo and think, 'My body is like that' or 'I feel really proud of my body' It would make me go, 'Oh! That's something I have not got' sort of thing. (Clara, 707–710)*

Clara suggests that the photographs of other women on Instagram mirror the dominant conception of female beauty; when she looks at them, she cannot help but see their slender, toned bodies as epitomising female attractiveness. She draws on consumer

culture ideology, which elevates the slender body as the perfect (conventional) standard by which all women must be judged – and judge themselves (Bordo, 2003). However, the cultural demand to judge and compare herself against such a standard problematises any deviations she perceives in the appearance of her own body. Arguably, body monitoring and self-surveillance are requirements for the performance of successful femininity, but engaging in such practices leaves her aware of the inadequacy and failings of her own body. Although she adopts the normalising and disciplining gaze (Foucault, 1977), she determines that her own body is *never* similar to the prevalent women's bodies on Instagram – but she does not resist their power to set the standard for being a woman. She, therefore, identifies with the typical cultural attitude of women who are dissatisfied with their bodies instead (Orbach, 1986; Bordo, 2003).

The saturation of images of the dominant representation of hegemonic femininity on Instagram, including an acceptance of the feminine ideal that emphasises slenderness and firmness, largely prevented participants from discursively constructing their own bodies as anything other than unacceptable. Appearance norms do not yield an alternative for interpreting one's body but rather enhance women's insecurity and self-doubt, and the self-surveillance and self-regulatory practices fostered resentment. Given that participants positioned their bodies as failing to meet the cultural ideal, the relationship they constructed towards their own bodies was antagonistic, separating the self from the body and themselves from other women. Furthermore, because the ideal is supposedly obtainable for all and is linked indelibly to successful femininity, their identity as women could be threatened.

3.3 Master Theme 2: Feeling the Pressure: The Gap between My Body and 'Her' Body

In this theme, participants deployed various accounts in which they were confronted by a pressure to meet a contemporary social norm of physical appearance, which operates as a standard of acceptable femininity and encourages them to view themselves as objects for their own gaze – as well as to anticipate judgement and punishment for failing to adhere to a societal ideal of feminine appearance. The women then constructed exercise and diet as necessary disciplinary measures to appropriate the desired body shape and size.

3.3.1 Subtheme 2(1): Fear of not meeting others' expectations: 'If your body doesn't look like that then you will be judged' (India, 272–273)

In their acceptance of a dominant cultural discourse of feminine beauty, the meaning and value of participants' appearances depended on the approval and validation of others. Their talk constructed a hierarchy in which certain body weights, sizes and shapes were deemed superior to others, and they attributed their fear of judgement to having a less-than-ideal body. In terms of a disciplinary regime, participants were aware of being subjected to a controlling and oppressive 'gaze', which they anticipate would mark their bodies as deficient (Foucault, 1977).

> *So, I feel like if you don't conform and if you're not in line with this sort of this image, if your body doesn't look like that then you would be judged. I feel like that's really what affects me, and this is why maybe I wouldn't want to go out or I would wear something like a long coat because I don't want to be judged, because I don't look like that. (India, 271–273)*

India refers to the normalising images on Instagram as reinforcing a dominant social reality of the way her body is meant to look. The normalised perception (the only reality which counts; Bordo, 2003) acts as a (predetermined) standard against which she measures, judges and disciplines herself. In doing so, she determines her body as failing to conform to a cultural standard; her problematised body thus becomes an object of attentiveness and self-monitoring, and she anticipates that others will perceive her very negatively.

Foucault's (1988) concept of 'technologies of self' illuminates how the dominant discourse acts as a 'self-steering mechanism', which shapes India's experience of, conduct towards and relationship with herself and produces a particular type of subjectivity. Her 'deviance' from the dominant representation of women's bodies defines her antagonistic relationship with her own body and sets the (limiting) parameters of her physical freedom, as she constructs ambivalence about going out or showing (off) her body. In a culture that deems only thin women as fit to be seen, India constructs her own body as something to be hidden. This (womanly) bodily existence is significant in the social construction of an oppressive feminine norm (Bordo, 2003).

India's fear of judgement may be heightened by dominant discourses of the 'obesity epidemic' in Western culture, which subjects individuals who deviate from the

social construction of thinness to contempt and stigma, and has generated a greater fear of fatness (Catling & Malson, 2012). It is possible that India conceals her body to protect herself against the cultural discursive formation of 'fatness' as a moral failure and an aesthetic affront (Murray, 2008). This is additionally significant for India; being a woman means she is subjected to heightened scrutiny over her physical appearance, and female fatness is particularly vilified (Gard & Wright, 2005).

In the following extract, Clara adopts the disciplinary gaze that renders her own body as problematised against the mass-disseminated ideal of beauty. She is therefore uncomfortable with being 'seen' on Instagram, particularly in comparison with the dominant representation of hegemonic femininity that the women she admires there emulate.

> *I don't feel comfortable enough to show my body to do that [post revealing pictures on Instagram]. I'd probably delete it straight away, [because of] people's opinion. (Clara, 299–304)*

Clara's previous talk reveals an acceptance of the dominant discourse on female slenderness; she constructs the thin and toned body as superior to all other bodies. Through self-surveillance, she constructs her own body as flawed for failing to meet strict social parameters of appearance for the female body (Duncan, 1994). Clara fears observation, judgement and examination; she anticipates that being objectified for her less-than-'ideal' body will put her in an uncomfortable and undesirable state, and that being judged by others will cause vulnerability and shame, and therefore wishes to avoid being placed in this subject position ('I would delete it straight away'). In addition, she possibly constructs placing her own body onto Instagram as precarious, in terms of potential stigma or diminishment of social capital for failing to meet a cultural ideal of femininity.

Furthermore, the context of Instagram may intensify Clara's subjugation. The social media platform enables surveillance processes through the mechanisms of judgement and evaluation, and makes users aware of such judgements through in-built features of comments and 'likes'. Since Instagram is predominantly a visual-based platform, it could intensify the expectation of having to construct her own body as if in

a state of permanent visibility. She is therefore constrained by the dominance of the normative discourse, as her bodily agency and intentionality are limited.

Yet, at the same time, Clara does contemplate displaying her own body for others to see on Instagram. Women's appearance to others is crucially important for perceptions of the 'success' (measure) of their lives (Berger, 1972); as such, it is possible that Clara is compelled to 'join in' with competing against the 'beauty' of other women. Her investment in culturally constituted heterosexual femininity may mean she wishes to gain validation, approval and acceptance through others seeing her as sexy, beautiful and attractive. Feminists argue that this pull to compete derives from patriarchal expectations: women come to view their bodies as objects of male desire, and as such, they are compelled to battle each other for the attention of men (Wolf, 1991). Clara also explained that she wanted to be envied, desired and admired like the women she looked at on Instagram (Clara, 499–501). She may, therefore, be compelled to see if she can be equated with the superlative mode of body appearance. This pull to compete may be intensified by the fact that Instagram's user base is predominantly 'normal women', as well as by the potential to gain attraction, recognition and eminence through competing with other women.

In the following extract, Rose constructs the potential dilemmas of placing her own body on Instagram. Her decisions are constrained by the meaning(s) that can be attached to the symbolic value of her appearance:

> *I think I'd wonder what people would think, the reason why I would post such a thing or what they might think of my body if they were to look and judge it. And those are the people that know you rather than just strangers, so it feels more important. (Rose, 360–364)*

Rose demonstrates concern over others' opinions, even for posting a photograph of her own body on Instagram. In her interview, she explained that others could judge her for being vain (Rose, 223). Interestingly, vanity (in the specific sense of preoccupation with one's physical attractiveness and desirability to others, and the meanings attached to these perceptions: happiness, heterosexual romance, approval and acceptance) and femininity are intrinsically linked; to be vain is to be feminine, and a woman who is not vain (that is, is not concerned with how others perceive her) is not 'fully feminine' (Wolf, 1991; Bordo, 2003).

Yet, Rose's wish to distance herself from this unwanted subject position suggests she does not want to be associated with this particular type of hegemonic femininity. This can be considered an act of resistance, through technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988), in deliberate and conscious refusal to take up a particular subject position. It is possible that her resistance is related to a competing discourse that is critical of vanity, in which femininity can be trivialised as an unnecessary preoccupation with (feminine) appearance; from this position, others may deem her shallow or self-absorbed. The consequence of such a judgement could be limiting; women who display what is interpreted as a 'hyper-feminine' (overly-sexualised) appearance are more likely to be objectified and deemed less intelligent, competent, determined and capable (Gurung & Chrouser, 2007). Rose therefore constructs the dilemma of wanting to be found attractive but not wishing to be treated, or limited, as a sex object. She may refuse the subject position of hegemonic femininity, which could threaten her achievements in other (masculine) domains. In doing so, Rose demonstrates the predicament (and the energy wasted) in having to think about herself as an object to be viewed, judged and interpreted.

Similarly to the other participants, Rose's concern over how her body will be viewed and evaluated occurs through the process of self-objectification – which is heightened, for Rose, as it concerns acceptance from significant others rather than just strangers. From this position, she may view her close relationships as dependent on her performing femininity, including through a successful feminine appearance that significant others will easily recognise and legitimise (Skeggs, 2001). Thus, Rose demonstrates how she engages in body surveillance that permits her to anticipate the 'gaze', which serves as an adaptive strategy to exert (some) control over how others will treat her (Calogero et al., 2005).

Participants deployed various accounts that constructed their bodies as always visible and available for judgement, in which they adopted the inspecting gaze that anticipates how others will perceive their bodies. Under the normative gaze, the women deem their bodies as unworthy of being seen; the intensity to self-discipline their 'exposed' bodies is extreme, and cultural reinforcements of appearance norms convey to them a sense of continuous deficiency (Schur, 1983). Since physical appearance is more central to the evaluation of women in society, and therefore becomes a key

determinant of success; some participants constructed a 'pull' or compulsion to display their bodies on Instagram, reflecting the tying of women's value to their appearance and the encouragement of female competition for beauty. Lastly, participants' talk suggests that achieving normative feminine beauty also brings the reward an effortless, carefree existence – they would be assumed to be attractive, successful, competent and in control, and judgement would become unproblematic.

3.3.2 Subtheme 2(2): Desire to exercise: 'I would prefer to have a more toned body and be thinner' (Rose, 667–671)

Participants constructed exercise as a manifestation of their desire to normalise their flawed, unacceptable bodies. They were compelled by the social imperative that advocates exercise, as a normalised body-management practice, for weight loss and improving muscle tone and appearance.

> *And I would prefer to have a more toned body and to be thinner. So, I feel like sometimes it does make me feel lazy like I'm not doing enough to make my body look like the people on Instagram, my best. (Rose, 667–671)*

Above, Rose draws on a dominant discourse in which achieving the desired femininity of a thinner and more toned body is a matter of personal choice. This position characterises her laziness as an individual failure of will, as she has the 'choice' to exert greater 'self-control' in order to be thin. Her current body, which deviates from the cultural norms of appearance, is equated with a lack of self-discipline and personal inadequacy. The social world of Instagram seems to enforce and reinforce this system of bodily meanings and practices; it seems that, for Rose, Instagram exemplifies the significance of regarding one's body as a 'socially visible subject that can-and-should be reconstructed to convey the desired social meanings' (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995 p.150). The visibility of other women's bodies on Instagram promotes the pervasiveness of the notion of an *attainable*, slender, toned ideal – an ideal that Rose therefore feels guilty for failing to transform her own body into.

In her interview, Rose constructed exercise as a (socially acceptable) solution to creating the body she desires (Rose, 784). This resulted in a form of self-discipline, through body-management practices, which served to normalise her body to conform to

the standard of femininity. Rose believed that conforming to this ideal would allow her the agency, or 'confidence', to share her own body on Instagram – and that she would subsequently be admired, desired and afforded the social rewards associated with adherence to the ideal; specifically, the advantage of 'beauty', which accrues as a function of thinness (Kwan & Trautner, 2009).

In the following extract, Natasha constructs the body ideal as achieved through dedication in time and energy:

> *Erm it makes me feel like I should be devoting all of my time to doing that and, and working way harder because nobody, nobody can look like that without putting in a lot of effort. (Natasha, 254–256)*

Natasha draws on the dominant discourse that attaining a thin and toned body is simply a matter of self-determination, self-discipline and dedication, and she positions strenuous work and constant watchfulness as prerequisites to conform to this ideal. The images of firm, taut female bodies she admires on Instagram represent idealised discourses within society, religion and health – namely, self-mastery and self-control over the body. Ultimately, the body is seen as demonstrating good/right/healthy or bad/wrong/unhealthy attitudes towards the demands of normalisation (Bordo, 2003). Natasha positions body management as necessary to shape the body/self into the desired, socially meaningful position. In this context, if we can truly exert control over our bodies, any deviance from the ideal is seen as a choice.

The time and energy Natasha suggests are necessary reflect the values of the Puritan work ethic – obligation, willpower, control, discipline and successful individual achievement (Quinn & Crocker, 1999; Bordo, 2003). Her (womanly) body therefore becomes an object of labour; deviant; in need of improvement – but this position limits her capacity to engage in body-management practices for health, strength, fitness or pleasure, instead positioning the aim of such practices as looking a particular way. Natasha also constructs her body as in need of discipline if she is to attain the desired results; this process of hard-won bodily transformation dominates her thoughts, conduct and behaviour, and ultimately acts as a self-disciplinary practice (Foucault, 1980b). Although Natasha hints at a critique by mentioning the effort and time required to achieve the ideal, she nevertheless accepts this ideal, without considering the societal

pressure to expend so much energy on obtaining it – and obtaining 'appropriate' health and femininity.

Similarly, India constructs her body and self as deviant for failing to work hard enough towards the aesthetic of health:

It makes me feel, once again, upset and disgusted with myself that I am not doing enough to look like that. I am definitely not making enough effort to look like this, I feel like it's my fault for not working hard enough. (India, 156–159)

India critiques her appearance against the 'ideal' and positions herself as responsible for failing to engage in activities such as exercise or dieting to transform her body into a more desired form. She self-monitors the physical appearance of her body according to a cultural idealisation of feminine beauty and her corresponding personal responsibility to achieve the appropriate body form has engendered guilt and disgust for her lack of 'hard work' – signifying a lack of will, discipline and self-control. The disciplinary gaze subjects her to 'disgust' with her own body; the concept of selfhood in Western society privileges self-control that emphasises a moral obligation to discipline the body (Thompson & Hirchman, 1995). In this context, she draws on powerful discourses present in contemporary consumer culture that locate the physical body as the locus for the affirmation of identity, whereby messages about 'who you are' are transmitted through 'what you look like'. Thus, her desire to control her body becomes entwined in a nexus of signifying the appropriate meanings of femininity, health and success, which for India is important as she demonstrates a sensitivity to cultural demands, particularly in regard to her body shape and size.

In the extract below, Clara feels under pressure to conform to the dominant representation of feminine appearance as achieved by other women on Instagram (Cohen et al. 2018). She positions herself as responsible for failing to attain the desired body composition; thus, she subjects herself to the cultural stigma in Western culture that attributes deviation from body appearance norms as a failure to make sufficient effort, and a failure in discipline and care (Fallon, 1990):

Yeah seeing these photos remind me that I should be doing more – that I like need to put more pressure on myself. 'Cause I feel frustrated of myself that I don't do more working out. And maybe annoyed that I don't work that hard at my body' (Clara, 57-59)

Clara suggests that the idealised women on Instagram characterise a form of social control as what ensues from seeing the images is a feeling of being under surveillance to conform to normative conventions of appearance, even when not actually being observed by another (Foucault, 1979). The self-disciplinary gaze objectifies and evaluates her body through tacit cultural knowledge of how she should look; the pervasive feelings of guilt and frustration affect her as she recognises her deviation from a disciplinary norm of appearance (Foucault, 1980). In this way, Instagram is constructed as embedded within principles of modern social life that subject her body and dictate her behaviours and those of other women for the social construction of appropriate femininity (Cohen et al. 2018); the dominant desirable images of women generate a fear of being seen or revealed as inferior.

In the following extract, Frankie overcomes the obstacle of having an 'unfit', flawed body, and positions 'empowered' femininity as attainable through choosing to be motivated and determined in pursuit of self-transformation:

And now I'm trying my best and I feel like I'm almost there which sounds so lame but it's true because, you know, I've worked hard. I worked fucking hard to look like how I look now. (Frankie, 806–809)

Frankie constructs 'working hard' as part of the process to enhance her own self-image. This draws on the notion of the body as an identity project in contemporary Western society; the body has become a vehicle of self-expression that can be transformed at will, and there is emphasis – especially for women – on the regulation of the body and so-called 'self-improvement' (Bordo, 2003). Through these discourses of femininity, Frankie comes to view her own body through an objectified lens as something to be viewed/evaluated; an object in need of transformation by appraising its relation to the paradigmatic image (Smith, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Her

adherence to the current beauty ideal steers her bodily transformation; her obedience to dominant contemporary norms construct various aspects of her body as deficient, requiring modification – or even complete transformation – to correct the perceived 'deficiencies' (Smith, 1990). By shaping her body to meet the physical ideal through the self-disciplinary practices of diet and exercise, her body is trained to docility and obedience to cultural norms (Foucault, 1980a). Feminists describe how women's bodies serve as a locus for the social construction of femininity: exercise and diet regimes aimed at attaining the 'ideal' body size and configuration contribute to the construction of 'docile' (self-disciplining) feminine bodies (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003). At the same time, Frankie's sense of accomplishment and achievement is suggestive of how women can experience such practices in terms of 'power' and 'control' (Bordo, 1990).

Frankie's use of 'lame' could hint at a critique, in that she is not passively responding to a disciplinary regime but rather is aware that her docility aims to meet prevailing norms. From this position, she may be aware that her obedience has consequences that are personally limiting, but she is unable to resist the rewards, pleasure and power gained by achieving a body that is undeniably socially desirable; a body that communicates a self that is in control, successful and competent.

Similarly to Frankie, Ava constructs fitness as a way to achieve her desired appearance for her own body:

> *I remember going to do the gym, I'm like doing it and literally making me feel sick because it's like so hard. (Ava, 262–263)*

In this extract, Ava is referring to following an exercise programme by a popular fitness influencer (creates specific 'motivational' fitness content for an engaged fitness audience and community) on Instagram (Ava, 259). She draws on a healthism discourse (Crawford, 1980; Rose, 1999), stating that she became interested in the programme with the aim of enhancing her health and as a result of the fitness influencer communicating mainstream ideologies, which promise a 'healthy' body while exalting the idealised toned and thin physique. From this position, it is Ava's responsibility to exert the necessary self-control, personal determination and adherence to the regime to create the desired stated of health. Yet, despite being quite 'active' (Ava, 264), she constructs the exercises as extremely physically difficult and describes feeling physically sick.

However, this is somewhat normalised by fitness influencers, who often position the act of pushing one's body beyond physical limitations in pursuit of one's goal as necessary, and construct pain as 'motivation' – an essential psychological mindset to gain the fit and toned physique (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). In addition, compulsive or strenuous exercise is often positioned as emphasising female strength and empowerment through promises of 'strong is the new skinny' (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). However, Ava said the experience did not leave her feeling powerful or in control but rather physically ill, demonstrating the ways in which such self-disciplinary practices punish and deprive her and other women.

3.3.3 Subtheme 2(3): Problems with eating: 'Then I felt guilty' (Ava, 268–269)

Participants constructed the controlled practice of eating as a central disciplinary process of normative femininity, used to produce a body that meets the ideal shape, size and composition. They drew on the moralisation of food choices, pulling in concepts of transforming the body/self towards an ideal state of being, and self-denial and self-restraint as necessary to demonstrate appropriately feminine appetite and self-control.

In the following extract, Ava demonstrates how food is constructed as either 'good' or 'bad'. Her sense of guilt is a consequence of 'failing' to make the appropriate food choices:

> *If I ever ate cake or something which is obviously, you know it's bad for*
> *you, then I felt guilty. (Ava, 268–269)*

Ava's construction of food is drawn from a dominant health discourse, evident in contemporary consumer culture, which assigns moral significance to habits that either hinder or promote traits such as health and attractiveness, creating a dichotomy between good and bad, healthy and unhealthy, right and wrong (Bourdieu, 1998; Steim & Nemeroff, 2005). Cake is constructed as 'bad' because, within the dichotomisation, fattening foods are delegated the immoral, unhealthy status. The guilt she felt after eating the cake could refer to this hypothesised morality–food connection, stemming from a 'Puritan work ethic' in which it is necessary to deny oneself pleasure or immediate gratification because one is eventually (culturally) rewarded for self-control, hard work and self-discipline (Mirels & Garrett, 1971).

Since Ava is interested in achieving a 'healthy' lifestyle (highlighted in theme 1(2)), which requires her to take care of her appearance and weight, eating the cake may have signified a failure to adhere to a certain mode of being that is meant to serve her (moral) goal (Foucault, 1988) – and thus is the criterion of her guilt. From this position, she is aware that she needs to execute a controlled, masterful (male) will over eating in order to achieve the controlled, firm (female) body (Bordo, 1990). Thus, she draws on contemporary concerns about managing the (female) body by regulating its (appetitive) desires, and on the cultural imagination that idealises attaining complete control over the (uncontrollable, weak-willed, impure – female, overlaid) body through willpower (Bordo, 1990, 2003).

In the next extract, Ava continues to demonstrate the pull of two contradictory feminine subject positions in a food-related dilemma experienced while in the company of her friends.

> *And then you'd be, 'I don't want a brownie,' and then they'd make you eat it or something because there's some social pressure if you don't eat a brownie, then you get labelled, let's say anorexic or something. So, I'd eat, and I feel worse because I really didn't want it and I just feel sick and then I probably made myself sick. (Ava, 758–763)*

Initially, Ava positions herself as attempting to embody the dominant discourse of 'good' controlled femininity by regulating her desires and resisting the temptation of 'bad' food ('I don't want the brownie'). However, she constructs her ability to occupy this position as limited, due to the fear or embarrassment she anticipates following a social judgement of 'anorexia'. Here, she suggests that her behaviour could be interpreted as sign of individual pathology, rather than within the gender-specific cultural norms of body-management practices (Burns & Malson, 2009). It is possible that she considers this position as limiting because of the stigma (and concern) attached to eating disorders in Western society (Burns & Malson, 2009). Yet, this also highlights Ava's lack of alternative discourses to talk about food without judgement, confusion or dread, and her resultant alignment with the secretive nature of eating- and food-related distress (Orbach, 1986).

At the same time, eating the brownie may have signified a moral failing on Ava's part because it represents a lack of discipline, control and virtue – especially

according to the hierarchal and dichotomous construction that positions indulging one's appetite as the 'body out-of-control', and not eating as the 'body-in-control', delineating failure or success respectively (Malson, 1997). Due to occupying an unwanted subject position of 'out-of-control' femininity, she is replete with guilt, dread and shame; to compensate and return to a moral eating practice, she therefore purges. As such, she constructs abstinence and restriction (in food, in desire, in intimate connection) as required to achieve the ideal body/personhood, which exemplifies feminine strength, control and achievement.

Similarly, in the following extract Ella describes her fear and guilt after eating foods that are deemed problematic, possibly not only for the 'fat' such foods contain but also the assimilation with the potential threat to create 'fatness':

> *It didn't make me feel very good – I mean just what I can remember and*
> *the way that I acted as in like it's definitely not normal to care so much if*
> *you eat a chocolate bar (Ella, 702–704)*

Ella describes the self-discipline she subjects herself to avoid the potential threat to her body that results from eating the 'wrong foods'. She reveals the dialectic in which her need to control the appearance of her body is dependent on being able to control her weight and size through diet. However, she hints that her intense desire for self-control feels restrictive, punitive and disempowering, an experience in which her body becomes a constant source of worry that she cannot escape. Her construction that it is not 'normal' to be so concerned with the consumption of food may offer some protection against engaging in weight-control behaviours such as dietary restriction, whilst insinuating the dark side of being 'rigid' with eating is that it can be pathologised in the form of eating disorders. Yet, Ella is still subjected to narratives in Western society that require women to acquire the appropriate constrained and subdued appetite as signified by the visibly normative body.

Clara draws on dominant discourses that suggest eating particular foods or drinking alcohol (that are high in fat and calories) would have a negative impact on her physical appearance:

And I've had emotional ... a few times but I'm like, 'You need to stop freaking out', because I wouldn't want to drink (alcohol) or eat something because I know it would make myself look worse (Clara, 456–458)

Clara constructs the emotional toll of self-monitoring her body as a visible object with the desired culturally salient meanings, and she refuses to engage in acts of atonement perhaps to avoid the feelings of guilt and shame that ensue from moral violations (Foucault, 1979). Her eating distress is positioned as consequence of rendering her body into transcendent femininity and produces a strong, controlled, disciplined and successful subjectivity. Therefore, similarly to Ella in the extract above, she hints that dietary restriction is experienced as punitive since self-denial requires constant watchfulness and total control – something that is disruptive to her mental wellbeing ('you need to stop freaking out'). Nevertheless, she is unable to position herself within discourses or representations that resist traditional notions of femininity that prescribe control around food and ultimately limit the desires and experiences of women (Burns, 2004).

In the following extract India draws on the regulation of the self, which operates through 'expert' dominant health discourses in contemporary culture, to self-monitor her conduct, thoughts and behaviours towards refraining from eating 'bad' foods.

I think it was a guilt like if I was then sort of eat a biscuit or eat something, it's like it's not even that bad because you are normally just eating it, but then it makes you feel worse and it feels like, 'Oh, no, I'm doing this to myself'. (India, 471–476)

Above, India constructs eating as a bodily urge that she does not consciously think about or choose to do. Initially, she positions eating a biscuit as 'not even *that* bad', because at this point, she is 'normally' eating – construed as a bodily urge dissociated from her conscious mind. From this position, her body does not interpret the biscuit as 'bad' because it is simply giving into hunger. Yet, eating is constructed as an occasion when the body 'takes over', triumphing in the dualist conflict between mind and body. India's talk positions a desire to have control over her body, whereby the construct of self-control demonstrates the desired integrity of the mind. Her lament

('Oh, no, I'm doing this to myself') suggests that she (her mind) should discipline the body and its desires (to eat) in order to attain the idealised body. Here, she draws on the dominant discourse of personal responsibility and individuality, which position body shape as simply a matter of choice. In this discourse, she only has herself to blame for failing, and she risks being assigned the undesirable moral characteristics of laziness, greed and self-indulgence. She identifies the need to make deliberate, conscientious choices relating to the rational, ascetic conceptualisations of the body that accord to the superior status of thinness (Evans et al., 2008). Thus, tighter control over the body is constructed as requiring an even tighter control over the mind (Bartky, 1990).

In her interview, Frankie constructed sugar as the 'enemy', positioning the food-type as a barrier to conforming to norms of feminine beauty and attractiveness:

> *At the end, there was like a tiramisu and I ate it and hadn't eaten sugar for about three months and I couldn't sleep because I felt so sick. It was like my body couldn't – like it was like, 'Oh, what have I done?' And I was like bloated and horrible and I like regretted it for like a week. (Frankie, 285–291)*

Frankie's abstinence from sugar reflects the moral values of self-denial and control. These are evident in religious discourses – the archetype of the Madonna is morally superior to and religiously 'healthier' than the self-indulgent, uncontrolled and insatiable obese person, or the archetype of the Whore (Hepworth, 1999). From this position, Frankie's willpower and achievement are signified by the ideal of the mind being firmly in control of the body. This discursive construction is one of paramount self-control and mastery; Frankie must be able to self-deny and control her calorific intake to conform to the desired expectations of femininity.

Frankie constructs the dessert as a rare treat in the context of a special occasion, by drawing on the contemporary description of food as 'naughty but nice'. This reflects the discursive construction that eating for pleasure is only permitted for women in measured doses, which positions restriction of appetite and denial of hunger as central features in the construction of femininity (Bordo, 2003). Although there may be cultural permission for Frankie to eat the dessert in this instance, there is an absence of gratification; instead, she describes a sense of punishment and repentance, constructed through her body's sickness/bloatedness, representing atonement for eating the dessert.

The dominant discourse of femininity steers her subsequent guilt and regret for her lack of self-restraint and containment of impulse/desire, which then 'disciplines' her own body in the knowledge of (feminine) limits and possibilities (Bordo, 2003). Thus, eating the dessert could epitomise submission to desire/sin/the body, signifying a failure to execute a strong (masculine) will. From this position, Frankie self-disciplines and self-regulates in the service of such norms to maintain the tenets of femininity that she wishes to embody, as she goes on to say:

> *Now I know that there's no point. When people are passing around cake and going – there's not one bit of me that wants it because I know the repercussions of feeling so shit afterwards, body-wise and also like, 'What did you do that for?' (Frankie, 292–296)*

Frankie draws on a dominant discourse of femininity that offers the subject position of a strong-willed, self-denying individual. From this position, she can speak and act as a woman who is in control of her body and desires, who is feminine by mastering her impulse and who will be rewarded with a slender, beautiful, 'powerful' feminine figure. In addition, her construction of control as a denial of flesh – indeed, her renunciation of the possibility that the eating body could signify anything *other* than a lack of control – resonates with Christian asceticism's renunciation of the flesh, in which control is also about denial of the body (Foucault, 1988). The dominance of the conventional female body affects how Frankie comes to feel, treat and shape her own body; the repercussions of eating – namely guilt, shame and regret – produce a self-disciplinary practice that acts a defence against losing control over food (and desire). The fact that her self-denial becomes a part of her thought processes demonstrates the powerful effects of being subjugated, made to think and behave in specific ways, which services the construction of femininity as inherently in need of control (Foucault, 1980a; Bordo, 2003).

In this master theme, participants constructed themselves as valued for how they look; they were affected by norms of appearance, which the women they admired on Instagram reinforced. The concept of normalising judgement, which is experienced by a disciplinary gaze, subjected participants to failing to meet standards and norms of appearance that are strongly attached to hegemonic femininity. They demonstrated that the only option to assuage the suffering created by this failure was to undertake the

disciplinary practices of diet and exercise (Heyes, 2006). However, they constructed pain and suffering in failing to undertake these normative practices adequately (or at all) and in struggling with the rigidity of the practices, not finding them easy or natural (Bartky, 1988). Yet, even when participants constructed 'power' or 'pleasure' in getting closer to reaching their ideal body, the pleasure was short-lived. Maintaining the weight became a new disciplinary control in itself; self-denial and self-control intensified in order to avoid experiencing failure again, ultimately encouraging stricter engagement with the disciplinary practices (Bartky, 1990; Heyes, 2007).

3.4 Master Theme 3: An Illusory Ideal: Limiting the Damage to My Own Body Image

In this third and final master theme, participants draw on resistant and critical discourses to construct the representations of women on Instagram. They positioned these women as reinforcing an illusory and near-impossible standard of beauty; one that they constructed as unattainable for their own bodies. In addition, they enacted a form of self-care by refusing to act in accordance with the behaviours and action required by the dominant thin ideology. Lastly, they wished to warn other women of the pernicious affective power that photographs of women on Instagram can hold over one's body (and mind).

3.4.1 Subtheme 3(1): 'Mythical girls' (Natasha, 186–188)

In this subtheme, participants described a critical awareness of the reality of the 'ideal' body, represented by their chosen photographs of women on Instagram. They demonstrated a rational resistance to the attainability of the 'illusory' images.

Natasha constructed a critique towards the women given the ultimate status of beauty on Instagram:

> *There are just these mythical girls that on the beach all the time or always taking photos with perfect bums and tiny waists and stuff. But it's just not realistic. (Natasha, 186–188)*

Here, Natasha challenges the hegemonic standard of beauty by resisting the Instagram images as a 'literal' aspiration because they represent a virtually unachievable standard of female beauty. She draws on the discourse of the women as mythical creations, who construct a false consciousness by (re)producing the dominant

ideology; in her interview, she also spoke to the 'lie' that such imagery produces (Natasha, 196). From this position, she knows it does not serve her best interests to channel her energy and time into a hopeless pursuit to obtain a perfect body (Davis, 1991).

At the same time, she may wish to distance herself from the unwanted subject position of being a subject of false consciousness, or a 'cultural dope' (Hall, 1981), which is an argument routinely used to critique 'vulnerable' women and girls whose meaning for (almost lethal) self-starvation is the ubiquitous media images of thin women (Bordo, 2003; Saukko, 2009). These narratives are deemed denigrating, stigmatising and dismissive of the complexity of 'eating-disordered' experiences, as such, this out-of-date and over-simplistic ideological critique is widely condemned by critical feminist theorists (Bordo, 2003; Burns & Malson, 2009; Saukko, 2009). Natasha may not wish to be positioned as weak-minded, narcissistic or an 'unwitting' victim of media (ideological) manipulation (Saukko, 2009; Davis, 1991). However, drawing on such discourses do not permit ambivalence or agency; rather, she must simply be misguided or mistaken to engage in certain hegemonic thoughts and practices when she knows better.

Natasha's recognition of the lack of realism in the Instagram images roots the problem in an unrealistic mediated ideal, as well as acknowledging an awareness of how the social media platform can replicate media techniques to create feminine perfection (Natasha, 200). Yet, this discourse may not enable her to critically scrutinise societal messages about feminine beauty (for example, social norms of how beauty is defined, cultivated and rewarded); however, Natasha conveys an awareness of the collusions, subversion and enticement present in the dominant ideology and representations of ideal women (Bordo, 1989; Burns & Malson, 2009). Conversely, Natasha's construction of the significant images as 'artificial' is a difficult position in the era of the 'hyper-real' (Baudrillard, 1988); such knowledge is positioned as faded or frayed, as it is unable to *truly* cast a critical eye over the seductive idea of female perfection conveyed through 'dazzling, compelling and authoritative images' (Bordo, 2003, p.104). From these complex and contradictory positions, Natasha may have to engage in ongoing negotiations when interacting with her own body, which is constrained by a fabricated but seductive ideal and by the limitations (or possibilities)

she describes in disciplining her body towards the norm of physical appearance for women.

Lastly, Natasha construction of the women having perfect bodily features – 'perfect bums and tiny waists' (Natasha, 186-188) – draws on the discourse of objectification, which functions to socialise woman to view themselves and other women as objects (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). From this position, she could resist the construction that women are simply their bodies, instead favouring the idea that women are individuals with personal qualities and achievements unrelated to their appearance. Similarly, her construction of an unrealistic expectation for girls to (*only*) take photographs of themselves hints that this is neither an accurate nor a global representation of girls' and women's daily lives or experiences – and one that may not resonate with Natasha's experience of being woman, either. Therefore, such a critique could reject the notion that she and other women are simply defined by their appearance, instead arguing that they have more to offer. In doing so, Natasha may be able to occupy a position that enables her to function as more than an object of desire.

In the following extract, Ella draws on a dominant discourse that celebrities and models *have* to be preoccupied with their appearance because it is a requirement of their job to present a certain image. This offers her the possibility of resisting the expectation that she needs to attain a particular bodily appearance.

> *No, I don't think -- I feel that way because I can sort of realise the reality*
> *of it. And again, it's their jobs. It's their ['celebrities' and models'] job*
> *to look like that. (Ella, 1323–1325)*

In her interview, Ella drew on a narrative that celebrities/models have access to resources that allow them to achieve the media-idealised image. This offers her a critical discourse that challenges the expectation that she and all other women should emulate the appearance of celebrities or models, who are idolised in society and media, because of the difference in their resources, expectations and lifestyles. At the same time, this position does not enable her to sufficiently critique the fact that, within current gender/power relations, a woman's access to power, capital, mobility and privilege is often tied to her accommodation to the ideal body shape (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). Although Ella is able to dismiss expectations for her to conform to an ideal of femininity that celebrities and models project, and that features in media-

idealised representations of slenderness, she still feels compelled to strive for thinness; without achieving this idealised appearance, her success and happiness are undetermined (Ella, 251–253).

Instead, from the position of a neoliberal subject, Ella rejects the suggestion that her motives are coerced by the influence of femininity from the media or society (Gill, 2007a, 2007b, McRobbie, 2007). In doing so, she is limited in offering a critique of requirements for female appearance in the broader context of power and gender hierarchies – especially how thinness is peddled as an egalitarian choice and sold to the masses – in which any woman can (choose to) be beautiful because thinness is the *only* requirement (Bordo, 2003).

In the extract below, Ava draws on a resistant discourse that positions the ideal body shape as unrealistic for the majority as bodies are entities determined by biology, meaning only the very thinnest (due to 'lucky' genes or metabolism; Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996) can acquire and easily maintain the desired body:

> *'And erm I just remind myself that there are very few people who I've met in real life who look like this. Realistically, the majority of people for their body shape or metabolism or genetics, looking like this would absolutely never happen' (Ava, 200–203)*

Ava is able to construct the idealised images on Instagram as not representative of 'real life'(Cohen et al. 2018; Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018); this enables her to position the platform as enabling a distortion of reality as women can portray themselves in an idealised manner (all being thin and toned) and thus unrepresentative of normality, or be the products of exceptional efforts to achieve a slender physique (Tiggemann & Pickering, 1996). Thus, Ava resists the dominant exposure to idealised images by recognising that the body shape portrayed is unattainable for most, in particular drawing on an understanding of medical and psychological literature that highlights the difficulties (genes, metabolism, 'natural' body shape/composition) in achieving the 'ideal' body. Possibly, this affords her agency in navigating the existing social system she is part of, as it could prevent her from wasting time and energy on the pursuit of thinness, which could be seen as only utopian.

Similarly, Clara positions the women on Instagram as distorting their appearance on the platform to meet an ideal of feminine beauty:

Yeah, don't think – like if I saw her walking down the road, I'm not sure she'd look like that (Clara, 76–77)

Clara's discursive construction positions the idealised images as an unrealistic representation of how women look in 'real life' i.e. walking down the road. Through a resistant discourse of 'media scepticism', she applies a critical lens to the images, which may offer some inoculation against the harmful influence of exposure to idealised femininity on Instagram (Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018). However, ultimately, she has to objectify, judge and evaluate other women ('I'm not sure she'd look like that') to protect herself from the standards and expectations of female beauty (that which women are pressured to achieve, including those she views on Instagram), rather than being able to draw upon a resistant discourse that positions the dominant ideology as responsible for creating unrealistic expectations of appearance for *all* women.

Frankie constructed the women on Instagram as strategically representing their bodies to emulate media-idealised beauty images:

They're probably taken at the time of day when they look their best, so it's probably in the morning. It's not going to be after like a huge meal. And like probably they put filters on it. I know that's probably not exactly what they look like in that moment. (Frankie, 933–938)

Her discursive construction speaks to the women on Instagram knowingly 'choosing' to take, edit and display their photographs to meet an ideal of Western femininity, by exhibiting their bodies as thin and toned on Instagram. She positions the women as autonomous and self-responsible by tactically adapting and circumscribing certain ways to achieve the desired result (Warin, 2010). Similarly, Frankie places herself as well-informed of such practices and is therefore aware that the women do not offer true representations of their bodies on Instagram. In her interview, she explained she was not 'stupid' enough to believe in the illusory reality that is created by such imagery (Frankie, 945); but such a position – (partial) awareness of the social critique of

the promotion of an unrealistic/unattainable body ideal –does not make it easier to cast off limited notions of beauty.

However, it is possible that Frankie constructs what is 'best' for own body within the context she lives in, within the contradictory constructions of femininity and beauty, and within existing structural constraints. From this position, her decision is not constructed as 'unthinking conformity'; rather, Frankie is aware of why she is following the ideology, but sees no other choice – the cultural privileges attached to thinness are compelling reasons to engage in the labour of training, shaping and modifying her body (Davis, 1991; Bordo, 2003). While 'choice' positions her as unaffected by the social control of female bodies that limits notions of constraint, coercion or oppression (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012), it also makes it difficult to critique the primary means of subjectification in which she comes to discipline and construct herself according to the ideologies and agendas of the thin ideal (Foucault, 1988). Furthermore, women do not stand outside culture – any 'free' choice is continually at risk of being reabsorbed into (repressive) discourses of femininity, beauty and the female body (Davis, 1991; Bordo, 2003).

Rose's (1989, 1999) expansion on Foucault's (1988) concept of 'governmentality' is useful to understand why Frankie would believe her choices are a result of free will. This concept argues that the *government of subjectivity* has taken shape via a complex and heterogeneous assemblage of *technologies*. These technologies act as *relays* – they bring together, on the one hand, the doctrines and ambitions within public objectives for the good health and order of the social body; and on the other, individuals' own ideas, aspirations and desires for health and well-being. In this way, a *governing of souls* takes place through people believing they do what they do out of free choice. For Frankie, this means there is a lack of opportunity to reflect on where her options originate from – in particular, the concept of the 'ideal' body and its associated body-management practices.

In the following extract, India constructs the lack of realism in some images she sees on Instagram as establishing a clear difference between the 'normal' woman (reality) and the ideal (fantasy). This offers the position that the idealised version of feminine beauty is unattainable for her, as a 'normal', 'average' woman.

I understand to myself that this isn't how a normal woman would maybe look like, the average girl would not look like this. (India, 358–361)

India's reading of the images could be constructed as form of self-care, in that it enables a resistance to the damaging belief that any woman can achieve the ideal of thinness if she exerts enough self-control. But this is somewhat contradicted by her awareness that other 'normal' women on Instagram comply with the cultural norms of femininity, as demonstrated in her earlier extracts (theme 1(1)). Therefore, these two conflicting positions would require active or ongoing negotiations in her interactions with her own body, along the 'thin divide' of a normal appearance (Davis, 1991, p.38). From this position, India is also limited in constructing resistance to the social rewards she desires from achieving a slender body; her awareness of others' acceptance of the ideal means she is similarly under pressure to achieve mainstream beauty standards in order to be desired, accepted and valued.

In this subtheme, participants demonstrated a degree of agency by challenging the level of female perfection presented on Instagram. This enabled a resistance to the idea that the ideal is obtainable for them and their bodies, and offered a buffer against engaging in disciplinary practices to attain the desired physique. However, it avoids or ignores a critique of social pressures for unrealistic thinness; the 'ideal woman', who combines slenderness with selectively toned muscles, is virtually unattainable without resorting to extreme measures (Gimlin, 2007). At the same time, participants drew on discourses of individuality, in which it was their responsibility to not take the images as 'literal' aspirations (e.g. Thompson & Stice, 2001) and to avoid being encultured in dominant ideology – an ideology that judges women against, and rewards them for, emulating a virtually unachievable conception of physical beauty, and denies the socialisation that privileges one aesthetic ideal over all others.

3.4.2 Subtheme 3(2): Working to regain control: 'I try to handle it in a healthy way and not let myself be controlled by these images' (Natasha, 363–364)

Participants constructed a resistance discourse of 'regaining control' over their bodies by refusing to discipline themselves according to the ideologies and agendas of the thin and toned ideal. They drew on a discourse of self-care, enacting a form of resistance to the oppressive and damaging effects of attempting to transform their

bodies into an illusory concept – a concept that does not deliver the promises sold in the cultural nexus that ties thinness with femininity, success, health and happiness (Bordo, 2003).

> *Erm, I try, er I try to handle it in a healthy way and not let myself be controlled by these images. (Natasha, 363–364)*

In the above extract, Natasha draws on a discourse of rationality by not succumbing to ideological pressure, which delineates being over-controlled by seductive and compelling imagery. From this position, her rational approach reproduces the mind/body dualism that constitutes Western dualist thinking, which privileges mind over body and rationality over emotions in personhood (Crawford, 1984; Fraser & Greco, 2005). By harnessing an individualistic discourse, it becomes Natasha's personal responsibility to cope with desiring something that she knows to be either bad or wrong for her ('I try to handle it in a healthy way'); she thus executes self-control to resist pressure to emulate the 'ideal' body. It is possible that this position offers distance from the unwanted subject position of being an active agent, or even a victim of succumbing to ideological pressure – a popular media discourse routinely used to describe girls and women that struggle with disordered eating or body-image problems (Bordo, 2003; Saukko, 2009). At the same time, this does not acknowledge the fact that Natasha has to *work hard* at resisting dominant cultural representations of, and messages about, women's bodies. This is also evidenced in the following extract, in which she positions a rational approach as not completely effective in stopping her feelings of inadequacy towards her own body; she constructs such an approach as, at best, a temporarily effective coping strategy:

> *And you know it's a desirable thing and I have had issues with my body image in the past. So that does sometimes bring up feelings of I have had before. Erm, but I would say that, I, I kind of know how to deal with that now. So, it doesn't, it doesn't impact my body image to the extent it would make me change my lifestyle or anything. (Natasha, 435–439)*

Natasha continues to constitute thinness as desirable, but she constructs her past difficulties with her body image as enacting a form of resistance; these difficulties prevent her from engaging in the practices of bodily discipline and transformation

consistent with the dominant ideology. But she positions herself as still affected by the saturation of these images, which continue to elicit negative emotions and reactions towards her own body (as demonstrated by her extracts in themes 1(3) and 2(1)). In doing so, Natasha constructs limited hope in curbing the power of the aesthetic social conditioning that forms her notions of female beauty. At the same time, her resistance is constructed as a form of self-care; she chooses not to change her lifestyle in the pursuit of thinness, implying a sense of self-protection from the harsh and punitive disciplinary regime required to obtain the desired physique. It is possible that Natasha's awareness of the unrealistic mediated ideal positions her as determined not to get caught in the false hope that thinness is attainable. Yet, she has to grapple with the limited options that these conflicting positions provide her: she is conscious that her own body does not measure up aesthetically, and faces being penalised for not meeting an ideal of feminine beauty; she may also be stigmatised or pathologised for not feeling attractive; and she is simultaneously aware that pursuing an unachievable ideal body has a negative, damaging and limiting effect.

In the extract below, Ella resists being affected by idealised images of other women on Instagram by actively choosing not to view or follow them:

I don't follow any of it anymore. So, I wouldn't say it impacts me at all now. But it definitely did and I have experience of the fact that it did (Ella, 727–730)

Ella is aware that the images on Instagram reinforce hegemonic appearance norms and magnify the already intense pressure she faces to be thin, which for her, constructs a vulnerability to experiencing body image difficulties. Thus, she positions herself as personally responsible for self-regulating the amount of time spent viewing images that reinforce societal ideals of female attractiveness (see RSPH, 2017). This position offers a sense of protection against her body image and emotional wellbeing, since she is able to construct herself as unaffected now. However, the extent to which Ella is able to take action against the media persuasiveness on her body image is limited, since she cannot subvert these impossible norms and demonstrate *actual* agency in spite of appearance culture. She illustrates her own and other women's struggle to

effect change in societal awareness, and the individual responsibility they face to 'normalise' the impact that dominant representations of female beauty have on body image.

In the next extract, Ava's talk positions her as having to work hard to not be affected by the imagery she sees on Instagram:

> *I find it hard to try and find images that make me feel something, but I picked that one just because of how I used to feel (worse about my own body). I try to work on that, but I don't like -- look at it, ever thinking I wish I looked like that. (Ava, 370–372)*

Ava draws on a discourse of self-care, which offers some protection and enables her to refute the ideal for her own body. In her interview, an underlying theme of Ava's talk was a state of diminished self-worth regarding how she felt about her own body being inadequate; her efforts towards meeting the thin ideal felt futile, and she experienced a dawning realisation that these efforts (compulsive exercise and restrained eating) were a source of unhappiness and self-limitation.

However, Ava partly circumvents this position by drawing on a dominant discourse of healthism in earlier extracts (theme 1(2)); there, she constructed her decision to pursue a 'healthier' ideal as a form of self-care (in terms of it being less restrictive and limiting), yet she self-monitors to produce the lean, firm physique she desires. From this position, the healthism discourse contributes to the creation of the subject who is interested in taking action to improve herself by undertaking the behaviours necessary to enhance health; the appropriate cultural body-ideal is a visible sign of initiative, self-care and control (Rysst, 2010). However, health is equated with beauty by endorsing the same socially desirable, female appropriate image (Bordo, 2003). Ava may therefore be unable to (critically) see the (obscured) sociocultural factors that might be at play, in which culturally entrenched concepts militate any construction of her gendered body.

In the following extract, Clara draws on a dominant discourse of rationality that enacts the mind/body dualism; she has to actively challenge her instinctive wishes to emulate the ideal image of femininity she sees on Instagram and in the media:

Yeah, you get into a mindset which you have to pull yourself out of, definitely. But I guess it's a bit like staring at a magazine cover for too long. You start to think, 'Oh, I wish I could look like that.' It's the same with Instagram, 'Oh I wish I could—' and then you have to pull yourself out of it. (Clara, 450–456)

From this position, reason is privileged over emotion as Clara uses her intellect to reject what is clearly a very seductive and compelling pressure to fit in. In doing so, she positions herself as aware of the rational (or even critical) arguments against the pursuit of thinness, but at the same time she cannot ignore its function as a powerful feminine symbol. From these contradictory positions, she is aware that the pursuing the cultural norms of attractiveness and femininity present problems, to which body surveillance and restricted eating serve as an illusory solution. Resistance is offered by enacting a form of self-care: distancing herself from a limiting position of wasting time, energy and emotions in an idealistic pursuit. However, Clara lacks a discourse that is powerful enough to challenge her desire to emulate the most significant way in which femininity is imaged. In addition, her talk lacks examples of her grappling with her knowledge of opposing, contradictory and complex cultural constructions of femininity; this affects what she can choose to do (or not do) with her female body, and is constrained by dominant ideology (Gill, 2007a, 2007b, 2008).

In this subtheme, participants constructed their negative and damaging experiences of following the dominant ideology as providing a 'truth' that buffers against complying with societal expectations of feminine appearance. They constructed the very 'real' effects of social norms that operate to discipline their bodies and highlighted the complex relationship between culture and subjectivity. The disciplinary nature of social constructions influenced their body image, but ultimately it remained the responsibility of the individual to resist these cultural messages, which the photographs they saw on Instagram reinforced, promoted and reproduced.

3.4.3 Subtheme 3(3): Warning others: 'I definitely don't think it's healthy' (Ava, 627–628)

In this final subtheme, participants warned others that the photographs of idealised women on Instagram hold a pernicious affective power. They positioned the photographs encouraging appearance over accomplishment as the feminine

demonstration of desirability and worth, in which a relentless focus on 'body' emboldens others to see and judge women and themselves as aesthetic but passive objects.

In the following extract, Ava constructs the fitness accounts she follows on Instagram as responsible for unhealthy representation of or messages about women's bodies:

> *Yeah. I don't think it's a good -- I don't really think it's a good idea. I don't know who started the craze of making these (fitness) accounts, but I definitely don't think it's healthy. (Ava, 627–628)*

Ava draws on her own experience in light of an expert discourse, which places at least part of the blame for bodily discontent on encountering a homogenous, rigid ideal that requires women to diet and exercise to attain the ideal standard of feminine appearance. In the context of her earlier extracts, Ava positions the (oppressive) representation of glorified images on Instagram as having a detrimental effect on her own body image, leading to harmful practices regarding eating and exercising. She thus enacts a form of critique, warning (other women) that fitness accounts juxtapose their 'healthy' status with normalising discipline towards attaining an ideal of physical appearance/femininity (Ava, 282). Conversely, she directs blame for the *existence* of such accounts on Instagram; it is difficult to hold the women in the photographs responsible, as it is likely they are just as objectified. Ava may be limited in terms of *who* to blame for accounts that culturally sanction appearance-based transformation through restrictive eating, compulsive exercise and obsessive tendencies; as such, she is immobilised with the knowledge that resists the dominant ideology.

Similarly, Natasha constructed Instagram fitness accounts as powerful in terms of influencing how one thinks, experiences or feels towards their own body:

> *I think it definitely has the power to erm to influence the way you think about things. If people actively go and follow certain kind of [fitness] accounts. (Natasha, 405–406)*

Natasha draws on a dominant 'expert' discourse in the context of feeling compelled to have a similar body to the idealised bodies presented on Instagram. From this position, she blames the limited, narrow representations of women's bodies for

propelling her and others towards a sociocultural standard of feminine beauty. But because the fitness accounts produce and reproduce feminine ideals and practices, which are entrenched in pervasive cultural and social discourses, Natasha struggles to identify the coercion that motivates her and other women towards self-disciplining in the service of such norms. She is therefore limited in recognising the subtle coerciveness of these accounts; their 'power' is in their reproduction of culturally sanctioned knowledge, which motivates the actions of those living within them (Foucault, 1982). This diffusion of power means no one is specifically responsible (Foucault, 1988); rather, specific cultural mechanisms exert control through dominant discourses of femininity, which provides a powerful set of imperatives for women to manage their bodies' appearances (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989). Although Natasha is limited in presenting such a critique, she demonstrates agency by enacting a form of resistance; that is, warning women that following the ideology of fitness accounts, which promote self-discipline as all it takes to achieve an unrealistic ideal, involves an element of risk to one's well-being.

Like other participants, Rose warns others of the pernicious effects that using Instagram can have on body image, since it reflects a distorted and idealised version of reality, in particular an unrealistic dominant representation of women's bodies:

> *'It's not real, it doesn't reflect real life but it is very easy to get caught*
> *up in it and become obsessed with it. Also, you're not seeing like one*
> *picture like this but instead you're constantly seeing these pictures and*
> *of course it is going to affect you, so people need to be careful' (Rose,*
> *755–759)*

Rose positions the social media platform as addictive in nature, perhaps because it offers relief or escape from 'real life'. In relation to this, she constructs the relentless exposure to glossy, thin-idealised images as problematic since others can infer that such images are highly prevalent, enhancing the pressures to follow perceived social norms – thus she positions the influence of social media as strengthening a desire to be thin (see Fardouly et al. 2015b; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018; Cohen et al. 2018). In this way, Rose articulates a clear warning that using Instagram has the

potential to exacerbate normative body image concerns and pressures to conform to 'body perfect' norms in young women, since the appearance-based content is relentless in both representation and message.

In the following extract, India constructs her female peers as emulating a sexualised representation of women, which she identifies with the imagery of celebrities in the media:

> *Yeah because it's like in the sense you kind of expect celebrities to be focused more to body, but when you see now -- well, particularly I feel pissed that a lot of people my age, especially girls, they're doing this which is becoming every post is more sexualised, more body. (India, 377–382)*

India positions her anger towards a representational practice that does not promote the display of (actual) female sexuality; rather, girls and women are invited to be beautiful by being 'sexual', which involves constructing oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy sold in consumer culture (Wolf, 1991; Gill, 2008). India is angry that other women on Instagram construct themselves as objects, with no active role in desire, by 'deliberately' presenting themselves in a seemingly objectified manner (Wolf, 1991; Gill, 2008). As such, she draws on a post-feminist discourse that presents all women as entirely free agents, no longer constrained by any inequalities. This discourse (re)presents sexual objectification as in the chosen, liberated interests of active, confident, assertive female subjects (Gill, 2007a). But this agency is conditional; heterosexual women must follow their 'autonomously' generated desires by emulating the valued 'look', which India constructs as immediately recognisable.

At the same time, India's anger offers a resistance towards heterosexuality femininity as a project concerned solely with making oneself look desirable by being 'more body'. In doing so, she partly offers a critique of the splitting of sexuality from intimacy, and of girls learning to be desir*ed* rather than desir*ing*. Similarly, the concept of the thin ideal is curiously unfeminine; it represses 'fat', which is inherently associated with the most feminine parts of a woman – breasts, buttocks, abdomens and hips – but is seen as unattractive; a sign of a body 'out of control' (Wolf, 1991). Wolf (1991) argues that women are taught to look sexual in order to be pursued, savoured and consumed for male pleasure – but each woman has to learn for herself from nowhere

how to feel sexual, while men eroticise images that teach nothing about female desire. Therefore, women (and men) must absorb the dominant culture's (sexual) fantasies, as there is little representation of anything else (Wolf, 1991).

At the same time, India's anger could be constructed as an expectation to present herself on Instagram in a similarly sexualised manner. From this position, she may be ambivalent about expressing her sexuality, which is not only reliant on the beautiful-(thin)-hence-sexual concept (Wolf, 1991) but also grants others permission to objectify or harass her for the way she looks. Yet, the consequences of not taking up this subject position mean she can equally become an object of derision for not looking attractive (as demonstrated in her extracts in themes 1.1, 1.3 and 2.1). Either way, she is limited; her physical appearance can be used to demean, humiliate, control and objectify her.

In the following extract, Clara positions young girls as emulating other women on Instagram, who portray an objectified appearance through revealing their bodies in a sexy provocative manner. She argues that body-centric selfies enable engagement with forms of sexual objectification:

> *But with the way Instagram is at the moment and with women posting selfies of themselves in bikinis or whatever, I think it's sending out the message to young girls by accident to concentrate on only on that and a lot of young girls are only doing that, I think. (Clara, 834–840)*

Clara draws on a feminist discourse here; she positions the women on Instagram as implying to young girls that they must focus solely on their bodies, and as displaying a form of self-objectification that suggests women are physical and sexual objects whose social value is mainly inferred from bodily appearances. From this perspective, Clara shows concern that young girls are thinking of themselves as passive objects – bodies to be looked at or used, rather than a person with accomplishments other than merely how they look. In doing so, Clara implies there is an element of risk in girls learning to relate their worth to their appearance, rather than to their competence attributes. Being initiated into the culture of sexual objectification means girls' bodies are increasingly looked at, commented on and evaluated by others and targeted for disrespect, harassment, and abuse (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Clara does not direct blame towards the women on Instagram; she likely positions them as just as entrenched in this (subtle) process of objectification, in which Instagram encourages the

performance of femininity by emulating a stereotyped image of beauty that suits dominant and popular opinion.

However, Clara's anger is unfocused. She is limited from this position, because there is nobody specific to blame – and because there is nobody to get angry at or complain to, there is nothing she and the other women (participants) can do. She and the other women in the study are, in effect, made powerless to challenge what they recognise as limiting and damaging to themselves and other women, because there is no one specifically to challenge. The myth of female beauty merely maintains female powerlessness – although the 'real' power is that this myth can remain unspoken; hidden in plain sight (Wolf, 1991).

To summarise, the participants admired the idealised images of women they saw on Instagram, and placed themselves under pressure to achieve similar results with their own bodies, particularly since the relentless exposure to such imagery enhanced and strengthened perceived norms of appearance. The desire to emulate the ideal body shape was fuelled by constructing their own bodies as inferior and inadequate in comparison to the women they viewed on the social media platform. Therefore, they positioned their appearance as in need of change and body modification, and necessary for them to be respected, admired and desired. Body monitoring heightened their experiences of judgment and punishment for failing to live up to a societal ideal of femininity, and as such, they struggled to construct their bodies and experiences of body image as anything but negative. Therefore, disciplinary measures such as exercise and diet to appropriate the desired body shape and size were constructed as a solution to overcoming the shame and inadequacy experienced because of their 'deviant' 'abnormal' bodies. In particular, attaining normative feminine beauty was assumed to create the state of being beautiful, successful and independent, as they imagine the women on Instagram to be. However, the participants constructed the disciplinary practices aimed at attaining the 'ideal' body size and shape as being difficult, unnatural and causing them and other women deprivation. Ultimately, it was the negative impact on their body image and emotional wellbeing that propelled them towards critical discourses that challenged the dominant representations of idealised beauty on Instagram. The participants were able to enact a form of resistance and self-care by refusing to act in accordance with the dominant thin ideology. An overarching

consensus among the participants was the importance of using their voices as women to share their experiences, in order to warn others about how their body image could be similarly impacted by the idealised images of women on Instagram.

4. Discussion

4.1 Introduction to the Discussion

In this chapter, I will summarise the key findings of the research in relation to how participants socially constructed the impact of their experiences on Instagram on their body image. I will critically evaluate the research in terms of quality markers and transferability, discuss methodological decisions and personally reflect on my role as a female researcher. I will then consider the main findings in relation to existing literature and theory, before considering their implications for therapeutic practice. Lastly, I will suggest areas for future research.

4.2 Overview of Analysis

Appendix 15 presents a summary of the master themes and subthemes. The homogeneity of participants' sociocultural backgrounds (white British) and age group (18–25) may have contributed to their similar experiences; yet, there were nuances and contrasts in the way each participant accepted, claimed and resisted particular discursive

subject positions. Below, I provide an overview of the three master themes and touch on the links between them.

In Master Theme 1, 'Shaping a woman: Am I meeting expectations?', the most central and powerful discourse shaping participants' bodies and subjectivities was the 'social norm' that a woman is defined by her appearance, and particularly a recognition of the narrow beauty standard that defines feminine appearance norms. All participants chose photographs of women who met a cultural ideal in the contemporary West – thin, toned, taut and white – although some also admired women who were slender but had feminine curves. Seductive notions of ideal femininity defined participants' desire to create a body similar to the women they venerated on Instagram. The homogenising imagery had a powerful normalising effect on what participants thought they should look like, which was heightened by their fantasies of the desire and power that possessing a culturally privileged body would grant.

In seeking to achieve normative femininity, participants used the photographs of women on Instagram to inspire them to transform their own bodies. They drew on the norm of 'health', which culturally determines an ideal appearance of slenderness alongside muscle tone, situating this aesthetic as a health goal; the achievements of this 'aesthetic of health' by other 'normal' women on Instagram also infused how participants approached health and fitness. Some 'agency play' (Warin, 2010 p.79) was apparent in participants' choice of bodies that seemed more realistic to achieve with their own body shapes. Participants appropriated a discourse of acceptable female fitness in different ways, but an imperative to be healthier was powerful in disciplining their thoughts and behaviours towards social norms of appearance.

Lastly, participants knew that the women in the photographs met the current standard of femininity (read as physically attractive), and through self-surveillance processes, they positioned their own bodies as comparatively inadequate and flawed. Their perceived deviance from a 'normal' body appearance negatively affected their subjectivities, fostering despondency and resentment towards their own bodies. Underlying some of the accounts were themes of antipathy towards the other women for their beauty, which threatened their own; participants saw them as competitors for heterosexual love, relationships and status.

In Master Theme 2, the powerful, productive effects of discursive practices constituted and regulated participants' bodies as deficient under the panoptic gaze (Foucault, 1979), constructing anticipated judgement and punishment for failing to meet a standard of acceptable femininity. Participants constructed a preoccupation with the gaze of 'the Other' and positioned their own social value as inferable from their bodily appearance. Through self-surveillance, they imagined that their own bodies conferred a myriad of negative meanings, which limited their freedom and agency to make their bodies visible. For a few participants, Instagram presented an opportunity to gain validation and approval for their appearance, and a pull to compete for beauty.

Participants constructed and adhered to cultural enforcement to normalise their bodies through a virtuous adherence to self-imposed diet and exercise. They positioned themselves as personally and morally responsible for transforming their bodies to conform to social norms of appearance, interpreted the thin, toned bodies of the women on Instagram as an unmistakable sign of willpower, control and discipline, and positioned hard work as necessary to transform their own bodies. Some felt that disciplining their bodies afforded them control and power, while others saw such discipline as a form of punishment and deprivation. When describing controlled eating practices, participants focused on self-denial and self-restraint, and linked their food choices to morality-based emotional consequences of guilt, dread and confusion. Participants constructed complete control over their own bodies as necessary to achieve an ideal body weight, size and shape; but their accounts stressed conflict, inadequacy and suffering in adhering to these normative body-management practices. This contradicts the dominant opinion that constructs achieving normative female beauty as unproblematic and effortless.

In Master Theme 3, participants constructed resistance discourses that counterweighed the imagery they were inundated with daily on Instagram. They positioned women's bodies on Instagram as contributing to an artificial notion of beauty, which, from their own history and experience, they constructed as unattainable for themselves and other women. From this position, participants described resisting the seductive and compelling pressure to conform to an ideal of physical beauty, and enacted a form of self-care by refusing to act in accordance with the dominant ideology of thinness. They described warning other women of the pernicious affective power

such idealised imagery can hold over one's body and mind, and ultimately feared the detrimental consequences of girls and women focusing on their appearances at the expense of their other accomplishments. However, participants were positioned as powerless because there was no one specifically to blame or hold responsible; since power manifested through manipulation of desire, they could recognise its coercive and repressive nature, but were unable to unmask its subtle mechanisms at the 'micro-levels' of everyday life (Foucault, 1980b).

4.3 Transferability and Quality

In this section, I revisit research quality issues and consider the limitations of this study. I consider the strengths and limitations in further personal and epistemological reflections too.

4.3.1 Evaluation of research quality

The Methodology (section 2.8) set out Yardley's (2008) guidelines for evaluating qualitative research validity. Below, I consider how the four principles therein have evolved during the research process.

4.3.1.1 Sensitivity to context

I changed the analytical method to demonstrate a sensitivity to participants' accounts of body image and Instagram, which emerged as amenable to a social constructionist approach. I focused on capturing the multiple, complex and contradictory meanings that constructed their experiences, and how these position them as women, in discursive practices that create and uphold particular forms of social life (Burr, 1995). I included participants' extracts with an analysis that focused on how the discourses in which they are culturally embedded form their subjective experiences. In this Discussion, I try to remain faithful to the varied contexts, structures and positions inherent to participants' experiences, and the consequences these have for them (and other women) in interpersonal and social life.

4.3.1.2 Commitment and rigour

Maintaining a commitment to a social constructionist approach changed the way I conducted the research project; it required grappling with social constructionism theory and (re-)exploring my ontological and epistemological positions. As I sought to theorise the ways in which social concepts and values enabled participants' accounts, I tried to maintain an awareness that the women did not uncomplicatedly absorb these concepts and values into their lives, but rather exercised choice with respect to discourses and practices – especially given that certain constructions offered them validity and legitimacy (Gergen, 1989) and had particular implications for subjectivity and agency (Billig, 1987).

However, at times, I felt stretched. The subject positions participants drew on could vary from moment to moment; they depended on the exchanges between the participants and myself and affected the subject positions made available to them – as well as whether they accepted, claimed or resisted these positions (see Burr, 1999). I explore this further in relation to reflexivity, and provide further insight by contextualising the research within the relevant literature and theory, later on in this chapter.

4.3.1.3 Transparency and coherence

Maintaining a research diary (see Appendix 1) throughout the research process has been useful, and at various points of analysing the data, I have questioned whether I am imposing my own perspective and knowledge. My own experience as a woman who has used Instagram and who empathises with participants' constructions and positions further complicated this question. At times, I have been aware of the researcher's sole power over 'interpretation' (Willig, 2008); as such, I have questioned whether I have been 'correct' in identifying the concepts, assumptions and ideologies shaping the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I am not claiming to speak for others, but rather offering my own interpretation of the analysis, while also acknowledging that there are many others; I have therefore included participants' narratives so that the reader can consider how the

data could have been approached differently (see Appendix 14). A sample of my analysis is also included in Appendix 10.

4.3.1.4 Impact and importance

The impact and significance of this research accumulated progressively. Participants emphasised the deleterious effects of idealised images of thin and toned women on Instagram, suggesting, at the very least, a need for caution for media outlets that idealise thinness, weight-loss and the aesthetic of fitness. Consistent with feminist literature and theory, the findings emphasised how eating and body distress are on a continuum with socially dominant pervasive values (Burns & Malson, 2009). Body image concerns related to Instagram usage could arise in therapy, particularly given the rising popularity of image-based social media platforms. A critical sociocultural approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the social and political dimensions of discourses that inform body image concerns for girls and women, and illuminates how cultural gender-specific constructions (of being beautiful, strong, independent, normal and healthy) are implicated in the development of body image and eating difficulties (Saukko, 2009).

4.3.2 Strengths and Limitations
4.3.2.1 Methodology and epistemological reflexivity

Interestingly, the term 'social constructionism' is predominantly used by psychologists; sociologists already consider themselves to be social constructionists, as most sociological theories argue that our experience of the world is the product of social forces, while psychologists use the term to refer to practice and theory that is fundamentally different from what is normally thought of as psychology (Burr, 1999). I thus found that thinking from a social constructionist perspective did not always come naturally, but my own position is broadly sympathetic to the claims and intentions of social constructionism.

Social constructionism challenges Anglo-American psychology, which is deeply reductionist; dominant psychological theories propose personality or psychopathologies as independent variables resulting from behavioural patterns or symptoms (Willig, 1999). Social constructionism thereby provides a healthy scepticism to what is presented as 'fact' or 'truth' and exhorts the role of language in the construction of explanatory categories that *create*, rather than *reveal*, evidence in support of such categories (Willig, 1999). From this perspective, psychology, like all forms of knowledge, is embedded in and produced by a system of values and power relations. As such, it can never be apolitical, and 'objective science' becomes an ideology that masks how particular conceptions become fixed and pass as 'truth' (Burr, 1999). This has been particularly helpful in challenging the essentialism and individualism central to Western psychology, which typically explains body image in terms of the properties of individual persons; as such, problems become easily pathologised, and it becomes the individual's responsibility to 'cure' themselves (Burr, 1999). Social constructionism has been used to challenge these dominant categories and associated practices, whereby the construct of 'body image' is used to discipline and oppress women (e.g. Parker et al., 1995).

It was, therefore, important to give voice to the participants by documenting accounts of their subjective experience, while also analysing the historical, social and cultural conditions that enabled these experiences and the discourses that constituted them (Willig, 1999). However, I have tried to accommodate 'practice', which refers to participants' own interpretations of and interactions within their conditions, and to acknowledge how social conditions offer a range of possible ways of being (Parker, 1992). However, missing from this critical realist project is the opportunity for participants to engage in critical reflection of the texts they have produced, including identifying the actions available within the discursive constructions on offer – and the limitations and constraints of such action (Willig, 1999). This is important because, as Willig (1999) argues, non-relativist social constructionist research needs to move beyond documentation and towards action. I am aware that participants were not provided with this opportunity, which means the 'reading' provided of their experiences is mine alone. Although it is easy to circumvent this position by arguing that I had initially planned to conduct an IPA study, and was therefore unaware of needing to offer

this opportunity, I do take full responsibility for missing this chance. Instead, I have tried to identify the opportunities for actions and implications for practice. I present the discourses and power relations that contribute to women's subjective experiences of body image, and recognise although women are not deprived of agency, it is important to acknowledge dominant (oppressive) ideology exerts strong pressures over women's bodies, and therefore sexism must remain central to the politics of the body (Bordo, 1999). In particular, I hope to recognise the potential to move past limiting constructions and endeavour to identify the social and material conditions that would enable such a move (Willig, 1999).

Drawing on Foucauldian principles (1972, 1977, 1980a, 1980b, 1982, 1988) has illuminated how reality can be constructed differently through language and shown that there are always alternative ways of describing experiences, identities and subjectivities – they are never fixed, but always open to re-negotiation and/or resistance (Willig, 1999). As such, social constructionist perspective offers a critique of a mainstream psychology's concept of a fixed, stable self, and elucidates the inadequacies and inaccuracies of 'self-contained individualism' (Sampson, 1983; see Nightingale & Cromby, 1999 for a comprehensive review). However, it has been challenging for social constructionism to develop a notion of self that accounts for human subjectivity, with its dynamic processes of self-formation (Cromby & Standby, 1999). Although subjectivity can be said to be formed through discourses, this does not adequately explain how such processes operate; it fails to explain phenomena that are, after all, very real experiences to human beings, instead relegating them to 'side-effects' of discourses (Burr, 1999). This remains a matter of debate; however, a possible solution is to include the concept of 'embodiment', which Burr (1999) argues is compatible with the ethos of both social constructionism and psychology, via Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology, which emphasises a psychological focus between the person *and* the world rather than one or the other. This is not to deny that the analysis provided greatly benefits our understanding of embodiment, in terms of how discourses and cultural practices are written on and through the body; but social constructionism needs a concept of the body to call its own, including its functional, physiological, hormonal, anatomical and phenomenological aspects (Cromby & Standby, 1999). Although my analysis has not specifically incorporated Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of embodiment, I

would nevertheless argue that it does speak to the dialectic process between embodied experience and language, in which each depends on the other for its form of expression (Burr, 1999).

Due to the interest of this research in power relations that centralise the body, such as gender and sexuality, I have focused on the body as a direct locus of social control to demonstrate how historically specific ideals of femininity regulated and disciplined participants' bodies (Bordo, 2003); while not ignoring that structural factors contribute to gendered oppression, as do manifestations of male dominance and power (Ramazanoglu, 1997; see section 4.4.1). Also, I have explored the possibilities of resistance present in the 'subjugated knowledge' within women's accounts of their experiences (Sawicki, 1991). As such, the research offers an analysis and understanding of how power appears in and operates through discourse; to this extent, the research usefully maps the contours and processes of power within a material, embodied context that gives it meaning (Parker, 1992). This has allowed me to fully address its significance to theory and practice (discussed later in section 4.4.1).

4.3.2.2 Procedural Reflexivity

I acknowledge that there was a lack of diversity in the sample of the women who participated in this research. Although this was not my intention as I recruited the first eight women who responded to the advertisement for fairness, I explore this further and make suggestions for future research avenues in section 4.6. The advertisements were placed and shared in culturally diverse areas; however, I could have made to more of an effort to consider the lack of responses from women with intersecting identities and differing societal backgrounds. In hindsight, the study would have benefited from purposive sampling to recruit women from specific boroughs and counties in London and the South-East area that are identified as predominately ethnically diverse in population and from a variety of settings that includes community centres, local workplaces and businesses.

The findings should be considered in light of the homogeneity of the sample, which I expand on in section 4.4.1.5 and see section 1.3.2 for a review of the literature on ethnicity and body image.

4.3.2.3 Personal reflexivity

In this section, I will take a critical reflexive position to summarise the complexity of holding a dual status as both cultural member and cultural commentator (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In line with Parker (1998), I consider how my own subjectivity affects and interconnects with that of the researched, and what forms of agency may have been facilitated or blocked in the process (see Appendix 1 for further reflections).

While writing the analysis, I was struck by the fact that, although the women offered some resistance to the dominant discourses of femininity that formed their relationships to their own bodies, this did not necessarily lessen the power of those discourses. Neither was I exempt, by virtue of educational privilege, from the affective power of the alluring representation of women on Instagram. Instead, it is likely that educational attainment encouraged my acceptance of successful women as intelligent, wealthy and thin, possibly because this is reflected by my female mentors and role models, but I am also aware that – especially as a woman of colour – having the appropriate appearance increases career advancements and social standing; it grants acceptance within the dominant culture and proximity to perceived norms and power structures that exist in White spaces. However, my educational privilege did expose me to knowledge surrounding regulation of the female body; feminist theories and writings assisted in comprehending participants' accounts, and offered a position to be critical of the implicit wider social influences therein. Yet, before undertaking such a research project, my knowledge of feminism was limited to a mainstream understanding of gaining equal rights for women; I was completely unaware of the relationship between female liberation and female beauty, and therefore unquestioning of 'the beauty myth' (Wolf, 1991). My cultural background as a British Indian woman very much played into the myth, as I now understand that patriarchal systems in both India and British perpetuate a thin beauty standard. The impact of being socialised from a young age to believe that my appearance is the most important (and defining) feature has been further reinforced by cultural messages that teach women to be insecure about their bodies, especially since it serves the interests of patriarchy and capitalism.

I was surprised that I had not learned about this earlier, and although it is tempting to self-blame for this oversight, I was curious about the absence of such teachings from the educational institutions I have attended, as well as the eating disorder unit at which I gained clinical experience. For example, feminists have drawn

attention to how dominant patriarchal notions of personhood and womanhood are closely associated with expert, medical and psychological discourses surrounding the pathology of eating disorders – especially as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are understood in terms of individual mental illness and require medical and psychotherapeutic intervention (Burns & Malson, 2009; Hesse-Biber, 1991). It is thus possible to understand how the dominance of such a narrative within educational and clinical settings grants advantage, legitimacy and validity to the medical and psychological treatment of women diagnosed with eating disorders.

At the same time, such notions require examining; both patriarchy and capitalism are influences to which we must attend. This is especially important since Instagram very much directs its attention towards young women with disposable income (middle to upper-middle class) and plays on notions of female liberation. Influencers portray themselves as 'empowering women' but perhaps only to direct them towards buying what is advertised, i.e. expensive gym wear, and since the line between what is clearly 'advertisement' and 'authentic' is becoming increasingly blurred, it is even more difficult for young women not to feel self-conscious about their bodies and lifestyle when those selling the products are so very similar to them in age and social class. It also furthers the idea that the 'ideal body' is the norm (since 'normal' women on Instagram can meet such expectations) and discourages us from questioning Instagram, a platform that is allegedly 'owned' by individuals and that cleverly then allows 'regulation-free' commercial gain.

I am not suggesting we abandon any specific discourse; rather, I am pointing out that, despite feminist perspectives circulating since the 1970s, the dominant perspective on 'eating disorders' remains that they originate, and are located within, individual women's psychologised 'peculiarities' (Malson & Burns, 2009). Therefore, while not seeking to apportion blame, it must be acknowledged that our current social order may have a vested interested in *promoting* rather than *preventing* eating disorders (see Striegel-Moore, 1994). We must seek to open up new ways of thinking and invite others to create and use theories that may challenge those congenial with our own values and therapeutic practice.

I wondered if I had known of feminist ideologies concerning the female body but chosen to ignore or dismiss them based on the privilege that inhabiting a slim body

offers. It is possible that I judged nothing to gain from a critical feminist perspective, or from questioning many of my own 'choices' that ultimately work towards 'slenderness' which participants' accounts also echoed – notions of compliance to sociocultural influences defy an idealised Westernised concept of being a neoliberal woman. In particular, a thin body is not only highly desirable but it meant that I possessed the valued characteristics of being attractive, intelligent and successful. I believe that being faced with other forms of exclusion (as a woman of colour) such as discrimination, disconnection and oppression, the possession of a slender body increased my social mobility and agency, which was demonstrated by success in social, personal and economic status. My efforts to remain slim were woven into my everyday routine, i.e. portion-sized meals, healthy food that I was socialised/raised to have, and gym access, but also being middle class meant I had the financial resources and leisure time to engage in the practices necessary to achieve the ideal.

When I interviewed the participants, they saw a culturally privileged (thin, middle-class, educated) body that holds an 'expert' professional opinion on body image. It is possible that their agency was constrained by their perception of me as a slim woman who is exempt from body image problems by her profession. They may have called on constructions of individuality and resistance to the persuasive imagery; in order to not position themselves as pathologised (in relation to my 'professional self') – especially considering that I held power in the interviews, in terms of having a professional responsibility to enact a process if I determined they met the clinical criteria for an eating disorder diagnosis. Participants' agency was therefore limited by an implicit pressure to separate themselves from the 'not-normal' thinking, behaviours and actions of the 'pathologised'. At the same time, they deconstructed such binary thinking by negotiating concepts of agency, conformity and resistance within multiple and contradictory discourses, positions and effects.

On the other hand, participants' agency may have been facilitated by my familiarity and similarity in age, gender, lifestyle and appearance; a sense that I may implicitly understand cultural and social references to Instagram, body image and gender. As a trainee, I was able to offer a compassionate, understanding attitude, which may have enabled participants to speak freely. I believe I extended the same care when analysing and writing up the data.

4.4 Significant Findings and Contributions

Psychological research into social media and body image concerns is still relatively new. These findings suggest that, when using Instagram, women's body image is impacted by gendered ideologies, imagery and institutional parameters that operate at a broader and local level. Furthermore, because a large number of young women and female adolescents use the social media platform, it is likely that many others may also be affected.

This section relates the findings of my study to broader literature and theory. I first discuss the psychological literature on sexual objectification of women, and then women's body image in relation to 'health'. Subsequently, I relate the findings regarding participants' body image and body-management practices to the ideal of privileged femininity. I discuss how the findings relate to research, practice and social change that aims to resist the thin ideal. Lastly, I refer how the findings are impacted by the homogeneity of the participants and relate to women of differing ethnic backgrounds.

4.4.1 Theory and Literature

4.4.1.1 Sexual objectification of women

For women, the pressure to be beautiful arises from Western culture's emphasis on the female body and sexual objectification, which socialises girls and women to view themselves and other women as objects (Berger, 1972; Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In Master Theme 1, 'Shaping a woman: Am I meeting expectations?', participants defined the women in their chosen photographs in terms of their appearance. Similarly, they self-objectified in light of the male gaze, recognising how they needed to look to be appreciated by others. The women in their chosen photographs met a sociocultural standard of attractiveness that they similarly felt pressured to achieve. Rather than being drawn to diversity among female bodies (e.g. different body types, ethnicities or sexualities), participants admired women with the Western ideal of a feminine body: white, thin and toned (and, for Clara, curvaceous). Homogenising imagery is part of the dominant culture, which ultimately works to combine and erase differences (Bordo, 2009), and is well-documented in media images of women (Groesz et al., 2002). The findings confirm that women using Instagram are

repeatedly exposed to the promotion of a homogenous body type, which is thin, toned and lean (see Fardouly et al. 2015b; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017). Guilt and the stigmatisation of fat function to encourage them to diet and exercise to achieve this ideal appearance (Boepple & Thompson, 2016).

Participants described their sense of self and success as a woman as closely related to their body and appearance. Through a host of social mechanisms, they learned that being 'beautiful' (i.e. thin) is an expected component of normative heterosexual femininity – necessary to achieve in order to be respected, admired, valued and even loved (Grogan, 1999). This resonates with Ahern et al. (2011), who similarly found that young women in the UK are acutely aware of the social idealisation of thinness and feel under to pressure to be attractive by being thin; consistent with objectification theory, they described the female body in terms of aesthetics, appearance and conformity to social standards, seeing it as an object to be viewed and evaluated. While Ahern et al. (2011) focused on media images of celebrities and models, the participants in my study perceived the bombardment of images of thin women on Instagram as an indirect pressure to change how they looked. Ava, Frankie, Ella and Natasha felt additional pressure from the visibility of thin, toned, 'normal' women's bodies; these signified 'proof' that it was possible for them to 'achieve' the ideal body, similar to (or more alluring than) traditional media's explicit instructions on how to 'attain' a celebrity body (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). Thus, this supports claims that the transformation of appearance is being viewed as an increasingly acceptable and worthy pursuit for 'ordinary' women to achieve (Featherstone, 2010), whilst offering relevancy for findings that suggest ideal images of thin, toned and attractive women posted by unknown peers on Instagram are strengthening societal norms of appearance and having a detrimental impact on body image, in particular since it is difficult to distinguish between celebrity and peer images, which are presented similarly on the platform (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). The study results also offer support for Tiggemann and Barbato's (2018) findings that attractive images of women are the most salient feature of posting on Instagram and endorse sexual objectification by focusing attention towards external appearance through viewing idealised images.

Conversely, in Master Theme 2, 'Feeling the pressure: the gap between my body and "her" body', participants described the harmful effects of sexual objectification.

They reported living as an image, which negated the possibility of living in their flesh. They described only seeing themselves through the distorted mirror of the ideal woman, which heightened their awareness of how their bodies appeared to others, rather than simply having the freedom to live in their bodies. Positioning body consciousness and surveillance as part of their experience as women, they were careful about their body image, anticipating how they would be viewed before they were seen. Most participants imagined judgement for failing to live up to the cultural ideal, which created feelings of shame, worthlessness and powerlessness and an intense desire to hide from others' punishing gaze (Lewis, 1992). What they could do with their bodies was therefore constrained by the recognition that their bodies were the target of visual inspection; they narrowed their presence as the result of the gaze. Whilst Cohen et al. (2018) focused on the effects that 'selfie' posting has on body image and eating concerns in young women, this study offers related findings concerning how Instagram as a platform fosters self-objectification by encouraging the inspection of one's outward appearance for the observation for others – and how the instant feedback through being 'seen', 'likes' or 'comments' reinforces body preoccupation. Furthermore, being exposed to idealised images of women similarly led to great investment by participants in how they were perceived online, whilst some also alluded to the fact that it intensified concerns about how they would be viewed outside of Instagram – increasing levels of body consciousness and surveillance in general.

The research supports Calogero and Pina's (2011) quantitative study of British young women, which found that 'body guilt' – guilt and remorse over how the body looks, and a desire for reparative action to 'fix' it – mediates the relationship between self-surveillance and eating restraint. Similarly, participants in this research described being dissatisfied with their appearance and felt under pressure to 'correct' their bodies to look like the women they admired on Instagram; Frankie, India and Ava also controlled their eating to fulfil the social mandate for a thinner, more feminine appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Swami et al., 2010). Contexts such as Instagram that encourage sexual objectification are associated with negative consequences for adult and adolescent females, and therefore could increase the potential and opportunity for body shame; anxiety; diminished awareness of internal bodily states; depression, sexual dysfunction and disordered eating (Fredrickson et al.,

1998; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004; Tylka & Hill, 2004; Calogero et al., 2005; Brienes et al., 2008; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Steer & Tiggemann, 2008). This study also contributes to extant literature demonstrating that, overall, Instagram is correlated with self-objectification and endorses the link between body surveillance and eating-disorder symptoms in young women (Fardouly et al. 2015b; Cohen et al. 2018; Tiggemann & Barbato, 2018). In particular, the results offer significant support for the findings of Cohen et al. (2018) that Instagram as platform fosters self-objectification and predicts an increase in body dissatisfaction and eating-disorder symptomology in young women. Moreover, self-objectification was found to moderate the relationship between Instagram usage and bulimia symptomology, even after accounting for thin-ideal internalisation and body mass index – both known risk factors (Cohen et al. 2018). This calls for further explorative research to consider whether visual social media platforms heighten self-objectification and contribute to attitudes and behaviours that normalise the sexual objectification of women. In terms of clinical practice, we should maintain an awareness of how clients' social media usage can potentially affect their mental health.

Participants were aware that Instagram encourages self-objectification because the photographs are for the explicit view and approval of others. They described a pull to compete against other women's beauty on Instagram, which can be theorised as stemming from the way in which physical attractiveness functions as currency for women's social and economic success; women's positive self-concept hinges on their physical appearance (Berger, 1972; Wolf, 1991). Furthermore, participants' investment in culturally constituted heterosexual femininity meant their beauty needed to appeal to (white, male) dominant culture (Gill, 2008). Some feminist scholars argue that women are 'seduced' by the admiration enacted by the pretence of sexual objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). However, being a 'sight' to be appreciated by others necessitates habitually monitoring the body's outer appearance and results in a reduced quality of life; as Rose emphasised (see Analysis, theme 2(1)), she always had to determine how others would treat her based on appearance. A woman's sense of self can therefore be monopolised by her physical attributes; 'instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she [also has to] exist outside' (de Beauvoir, 1952, p.316).

In Master Theme 3, participants described their worry and feared that girls and women were under pressure to self-objectify on Instagram and, as Clara suggested, for their sense of self to depend on their physical attributes rather than other competencies or accomplishments. Indeed, in their study in Singapore, Chua and Chang (2016) found that adolescent girls' acts of self-presentation on Instagram were driven by emulating a media ideal of beauty to gain attention, validation and recognition; peer beauty norms emphasised thinness, and efforts to achieve this standard led to unhealthy dieting, self-induced vomiting and self-starvation practices. Moreover, the participants' worry and fear that using Instagram increases body dissatisfaction is validated by Ahadzadeh et al.'s (2017) study, which found that investment in appearance (culturally expected and encouraged in women) leads to comparison to idealised images present on Instagram and creates disparity between the actual and ideal body in young women's perceptions. Their findings also demonstrated that young women with a particularly low sense of self-worth were most vulnerable to experiencing discomfort with their body and appearance when viewing attractive images of other women on Instagram. Therefore, the participants' claim that using Instagram can have a negative impact on female body image may be especially true in those with low self-esteem, and highlights the difficulties that ensue when appearance is used as basis for evaluation in women.

Daniels and Zurbriggen (2016) argue that, when girls and women use sexualised Facebook profile pictures, other women are likely to judge them as less physically and socially attractive and less competent. In its acknowledgement, approval and evaluation of the gaze – which is neither avoidable nor within women's control (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) – Instagram also meets the criterion for a sexually objectifying environment. It would be useful to develop educational programmes to help adolescent girls consider how they portray themselves on social media. However, it is short-sighted to tell them to stop posting sexualised photographs when this is embedded and encouraged in Western patriarchal culture (Tiggemann, 2013). Instead, efforts could help them to understand and resist (sexist) structural factors related to sexualisation (such as gender stereotypes that prioritise sexiness for girls and women), to critically assess contemporary culture that promotes and expects sexualisation in a culturally-promoted body aesthetic ideal and to gauge the costs and consequences of self-sexualised images – both to themselves and to females as a group (Daniels &

Zurbriggen, 2016). In terms of social action, more needs to be done to address the widespread sexualisation of girls and women in Western culture.

Tolman and Debold (1994) argue that living as images encourages an absence of a connection to desiring bodies, which feel hunger and desire, satiation and frustration, pleasure and pain. It is possible that some Instagram accounts have the effect of confining girls and women to exist as images that reflect others' desires, and that the image of the ideal woman obfuscates their awareness of the knowledge they hold in their bodies as a source of power (Tolman & Debold, 1994). Girls and women need to remain connected to their desires and hunger, and to have permission to live fully in their flesh, to move beyond how they are constrained (and constrain themselves) within the confines of idealised images – both on Instagram and other media.

I am not suggesting that women or girls are any safer living fully in the flesh of a female body; they remain threatened by the ever-present dangers of physical and sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, AIDs, social ostracism and denigration, which are enormous barriers to the freedom to enjoy their bodies (Tolman & Debold, 1994; World Health Organisation, 2013). However, I certainly agree that efforts to eradicate the sexual objectification of women and girls are necessary; as Kilbourne and Jhally (2000) reason, turning females into objects is the first step towards dehumanising and ultimately committing violence against them. It is psychologically healthier and safer for girls and women to resist the disassociation from their bodies demanded by the desirable (but desireless) image of femininity; such resistance can reduce particularly gendered mental and physical problems (Tolman & Debold,1994).

4.4.1.2 'Healthy' bodies

In Western culture, boundaries between health, beauty and fitness have become blurred. Participants conflated culturally normative health with beauty (Malson, 2009); although not explicitly mentioned, their accounts implied that it is obviously not okay to be fat, and reflected constrained ideologies of bodily health and normalcy. In recent years, concerns about the 'epidemic of obesity' and its associations with poor health have contributed to national and global health promotion that seeks to encourage weight loss through healthier eating and exercise (Aphramor & Gingras, 2008; Evans et al., 2008). But while health promotion is aimed at both men and women, the longstanding

social prescription of female slenderness render any weight and weight-loss practices in a very gender-specific way (Malson, 2009). Thus, the dominance of healthism can contribute to existing negative associations that cohere around large bodies – especially large female bodies (Malson, 2008).

In addition, this discursive field constituted and regulated participants' subjectivities and body-management practices. Exercise and diet were framed as moral and desirable health behaviours to produce the thin and toned cultural ideal effectively. The findings show how this can be problematic: Ava, Frankie and India constructed the pursuit of 'health' as having the potential to mobilise 'anorexia' and 'bulimia' subjectivities, experiences and practices by reinforcing problematic ideas about exercise and food, with the latter dividable into moralised categories of good/healthy and bad/unhealthy. Participants also expressed concern that idealised images of 'healthy' women on Instagram could produce similarly deleterious effects in others, including encouraging the dominant approach to weight loss, eating and exercise. This supports findings that 'fitspiration' imagery on Instagram leads to not only body dissatisfaction and self-objectification (Fardouly et al., 2015b) but also disordered eating and compulsive exercise (Boepple & Thompson, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017). Moreover, it also supports Turner and Leferve's (2017) findings that 'fitspiration' accounts on Instagram encourage the eating of only a narrow group of foods based on their perceived 'healthiness' (i.e. no sugar, no carbohydrates, no fats) and by extension encourage orthorexia symptoms (fixation on healthy eating, dietary restrictions and food-related anxiety) and patterns of disordered eating; this was also evident in the narratives of Ava, Frankie, and India. These findings also agree with Turner and Leferve's (2017) claims that even limited exposure to the content that fitspiration accounts produce results in social pressures to conform to what is then perceived as normal or prevalent 'healthy' behaviour, and images that portray a specific dietary intake and exercise (as necessary to create the normalised 'healthy' body) encourage problems related to food and exercise. Overall, this study corroborates previous findings that fitspiration content on Instagram has implications for body image concerns and disordered eating in young women (Fardouly et al. 2015b; Boepple & Thompson, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017; Turner & Leferve, 2017).

The findings agree with Catling and Malson's (2012) study, which explored ways in which British women with an eating disorder diagnosis made sense of anti-obesity health-promotion campaigns. Their findings demonstrate that the campaigns were perceived as reinforcing existing cultural denigrations of fatness and idealisations of thinness, re-articulating 'anorexic' and 'bulimic' values and practices, mobilising 'unhealthy' eating practices and obscuring the problems of underweight and disordered eating. The campaigns were read as 'anorexogenic' and 'bulimogenic', which may have been a more likely interpretation for the participants in this particular study, given their 'eating disordered' experiences. Yet, this study's findings show that women and girls can generally interpret the dominance of healthism as endorsing a cultural ideal of a feminine figure, and that it mobilises disordered eating practices under the guise of health-enhancing behaviours. Therefore, I would argue that 'eating disorders' are not separate, objective clinical entities but rather occur in subjectivities and practices constituted within normative discursive contexts surrounding slimness as a project of gendered aesthetics, undermining the seemingly categorical distinction between 'normal' and 'pathological' (Malson & Burns, 2009; Catling & Malson, 2012). Catling and Malson (2012) argue that 'healthism' further marginalises feminist arguments about the harmful effects of 'dieting' and 'exercise' (e.g. Orbach, 1978, 1986; Wolf, 1991) in its reframing of a gendered aesthetic project that promotes slenderness as achieved by 'healthy' body-management practices. Thus, the findings reveal a need for caution; for further research and advocacy to prevent dominant 'health' discourses from adding to existing 'eating disordered' experiences among women and girls, and for the need to factor in the potential for 'fitspiration' imagery on social media to promote unhealthy weight-loss practices.

The participants and the women in their chosen Instagram photographs reproduced and reinterpreted dominant cultural messages regarding health. It was very difficult to challenge health practices that 'improve' one's outer appearance because they were justified for 'health' reasons. In addition, participants associated anything less than a visibly disciplined, controlled, tight and firm physique as a sign of personal inadequacy; they associated 'fatness' with laziness, lack of self-discipline and incompetency – as does society (Bordo, 2003). Their personal responsibility to work on their bodies was thus reinforced by a moral duty not to be 'overweight', which is

framed as a risk for 'ill-health' and a 'problem' to be corrected (Sobal & Maurer, 1999). Russell-Mayhew (2006) argues for narratives that critically engage with moral and ethical aspects of cultural ideals concerning the body; the physiological, social and cultural resources expected to achieve an ideal weight are near impossible, and such a strong focus on weight loss and weight control can obscure adverse practices of 'health'. The importance of Russell-Mayhew's (2006) argument is critical since mainstream media argues (simply) that 'fitspiration' images on Instagram are highly curated, filtered and manipulated versions of how others look and position women as bearing the responsibility to be mindful of this when using the platform, to reduce the detrimental impact on their body image (see *New York Post,* 2017; *Stylist,* 2017). Therefore, it is poignant for this study to highlight that the coerciveness of fitness accounts resides in their reproduction of culturally sanctioned knowledge of health and femininity, and that specific cultural mechanisms exert control over female bodies through dominant discourses and representations of femininity; in particular, the fact that 'health' is conflated aesthetically with 'beauty' is strengthened by fitspiration imagery (rather than 'fitspiration' being solely responsible for the negative impact it has on female bodily appearance). Such knowledge is essential to avoid holding women accountable for eliminating societal effects on their body image.

Consequently, to promote the well-being of women across the disordered eating continuum, there is a continuing role for researchers and clinicians to challenge the potentially negative and reductionist approach that situates weight as the primary determinant of health. It is important to challenge the ways in which 'healthy weight' discourses dismiss bodies of different sizes and shapes and have the potential to mobilise unhealthy weight management practices, particularly when considering educational and health-promotion initiatives at both community and individual levels (Burns & Tyrer, 2009). Research, practice and advocacy needs to be directed towards body diversity; otherwise, the risk identified in this study (and others, e.g. Gimlin, 2007; Diedrich et al., 2011) is that a set of body ideals will continue to be replaced by equally prescriptive, and potentially harmful, ideals for women.

4.4.1.3 Body image and ideals of femininity

A central component of the findings was informed by the discourses and norms of ideal femininity, which constituted participants' subjectivities. Femininity is an ideological and social construct around which norms and standards are formed for the way women should be, including appearance, demeanour and values (Bordo, 2003; Burns, 2004). There is not one monolithic construction of femininity operating at any given time but rather multiple permutations; femininity is bound to a specific historical and cultural context (i.e. it can change over time), and 'acceptable' femininity is continually shaped by race, ethnicity, sexuality and socioeconomic status, which are rendered meaningful according to their context and embedded gendered, classed and racialised power relations (Burns, 2004). Although a multitude of femininities exists in Western culture, participants' accounts were influenced by a privileged, hegemonic form of femininity that strongly emphasises appearance, within which the dominant notion of an ideal feminine body is thin and toned (Ussher, 1997; Choi, 2000).

Participants constructed the women in their chosen Instagram photographs as conforming to the ideal body type, projecting a standard to which they aspired for themselves in order to meet cultural notions of female attractiveness. Viewing idealised representations of women's physical appearance on Instagram may thus have enhanced the salience of the societal beauty ideal. Yet, the Western cultural demand for women to judge and compare themselves against the idealised image of beauty made participants notice how far they were from the ideal, leading to discontent with their own bodies. This endorses research findings that, for women, making appearance-based comparisons on Instagram is associated with decreased body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Fardouly et al. 2015b; Hendrickse et al. 2017). The pressure to engage in appearance-related comparisons to ideal images of women also leads to a greater drive towards thinness (Hendrickse et al. 2017), and those with particularly low self-esteem are most vulnerable since appearance is closely related to self-evaluation in women and influences how they will be evaluated by others too (Ahadzadeh et al. 2017).

The study explored why participants were constrained *as women* by the individual, social and institutional rewards accompanying physical attractiveness, which reinforce the essential, virtually compulsory nature of attractiveness for women (Berger, 1972). Findings under master themes 1 and 2 demonstrate that the performance of 'appropriate' femininity is not entirely voluntary; participants were aware of the social

retributions for not performing one's gender 'correctly'. Their choice as women to be 'feminine' was thus not wholly a choice; they were aware that only women who conform to an ideal of socially constructed femininity are privileged, and, as women who desired social acceptance and to avoid social stigma, their only 'choice' seemed to be conformity with the ideal (Bordo, 2003). These findings illuminate the significance of gender norms and constraints, and ultimately how 'ideologies of [body]weight closely parallel ideologies of womanhood'; thus, participants experienced remarkable pressure to construct an appropriate feminine identity (McKinley, 1999 p.97).

This study therefore demonstrates that the concerns raised by previous research on Instagram and body image are justified, since participants were similarly affected by norms of appearance that were strengthened by their usage of the platform, where they were exposed to idealised images of thin and attractive women that were widely accepted and consequently regarded as normal (Fardouly et al. 2015b; Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Kleemans et al. 2018). It is also possible that constant exposure to the idealised images that featured thin, toned and attractive women had a greater accumulative detrimental impact since these types of images were viewed regularly by the participants (see Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). The effects of heightened exposure to social and cultural norms of feminine appearance on the platform closely relates to the qualitative findings of Grogan et al. (2018) that suggest Instagram may give women an additional resource to encourage social comparison, self-objectification and body critique, since participants are exposed to a controlled, selective and evaluative environment that requires them and other women to project a perceived standard of physical attractiveness in order to invite positive responses about their bodies, which can be validated through 'likes' or 'comments'. Thus, the 'ideal' look is encouraged by socially shared rules for posting appearance-based images onto Instagram and perpetuates the pressure for women to conform to body-ideal expectations that are potentially harmful to their bodies and body image (see also Grogan et al. 2018).

Importantly, participants demonstrated the ways in which women are subjected – and subject themselves – to a disciplinary regime, enacting repression through subtle forms of surveillance, including self-surveillance. They constructed normative body-management practices of diet and exercise as solutions to their deviation from the ideal, which acted as disciplinary controls to appropriate their desired body shape and size.

The discipline involved in this pursuit of female thinness evoked gendered social constructions of desire and control (Bordo, 2003). Thus, the findings strongly demonstrate that the slender and firm female bodies popular on Instagram can be read as (and reproduced for) embodying masculine notions of self-control, discipline and willpower; these notions are prized for being difficult and desirable, and they underpin the feminine body and its desires as inherently in need of control and regulation (Bordo, 2003). Participants positively constructed rigorous self-restraint and self-discipline over one's desire and body. In contrast, Ava, Frankie and India judged submitting to hunger and bodily appetites as weak, shameful and disgusting (theme 2(3)), especially when the body is gender-overlaid as uncontrollable, weak-willed and impure (Bordo, 2003).

Conversely, the findings broadly concur with research findings that women's experiences of 'eating disorders' are informed by femininity discourses that grant the appearance and feeling of control and abstinence and stimulate pride, achievement and perfectionism (Garrett, 1998; Malson, 1998; Bordo, 2003). For example, Burns's (2004) analysis shows that the logic of dichotomies and discourses of femininity are involved in women's experiences, inscription and practices associated with 'anorexia'. This research supports the feminist argument that all women and girls are vulnerable, to some degree, to the construction of femininity, which characterises the pursuit of thinness through normative absolutes, such as strength and self-determination, as reinforced by historical normative notions of gendered being (Saukko, 2009). I agree with feminists who argue for the 'mainstreaming' of 'eating disorders'; that is, for eating disorders' distressing experiences and damaging body-management practices to be thought about, understood and informed by the context of oppressive gender ideologies in Western/ised patriarchal cultures (Malson & Burns, 2009).

Tseëlon (1993, p.319) argues that beauty work is in large part of the process to transform the natural female body into a 'timeless' cultural fantasy, but because 'beauty' is not innate, it takes a lot of effort to achieve and maintain. In Master Theme 2, 'Feeling the pressure: the gap between my body and "her" body', participants demonstrated that body-management practices aiming to reproduce the desired gendered aesthetics were far from easy or natural. Holland and Tiggemann (2017) found that women who present a 'fitspiration' image on Instagram achieve the 'healthy' thin and toned physique through compulsive exercise, disordered eating habits and dietary

restriction, which the participants also engaged in to achieve a similar body. The cultural ideal of being fit, thin and toned is just as unattainable and has debilitating effects on women, including their mental and physical health (Gimlin, 2007).

For women and girls to be able to consider alternative subject positions and more wellbeing-enhancing discourses of size and embodiment, it is vital for research and practice to recognise the coerciveness of slenderness and the fitness aesthetic as critical factors. Until social change is directed towards women's equality, promoting ideas that concur with a critical feminist approach may be at odds with society; family; partners; peers, sport and healthy ideals around body size and weight (Burns & Tyrer, 2009). The 'reality' is that it is more socially acceptable, and therefore easier, for girls and women to maintain a smaller and thinner body through 'disordered eating' practices than to have a bigger body that leads to social denigration (see Burns & Tyrer, 2009). Frankie somewhat echoed this idea; she felt a sense of achievement in getting closer to her ideal body, which she experienced in terms of 'power' and 'control', speaking to the 'reality' that accommodating to feminine ideals provides women (especially white heterosexual women) with access to power, if only in a limited way (Rubin et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that individual, social and institutional rewards accompany physical attractiveness, which contributes in part to the reproduction and reinforcement of social relations and norms, and as such, women are ambivalent about opposing a social system that privileges attractiveness (Kwan & Trautner, 2009). It is necessary to continue to consider the many frightening consequences of resistance for women – especially given that institutionalised advantages of beauty are apparent beyond social life, including in work, education and marriage (Kwan & Trautner, 2009) – while continuing to analyse, share and make known new knowledge and truth to disrupt dominant gendered power relations in Western/ised cultures.

4.4.1.4 Resisting the messages of the 'ideal' body

In Master Theme 3, 'An illusory ideal: limiting the damage to my own body image', participants explored the conflict and ambivalence involved in resisting the construct of the thin ideal on Instagram. They showed an awareness of Instagram's control over the production, selection and exhibition of edited images, which enables

the creation of a self-image that closely represents the female beauty ideal. In keeping with qualitative studies that focus on traditional media (Tiggemann et al., 2000; McCabe et al., 2006; Mooney et al., 2009; Ahern et al., 2011), participants positioned themselves as knowledgeable about the manipulation of images and critical of the pressure they felt from accounts they follow on Instagram. This demonstrates women's agency in resisting and navigating body image concerns, within the constraints of a visual social media platform embedded in a culture that idealises thinness for women. Whilst the participants could detect the use of filters and effects applied to images, as in the findings reported by Kleemans et al. (2018), they were unable to detect the reshaping of bodies, instead viewing them as realistic and normal. Therefore, it can be argued that the reshaping of bodies to appear thinner and slimmer are difficult to identify as *manipulation* but are rather positioned as normal, accepted and attainable. Therefore, unknown or unfamiliar peers on Instagram may exert a powerful influence on the body image of young women since perceived similarity is high and social relevance means that the appearance of peers is viewed as achievable – as highlighted by these findings and those of other studies (Tiggemann & Brown, 2016; Kleemans et al. 2018) – instead of these young women being able to draw on the knowledge that others are constructing an ideal body online through digital manipulation.

Without ignoring the benefit of agency, which enables them as women to survive a context that objectifies female bodies, participants' critical awareness nevertheless did not protect them from negative emotions towards their bodies – although it did prevent engagement with unhealthy weight-loss practices. This supports evidence that cognitive strategies aiming to undermine media messages have had limited success in preventing negative body- and eating-related attitudes and practices (Levine & Harrison, 2004; Engeln-Maddox, 2005; Yamamiya et al., 2005). These findings and others (Rubin et al., 2004) may show that a rational approach is, at best, a temporarily effective coping strategy; it is unable to promote radical change in how women and girls experience their bodies, and neither counters the pervasiveness of aesthetic social conditioning nor challenges girls' and women's daily inundation with such imagery.

The findings support a critique of a cognitive behavioural approach to body and eating problems, which locates the 'problem' in 'pathological' thought processes of individuals (see Burns, 2008 cited by Gremillion, 2009, p.248); participants wished or

attempted to resist the seductive but compelling Instagram, partly to avoid cohering with the pathology and stigma of eating disorders within society and diagnostic and popular discourses (Saukko, 2009). This calls for prevention programmes that do not actively 'deny the social and discursive context of women's lives' (Ussher, 2000, p.210). The findings would encourage utilising social critical perspectives, in educational programmes that understand body image and body-management practices as based on gender inequities and maintained by widely sanctioned ideologies, which play a critical role in disrupting women's experiences of their bodies (Levine & Piran, 2001). Indeed, one must go beyond the pressures of thinness to critically examine women's experiences of objectification, which clearly violate body ownership (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Piran, 2001). A critical perspective is also concerned with power, as highlighted in this study, and focuses on developing critical knowledge of the relational contexts in which females unconsciously learn their own social rights and worth – including the systems that operate to collude with (or resist) dominant social discourses regarding gender, body, sexuality and control. Such an approach is shown to be effective in guiding transformative change (Levine & Piran, 2004).

Participants were able to construct the thin ideal as an illusory concept that was unattainable for them and their bodies. Their discourses suggest they had to resist behaviours consistent with the dominant thinness ideology to protect themselves from pursuing an unachievable ideal with a negative, damaging and limiting effect on their body image. Their difficult and distressing experiences evidenced a darker side to the pursuit of beauty – one with high material, physical and emotional demands (Gavey, 1989; Gill, 2008; Kwan & Trautner, 2009). This enabled participants to evaluate the negative consequences of trying to live up to the images of ideal women on Instagram. However, as mentioned earlier, it did not change their evident subjective distress in relation to their bodies; instead, it made it difficult for them to discern how to relate to their appearance. Interestingly, young women who identified as feminists found that devising new ways to inhabit their bodies was a more liberating approach than seeking non-objectifying ways to be satisfied with their appearances (Rubin et al., 2004). Thus, when considering prevention or therapeutic practice, efforts could be made to encourage embodied resistance, which could help women to accept and live more comfortably in their bodies.

Research such as this offers opportunities for insight into the socially shared processes of women's engagement with feminine beauty and thinness ideologies. Its social-constructionist-informed critique aims to make visible what is hidden: 'the constitution of subjects through discourse and ideology' (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012, p.119). In particular, popular articulations of empowerment and individualism concealed and obscured the possibility for participants to position themselves outside of discourses central to neoliberal femininity (Gill, 2007; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). Feminist writers emphasise that 'the disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet it is no one in particular' (Bartky, 1988, p.74) – in other words, the 'invisible' powers that create and continue to promote body image concerns are multifaceted, multiply deployed and sustained in myriad ways, mostly with the cooperation of all of us (Bordo, 2003). This research demonstrates how participants were able to use discourses of resistance as well as the points at which these discourses were insufficient and thus prevented them from naming the nature of their oppression – a necessary prerequisite for such oppression to be identified and resisted. Thus, while calls to protect users that include a pop-up warning for individuals who have been online for a length of time deemed potentially harmful; an icon to highlight when photographs of people have been digitally edited; and for social media to identify vulnerable users and signpost them to the appropriate services are all valuable suggestions, such protection may not empower users to make sense of and understand how to respond to potentially harmful content in a way that adequately prepares them for coping with increasingly digitalised lives (see *The Guardian,* 2019a).

This reinforces the idea that a key aspect of social action is providing prevention programmes, which should enable women and girls to question or challenge powerful and profoundly gendered cultural meanings and practices (argued earlier in relation to incorporating critical social perspectives (CSP) models in prevention; Levine & Piran, 2001, 2004). Taking this a step further, such programmes should tackle sexism, which feminists argue contributes to not only eating disorders but also other predominantly female disorders, such as depression and phobias (Orbach, 1978; Carmen et al., 1981; Freedman, 1986; Szekeley, 1988; Wolf, 1991). Social change is required to improve the status of women, since an economically, emotionally and sexually independent woman

can rely less on her appearance as her primary source of power. Furthermore, if women can gain freedom from the 'lookism' that controls them by keeping them so busy, they *will have time* to fight discrimination against women and initiate and support legalisation for equal pay, childcare programmes, reproductive freedom and deterrents to physical and sexual violence (Freedman, 1986; Wolf, 1991; Shisslak & Cargo, 1994).

Crucially, women must be empowered to see other women as allies rather than competitors (as implied by the findings; competing for beauty separated participants from other women); if women support each other, it is difficult for the patriarchy to execute the divide-and-conquer strategy that makes it easier to manipulate and control women (Shisslak & Crago, 1994). According to Wolf (1991), only solidarity among women will give them what being thin and beautiful promises: power, significance and self-worth. Rightly, she argues that women are not a minority group but comprise half of the population, and therefore could not have been dominated for so long without colluding in their own oppression. By working together, women have a better chance of empowering themselves and affecting social change.

The implications of this study are far-reaching. Most importantly, the research highlights the need for a more realistic representation of, and variation in, the sizes and attractiveness of women shown in media images. This could prevent women and girls from being subjected to the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenising, elusive ideal of femininity, which is a pursuit without limits or respite; it requires women and girls to constantly attend to whimsical and minute changes of 'fashion', habituating the forces and energies of their bodies to external regulation, transformation and 'improvement' (Bordo, 1992).

Although this is a common argument in the literature concerning body image and eating disorders, and has already been recognised by the UK government in various body image summits and initiatives (British Medical Association, 2000; Body Confidence Campaign, 2013; Be Real Campaign, 2014; Halliwell et al., 2014), policy changes are required to promote body diversity. The government's efforts to work with key players in retail, advertising, fashion and fitness industries is argued to effectively *ignore* the political and economic structures that benefit from women's subordination to 'beauty' – which would *suffer* if women advanced emotionally, sexually and economically and started to use their power more directly (Wolf, 1991).

4.4.1.5 Impact of the Homogeneity of Participants

The study acknowledges the homogeneity of the participants as White, heterosexual, upper-middle class women and the lack of diversity in the sample means it could be difficult to relate the findings to women of colour. Thinness has become an established feminine ideal in Western cultures; this dominant body ideal is viewed as a White European-American aesthetic preference and those who can achieve it are conspicuously valued within mainstream culture. However, cultural differences exist in attitudes towards body aesthetics, ideals of thinness and body fat and in the development of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating among ethnically diverse women (Swami, 2015, see section 1.3.2). Therefore, referring back to the literature reviewed in section 1.3.2 on ethnicity-specific differences in body aesthetic ideals and body satisfaction, it is possible to speculate on how the body images of women of colour are affected by Instagram.

It is possible to hypothesise that Black women would have a preference for viewing less thin women on Instagram, but may be alienated by the dominant White thinness ideology that exists (see Hesse-Biber et al. 2004; Shoneye et al. 2011). Especially since idealised images of Black and ethnic minority women on Instagram would be similarly admired for their curvy, toned figures, whilst also perpetuating body dissatisfaction given the difficulty Black women face in obtaining the feminine ideal (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004; Shoneye et al. 2011). They also could also be constrained by negative social perceptions that cohere around their bodies as embedded in racism, whilst also face backlash for obtaining idealised body tone or muscularity as it threatens their identity as women (see Jones & Shorter-Goodon, 2003; Stephens & Philips, 2003; Citrin, 2004; Kilbourne, 2010) which White women are exempt from and instead idealised for - also demonstrated by the participants in this study. Therefore, Black women may identify as (devalued) members that do not meet the dominant Eurocentric aesthetic on Instagram and potentially could be in conflict between their cultural heritage and the culture of the dominant group – thus they either embrace, reject or *simultaneously* embrace and reject hegemonic feminine beauty.

Ethnic minority women using Instagram could experience a normalised pressure to be thin that could be perpetuated by unique cultural messages that Asian women in

particular are expected to be thin while striving to obtain Western curvaceous features (see Brady et al. 2004). However, biological limitations to achieving Western beauty norms may leave them more vulnerable to body image difficulties. Unique experiences of racialised sexual objectification, race-related teasing and racial microaggressions may increase body surveillance and monitoring, as well as adding pressure to assimilate to Western standards of attractiveness to fit in within the dominant White culture that exists on the social media platform. Whilst, Indian women on Instagram could similarly face pressure to achieve body ideals that assimilate with social norms of appearance that exist in British culture, whilst experiencing appearance-related pressure to be fair that similarly is normalised by Eurocentric societies (see Button et al. 1998; Furnham & Adaim-Saib, 2001; Dhillon & Dhawan, 2011). Body surveillance may cause them to focus on aspects of their appearance that deviate from White norms and are disregarded by Indian culture, as well as cause engagement with weight-control methods such as diet and exercise to achieve the idealised appearance.

Women of colour experience their body image in relation to social constructions of body and beauty that are rooted in racism and sexism, as well as experiencing White standards of beauty as universal and expected (see section 1.3.2 for a more detailed review of the literature on ethnicity and body image). However, discourses that cohere around ethnic or racialised bodies puts Black and ethnic minority women at a particular disadvantage (given biological limitations or hypersexualised or racialised connotations of appearance), especially with social status and power, since privilege is *not* associated with bodies that are of non-White ethnic appearance (Beltran, 2002). Therefore, it would be important to consider particular discourses and representations of appearance that uniquely affect the body image of women of colour in their experiences of using Instagram (see section 4.6 for recommendations for future research).

4.5 Implications for the Therapeutic Practice of Counselling Psychology

The findings demonstrate that using Instagram can have a detrimental effect on women's body image – especially if they attempt to achieve the idealised thin and toned feminine figure emulated on the platform. Given that Instagram is most popular with young women and female adolescents (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015), many in these

age groups could be affected. Although some psychological research exists on how women's usage of Instagram is associated with body image concerns (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Fardouly et al., 2017; Holland & Tiggemann, 2017), the findings here contribute to a more nuanced and complex understanding of its impact on women's subjectivities, experiences and body-management practices.

Counselling Psychologists could use this research as a resource when working with females seeking therapy for body image concerns (in general, or specifically in relation to social media use). This is highly relevant, given that the government acknowledges that low body confidence is a significant public health problem in the UK and has particularly focused on a narrowly defined image of beauty, the bombardment of idealised images, the difficulty in avoiding them, their digitally perfected nature, and the pressure that all women can – and should – aspire to look like them (Body Confidence Campaign, 2013). Recently, the Youth Select Committee has urged the government to recognise the seriousness of body image difficulties for children and young people, including the rising use of social media as a contributing pressure (A Body Confident Future, 2017). Instagram is emphasised as particularly challenging for body image since comparison-fuelled body dissatisfaction is encouraged by impossible-to-achieve perfection in idealised images of other women, and individuals can easily not know or *forget* that photos are curated, edited and filtered to offer a highlighted reel of an individual and their life. Such findings are pertinent in relation to children's charities' concerns about the effects of cyberbullying on self-esteem and body image in girls, in which social media platforms are used to exacerbate feelings of exclusion or unpopularity, both through seeing images of their peers that imply they are attractive, liked and popular, and through photoshopped images being used as a way of being unkind to each other (*The Guardian,* 2019b). Similarly, it has been reported that 'likes' on Instagram are addictive as a form of social validation for young people, with many increasingly anxious about how they appear online; this is worsened by idealised images of celebrities and unknown peers, which can undermine a young person's view of themselves (*The Guardian,* 2019b). While social media is recognised as providing great benefits, it also increasingly exposes young people to significant risks to their mental health, especially if they are unable to cope with the sudden demands of social media as their exposure to others increases. Therefore, the importance of this study's

findings should not be underestimated, especially since the statutory regulation of digital media is long overdue and requires thoughtful concern with regard to psychological health – data harvesting, targeted advertising and images that promote self-harm, suicide and eating disorders *still* exist and we fail to protect the most vulnerable. Counselling Psychologists may therefore increasingly encounter clients affected by social media in therapeutic practice, and, as social media is rarely discussed in the literature or training, this research may help to inform therapeutic practice. I also aim to disseminate these findings in a journal article to make them widely available.

The findings draw attention to the centrality of sociocultural contexts and gendered experiences and expectations, incorporating a view of body image and disordered eating as existing on a continuum that includes body dissatisfaction and normalised practices of dieting and exercise for appearance-related reasons. Counselling Psychologists may benefit from integrating a feminist or social constructionist lens; both emphasise that our formulations should take into account the person–political relationship, and attend to the socioeconomic and cultural contexts that enable the conditions for 'eating disorders' in the first place (Rader & Gilbert, 2005). In addition, critical feminist approaches suggest narrative and collaborative therapy are usefully deployed in relation to 'disordered eating' problems; these can incorporate the issues highlighted here regarding gender, health, power and the central role of language as meaning-making and action-oriented, as well as addressing social and historical discourses that have shaped a particular way of being (especially for women) (Burns & Tyrer, 2009). It is helpful for women and girls to understand that the increasing pressure coming from society and mainstream media to be beautiful, famous and wealthy can be intensified by their Instagram usage, *if* focused on idealised images of other women that exemplify being attractive is a way to succeed in life as a female (see *The Guardian,* 2019b). As mentioned in section 4.3.2.3, influencer marketing strategy is highly successful in directing young women with disposable income, in particular, towards products and services that will help them to be 'empowered', 'successful' and 'beautiful' by appropriating the 'ideal' body and lifestyle. This should be clearly understood as *'marketing'* that increases revenue for profitable companies.

It is important that therapy enables acknowledgement of the many distillations of culturally normative gendered values that participants implicated in their eating

difficulties: idealised feminine beauty, individualism, self-control and discipline, among others. By doing this, women and girls can sufficiently address the multidimensionality of voices and discourses that have come to define them, and evaluate both empowering and disempowering dimensions of social discourses (Saukko, 2009). For example, perfectionism may enable obsession and starvation, but it can also facilitate success in competitive (male-dominated) professional markets and educational settings (Walkerdine et al., 2001; Evans et al., 2004). This not only allows a space-based approach that emphasises externalising problems but is also radically non-pathologising, which is important – especially as participants drew attention to how they potentially could be blamed and considered defective for body image and eating struggles.

Counselling Psychologists may benefit from avoiding a time-based narrative, which follows a predicted path from a state of 'illness' to a 'healthy' self – by listening to a 'preferred' voice – one that is independent, strong and anti-perfectionist (Saukko, 2009). This can ultimately reinforce normative distinctions between the healthy and the pathological, including reproducing the gendered cultural assumptions about strength and fitness that lie at the core of 'eating disorders' themselves (Moulding, 2009). An alternative here is to appreciate the multifaceted, tension-riddled, contradictory nature of discourses, which can lead to problematic or newfound possibilities and offer women a more nuanced, critical engagement with the political issues influencing their relationships with their bodies and selves (Saukko, 2009).

In addition, I suggest there is a good reason to explore body image in relation to low self-esteem difficulties, given that socialisation teaches girls and women that looking beautiful affirms their identity as female (Orbach, 1978). This may not always be appropriate (many factors impact self-esteem), but it can be worth exploring since female appearance becomes an important basis for evaluation by self and others (Thompson et al., 1999). A more direct approach could be necessary, given that participants highlighted that, as women, they did not seek help for their problems with their bodies and eating; hence, a therapeutic focus on the critical force of personal-social histories (the intertwined constitution of the self and society; Cromby & Standby, 1999) in 'normative' but 'problematised' body dissatisfaction and its subsequent body-management practices could subvert understandings of such problems as residing and

emanating from the 'disordered' individual (see Epston & Maisel, 2009). Furthermore, since well-intended advice that has been published on managing Instagram usage perpetuates individual responsibility for not developing body image concerns (see *Women's Health,* 2019; *Cosmopolitan,* 2019), it is important that Counselling Psychology contributes meaningfully to conversations regarding the existing power relations that influence the development and maintenance of body and eating-related distress that women face when using the social media platform. This could also open up different discourses and representations for young women to engage with, and enable them to experience their bodies in a way that is not shaming, as well as allowing Instagram to be used in a way does not fuel body dissatisfaction.

Also, when working with females, efforts to improve the highly 'gender-neutral' traits of autonomy and assertiveness need to acknowledge structural inequality and the differences in power and resources between men and women. This includes an awareness that increasing women's autonomy has gender-related differences, and that the social meanings and interpersonal consequences of women's assertive behaviour are constructed differently in different-sized bodies too (Striegel-Moore, 1994).

These findings also have implications for social change. As women, the participants challenged the distinction between pathologised and 'normative' disordered eating; consequently, Counselling Psychologists have a role in disrupting this distinction in therapeutic practice, research and advocacy. This includes attempting to create space and access to therapeutic services for a large number of women and girls who would not meet a clinical diagnosis of 'eating disorders' and are therefore unlikely to be eligible for publicly funded and clinically oriented eating disorder services. This study could also contribute meaningfully to helping children and young people engage in healthy digital lives, which does not simply involve learning safety rules that protect them from physical or cyber threats, but rather focuses on ensuring they are prepared for the emotional demand of social media; therefore, such research could inform guidelines for compulsory digital literacy and online resilience lessons that are aimed to be taught in secondary schools (*The Guardian,* 2019b).

This study emphasises that critical feminist and sociocultural explorations of women's experiences are necessary to deconstruct the power relations that exists in the development and maintenance of eating disorders and should be continued to be

integrated into the prevention and treatment programmes that are targeted at both clinical and non-clinical populations of women and girls (Katzman et al., 1994). We have a responsibility to participate and be involved in primary prevention programmes, which should educate girls and women about gender from an early age and critique socially prescribed roles for gender; gender stereotypes and values; gendered expectations around the female body; weightism, sexism and self-objectification. Such programmes should also promote feminist activism to address power imbalances and empower women in the social construction of gender. Indeed, the findings demonstrate that some women are unaware that beauty maintains their subordination; it is therefore necessary to promote knowledge about the emergence and maintenance of discourses that emphasise thinness – especially thinness as a 'direct solution' to the dangers posed by the women's movement (Wolf, 1991).

4.6 Areas for Future Research

This has been a modest study, but it highlights the need for further psychological research. While the study has identified that using Instagram has a negative impact on women's body image, it has only involved white heterosexual women, doing little to suggest how 'eating disorders' among women of other ethnicities are positioned in relation to a predominantly heterosexual, white, Western mainstream culture (see Nasser & Malson, 2009, for an overview). A similar qualitative study could explore variations and (dis)continuities in the production and maintenance of women's 'anorexic/bulimic' bodies and practices across multi-transcultural contexts, while also accounting for the possible relevance of locally-specific, discursive constructions of the female body and eating. Even in mainstream Western/ised contexts that are culturally preoccupied with 'body image', it is possible for 'anorexia/bulimia' subjectivities and practices to be expressive of other gender-specific cultural issues (Orbach, 1986; Bordo, 2003). In addition, it is important to consider how discourses and discursive practices associated with a gendered aesthetic of thinness are taken up and re-articulated by, on and against women's differently racialised bodies, in 'different-and/but-same cultural contexts' (Nasser & Malson, 2009, p.83). While the findings of this research may not be generalisable to all women, aspects may resonate with subsets of them – those who feel the most impacted.

However, it remains important for research into body image concerns and Instagram to move beyond focusing on women to acknowledge other often-overlooked groups, such as ethnic minorities, LGBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) individuals and those with disabilities or serious illnesses. Adolescent girls are also under-researched compared to adult women, despite the overwhelming evidence that eating disorders emerge in adolescence (Striegel-Moore, 1994). Feminist theorists and scholars have argued that eating disorders challenge and subvert what it means to be female in society at present; to address this, a developmental perspective should be considered that addresses patriarchy, sexism and misogyny in the lives of girls and adolescents. Since this demographic is particularly vulnerable to the development of body image problems, as well as being digital natives (people who have grown up in the digital age), longitudinal research is needed to investigate the impact of social media over time for this group. Correlational data has already identified an association between Instagram usage and body image concerns (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Fardouly et al., 2015b).

Further research using other methods such as Discourse Analysis (DA), particularly Foucauldian DA, may further illuminate broader institutional practices and deployments of power operating in the context of social media and women's and girls' body image. A Foucauldian DA may broaden the discourses and discursive practices in this research, particularly those of femininity, individualism, health and add others if necessary.

I have stressed the importance of a contextual approach that considers sociocultural factors that influence women and their experiences of eating disorders. This research suggests that future studies on body image and social media would be well-advised to take a contextual approach, which offers a collaborative relationship with participants and facilitates critical exploration of the subjective meanings of the phenomena under investigation. This is not to say there is no value in other research methods, such as quantitative data, but rather that psychology has relied heavily on agentic methods that involve separating, ordering, quantifying, manipulating and controlling (Willig, 2008). The potential ramifications of using a limited range of methods are weakened ecological validity and a narrowing of our vision; methods determine what we can ask and limit the answers we may find (Striegel-Moore, 1994).

Quantitative methods could be helpful to study large units in order to move past the focus on the individual and towards the social influence of contextual factors over body image and social media – as well as the development of eating disorders more generally. This would assist with supporting primary prevention programmes to target larger social systems, such as schools and universities.

This study supports the further incorporation of CSP, which remains limited in comparison with the volume of research concerned with weight-and-shape-related social pressures (Thompson et al., 1999). It would be useful to build on CSP, which extends Piran's previous work on an empowerment relational approach to prevention (Piran, 1995, 1999, 2001). The model recognises women's personal experiences of and practices towards their bodies as anchored in and shaped by a complex social system, which needs to be illuminated to guide constructive and embodied transformation (Foucault, 1979; Wolf, 1991; Weedon, 1997). This would contribute to women and girls enhancing the skills necessary to critically examine the (in)visible influence of dominant ideology – which serves to regulate, discipline and limit choice through the desirability, preference or motives of conformity (or consequences of non-conformity) – as well as the cultural conditions in which choices are offered and taken, and the consequences attached to these choices (Gill, 2007a, 2007b, 2008).

This research supports the need for broader measures of body image (as called for by Piran, 2001, 2002) to prevent the current heavy reliance on cognitive-behavioural measures of body image disturbances, which de-emphasise other disruptive bodily experiences. Piran (2001, 2002) argues for the validity and utility of the concept of 'disrupted embodiment' (or 'disembodiment'), which refers to a focus on the body for how it looks, rather than being in control and connected to one's body as a source of empowerment, functionality, needs and desires. This construct would support ongoing and prospective cross-sectional studies examining the relationship between, body image difficulties, disordered eating patterns and social structure factors (Levine & Piran, 2004). In addition, since this research adds to accumulating support for a critical perspective that understands body-related experiences as tied to varying social and oppressive structures, including power relations and social hierarchies, it has significant and specific implications for the prevention and treatment of body image difficulties and disordered eating, particularly in the context of image-based social media platforms.

4.6 Conclusion

This research has increased awareness of the social construction of 'gendered bodies' by making visible cultural and social dynamics enacted through the imagery and ideology of femininity, as analysed through women's experiences of Instagram. Participants constructed the effects of social norms that operate to discipline their bodies towards socially acceptable, similar-looking bodies. They highlighted the complex relationship between culture and subjectivity; disciplinary social constructions influenced participants' body image and eating practices, but they ultimately positioned the individual as responsible for resisting the cultural messages promoted, reproduced and reinforced by specific Instagram accounts. This research shows that while body image concerns and disordered eating featured for participants, they were not 'abnormal'; rather, they considered such concerns in response to culturally idealised views of how women should look.

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Appendix 1   Excerpts from Research Log

I kept a research diary throughout the process of research to keep a record of my feelings, reflections and subjective processes as they unfolded. I found the log helpful in terms of being a containing space to reflect my thoughts, and such, the extracts represent the most salient aspects of the process and reflective of recurring themes in what was shared.

Excerpts:

Recruitment, Interviewing and Date Collection Stage

I going to put a version of my flier onto Facebook and Instagram to be shared by others in my public network. The fliers in various public spaces have not yielded much luck – I wonder if my advertisement has been limited. Or, have I made assumptions about the places that young women are most likely to visit?

Putting the flier on social media garners interest quickly, I am curious if this suggestive of the population, is social media their most frequented place? Nevertheless, it is a relief to gain respondents; I was beginning to worry that it was not a phenomenon that other's recognised.

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In hindsight; I should have a created a telephone pre-prepared schedule; when I am speaking to potential respondents, although I ensure that they are in a confidential space before asking questions in regard to their current or historical mental health history, my answers and responses are not uniform. I should have thought about this more carefully, including having a pre-prepared response as to why an individual may not be able to participate if they did identify as having a current or historical diagnosis of an eating disorder. I am aware that as a trainee, I ask these questions and I am aware of how to treat the situation with sensitivity, but nevertheless, for consistency, including to be able to answer further questions the respondent might have, a schedule would have been more helpful.

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I have condensed my interview schedule to make it more concise. However, when interviewing, I notice that my questions and the answers I get feel repetitive. I

wonder if there is a better way to touch upon some of the nuances of the participants' experiences, especially around what provides opportunities and what limits options for their body image as women. I am thinking about what forms or representations of body and body image are most available or accessible – and what does it mean for them to inhabit or embody (or not?) such representations and the discourses that surround them? I hold this in mind for later; this might be an important reflection to consider in the analysis.

<center>*******</center>

I am looking at my interview schedule and the data from the interviews. I can see how my own personal experiences and assumptions of Instagram, including my understanding of the literature. It may have been more helpful to ask the participants to speak about their experiences of body image and Instagram generally to see what emerged.

<center>*******</center>

This excerpt forms my thoughts and feelings I wrote after I interviewed each participant.

Natasha is my first interview; I am feeling slightly nervous. I have learnt my questions, but conscious of creating 'depth' when gathering answers. When I first meet Natasha, I thank her for taking the time to conduct the interview. When I explain the interview process, she seems less nervous, I hold this in mind as an important step for further interviews. I feel aware of my role as the interviewer – I try to find a balance between asking questions and holding in mind what is being said. I wish I could think faster – at times; it is difficult to think quick enough to grapple with what is underneath the surface of being said. We get into a rhythm, I feel jotting down notes for further thoughts is useful – it helps me remember what I wish to revisit. Natasha's interview is almost an hour, but it does not feel very long; I wonder if I got enough information that is reflective of her experiences. It is here that I begin to feel my questions are repetitive, there are few times, she communicates that this is something she has said before, but possibly I am reading too much into this. I do need to think about it though.

In the debrief, she reflected on being unsure if she was helpful enough in the interview, we talked about her body image not being 'impacted enough.' I wonder if

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this speaks to the phenomenon – that it is so normalised, Natasha does not feel her body distress is either valid or 'enough'. In the car on my way home, I think about if what Natasha described was for her 'normal' and 'normal' to deal with. Or is there is a sense of needing to communicate her body image is 'normal.' What underlies this 'normality' - and what is hidden in normality?

Ella is keen to make sure I have enough information for the interview; she is warm and open. However, there is a sense of a struggle between what is being communicated; questions and answers become jumbled. I am not sure how much I could use – should have I steered her towards the questions? I am unsure if we are talking about body image at times, I am worried that my biases that all women should describe being 'impacted' negatively is coming in; I am conscious in this interview of reining in my ideas of *how I feel* she should be affected.

Rose is very thoughtful, carefully contemplating being replying. This definitely helps with space in gathering my own thoughts. I feel I made a mistake, when she asked if it was okay if she could share a photograph of herself for the interview, I said yes but we could return to it later. Why did I say that? And, we did not return to the photograph of herself either – I should have said yes earlier. This was poor form on my part –have I become too fixated on the photographs of other women on Instagram?

I am struck particularly by Rose's shame and guilt – especially in terms of Rose feeling that she should not really be impacted by her Instagram use or the photographs that she is exposed to on the platform. I need to hold this mind, shame is such a powerful emotion, is there a sense of it being shameful to experience distress? Or is it the nature of naming distress too?

Frankie is very talkative and talks at length without much pause. She is engaging, but I am trying to stay with what is being communicated. I am struck by her experiences, she gives a comprehensive narrative of how Instagram affects her body image. She adds a different dimension in that she explains she is on particular health and fitness journey. This very much throws up for her conflicts in her relationships with others.

Frankie very much feels part of the Instagram health and fitness community online; it seems somewhere to share with others who have similar thoughts and experiences. A thought comes to mind about online pro-ana communities…I wonder if

she senses my trepidation– she is careful with her answers, uses a lot of words around health, fitness, normal.

Ava is nervous but relaxes over time in the interview process. Her use of Instagram seems more peer and friendship-oriented; is this characteristic of her age and life phase?

There is a willingness to communicate that she has moved past being affected by photographs of other women on Instagram, yet later alludes to this being a continuing struggle, there is a kind of aversion to the women that post body-centric images, as she goes on to explain that when looking for health and fitness, she chooses to look at men now. Is it easier for her to then concentrate on the 'fitness' aspect rather than 'body' or 'appearance' focus part? How do you separate fitness from the body that fitness creates?

Clara is conscious of not wanting to appear vain. She describes a fear that others will perceive her to be too focused on her appearance. I am curious about this fear; later she reveals that others can judge you for being body and appearance-focused. I am aware that at the same time, women are similarly judged for *not* caring enough about their appearance too.

She is acutely aware that using Instagram has a negative impact on body image; she toys with the idea of deleting the social media platform. She gives a sense of trying to move past her body image difficulties but does using Instagram make this *impossible* for her?

India is one of my younger participants. Her interview has flow and depth; I feel strangely connected to her. I wonder what this is about? I then sense her experiences of using Instagram in a way mirror my own in some ways.

She is insightful about how the photographs of other women on Instagram create a pressure to look a specific way. It seems that a fear of being judged overwhelms her ability to enjoy and take pleasure in things – eating, socialising, having fun. In the debrief, she is hopeful that this research project will raise awareness for other women and girls. I feel sad after this interview, but optimistic about the potential for the research to be help others affected.

Katy is nervous throughout the interview; I do my best to put her at ease. We talk a little bit about how there is no wrong answer. This helps, but I wonder if I sense her nerves still, and this hinders my ability to be to ask for further information. I don't

want to be too leading, but I feel a sense of something not being said. In the end, she becomes more comfortable; we talk about her experiences with some depth. However, the interview is quite short; I wonder what this is about?

I struggle to hold her answers in my mind – I checked carefully in the debrief if she was okay, and she said that everything was fine. When I listen back to the interview, she does sound okay, but I cannot shake this feeling – then I realise, I have had this feeling before from other interviews, I have become acutely aware of the underlying shame, guilt, uneasiness that is present in their body-related distress.

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Although I do not ask specifically about their body image evolving or changing over time, I can see that participants refer to their body image at a different 'time', mostly when a teenager.

Nevertheless, I feel a helpful question is one that would have provided a time-based narrative of their body image, which could have given a sense of their experiences before they started using Instagram too.

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I can see that the women refer to feeling that younger girls than themselves would be *most affected* by the imagery on Instagram, there is a narrative for some, here around troubles or difficulties with the body image, and for some, primarily as a teenager. Yet, there is a sense in the data that some distancing or maturity protects them against distress related to body image.

I have been thinking a lot about what it would mean to be an adolescent now – growing up in a digital age – heightened by the pressure of appearance. Some of the women who participated would have only been a teenager when Instagram was established, I feel I may have missed an opportunity to ask them what it was like to grow up, develop and mature into a young woman with the ever-presence of social media. I am trying not to make assumptions based on age, but for the participants who are younger, their distress feels even more evident.

Use of Photographs

I like the use of photographs; it is helpful to see what my participants are seeing. I am struck by how homogenising imagery deluges their Instagram accounts: thin,

toned, white women. In a lot of the photographs that are shared: the face of the woman is not included –the photo showcases specific body parts only. Before, reading feminist literature and objectification theory, I will admit that I did not know such imagery would be considered 'objectified' – I really thought this only applied to women being 'sexualised'. I am curious about this knowledge being absented from my experiences…I need to reflect further on this.

The photographs would have been helpful to include in this research project as an appendix – the reader could then see what I saw when shared and what the participants' shared as reflective of their experiences of Instagram. Unfortunately, because of ethics, it is not possible. I have considered if there are other ways to offer the reader a semblance of the shared photographs. I look for images online and, on the internet, (that are not held to the same copyright law), it doesn't feel the same…they are generally of models or celebrities – the photographs mostly shared by the women in the study are of other 'normal' women. Unless I target famous influencers on Instagram (whose images are publicly available, and I can ask them specifically for permission too)– it is not possible to really capture what the participants see on Instagram. I am not comfortable in singling out a few individuals – it isn't fair or particularly representative either.

Also, I am not sure about putting my own interpretation on the images (by being responsible for choosing them specifically) the women in the study provided – I think it is most likely I just won't include any photographs.

Another option would have been to find peers or friends that would have willingly to provide photographs of themselves. Again, I feel this is a blurred line in ethics, what am I communicating with these women – that their photographs have a potential (not always, I know) negative impact on others? Would they want images of their bodies immortalised in a thesis? Am I asking them to show their bodies in a sexualised and objectified way – is this ethical? The notion of a female neoliberal subject is emerging in my mind – should I let them make this decision themselves, it's their choice, right? When I approach the subject (I am not sure if they sense my reluctance too? Am I only really exploring this as an option because I feel I should?), I don't seem to get much willingness from anyone. They all give valid reasons, a lot of which I emphasise with, I am not sure if I would want my body to be seen by others. I

do give the matter further thought since it comes to mind that the women in the study *also* talk about not wanting their bodies to be on display to others…(even though the context is different).

In the end, I decide that the reader's imagination will have to be enough to see what the participants' see (of course, enabled by the analysis and accounts provided).

Writing up Stage

I am in the process of writing my literature review. I seem to have missed the point about it being 'critical.' I have tried too hard to cover all the areas that the research touches upon, and therefore not been *critical* of the literature that I have presented. I feel I have been too broad – covering all different perspectives on body image – cognitive, psychodynamic, biological…my supervisor raises a good point – my literature review seems more focused on eating disorders rather than specifically on body image. I think I am really struggling with the split in the literature, between what is described as body image difficulties and then what becomes clearly defined as 'eating disorders.' I align with a feminist perspective that suggests this on a continuum – it is evident that the diagnostic criteria of 'eating disorders' is prevalent amongst 'normal' women to different and varying degrees, so I consider how best to capture this through the literature and in my commentary.

I need to re-evaluate how to present my literature, so the reader can see the aspects that are most salient to this research and how this project is going to contribute. I decide to focus on a sociocultural model of body image since it is a social constructionist project, I need to narrow my focus – although I can see there are many ways the women's experiences of body image can be interpreted.

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I am fascinated by feminist literature and theory; I am curious how I have not been exposed to such thinking before? It is interesting, I am reading a critical feminist critique of how the 'body image' problems of anorexia and bulimia ignore gender and sexuality, and especially around what it means to be a woman. I never really thought about it like this – the parameters for being an adult man and for being an adult woman seem very different, especially in the context of puberty and the social consequences of maturation – I am struck by the concept that 'anorexia' can represent a parody of what it

means to be female in society (a subversion of the 'male' gaze), and also how the female body is *resisted.* I have had a placement on an eating disorder, I don't remember any of this being discussed – or a feminist lens being incorporated into treatment or practice. I wonder if this needs to change if we are to think about *why* females are most affected by body image, disordered eating and eating disorders? A lot what I also read roots the problem in the fact that a 'gender-neutral' lens is applied – based on the 'ideal' man - characteristics of independence, selfhood, and separateness, but these are not the 'ideal' qualities of a woman, neither is it *as easy* for women to achieve such traits(although are expected; caught in double bind of having to be both feminine and masculine), this relates to my research, in that, being concern with appearance seems to be a part of and an expected component of femininity (including organising themselves towards the needs of others).

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Writing my methodology chapter feels very tiring and draining. I am happy with my decision to change my stance to a social constructionist perspective, but feel I am learning and writing at the same time. I need to find my position within social constructionism, some of the literature I read I find confusing. It does feel like what I have 'known' before – has changed, it raises lots of interesting questions about the discourses surrounding mental health…something for me to think about in therapeutic practice…

I feel like I am slowly getting there, I know I reject an extreme relativist position, this makes it easier to understand and find literature which is more in line with a critical realist perspective as I figure this is most suited to my position (personally and for the research). It seems to be getting easier to write, I understand a critical realist position too, so that helps. I re-read aspects of the literature to really get a grip on what it means, especially because it is necessary for the analysis.

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I am enjoying the write-up phase of my analysis. It's definitely more interesting, I feel more connected to my research, it has been sometimes hard and tiring to keep going with the writing. I feel there is an enmeshed between the voices of the women and mine, (layered through differing and shared subjectivities), I can't help but wonder what they would make of the analysis?

****

Anxiety kicks in. I am worried that I putting too much of an interpretative spin on what is being said, I want to remain faithful to the participants' comments *but also* situate them within meanings in society. I have included theory in the analysis, it does not feel right to make comments without giving credit to the authors that I am drawing upon, while hoping to still offer something new or insightful to the experience. I hope that the research offers a meaningful and novel perspective.

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I cannot sit and write my analysis for long, I seem to get tired very quickly. Lots of ideas and thoughts are swimming in my head. It feels like I cannot escape research, spare time seems to feel less enjoyable by knowing I have to return to writing.

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My changing relationship to Instagram and my body image

Over time, I have been exposed to knowledge about how the beauty image is not only distorted but is also argued by feminists to be rooted in female oppression; I was not (completely) aware of how appearance norms can be oppressive or the role they play in contributing to a patriarchal hierarchy in Western society. On reflection, I realised a few things come into play here. Firstly, the concept of being a neoliberal female is a protective layer that stops me from having to confront the 'choices' I make when it comes to my body and appearance. Secondly, being slim to an extent has afforded privilege and acceptance that I would (still) struggle to give up. Thirdly, the feminism I focused on 'fitted' my personal experiences and worldwide view. However, this research has led to a re-examining of what it means to be a woman and, in particular, of my experiences of being a woman too.

I have thought about what it has meant for such areas of feminist thoughts around the body to be denied or suppressed in my realities of the world; I was taken aback by concepts around 'thinness' being symbolic of the denial of feminine sexuality, body, and appetite, including notions that the 'beauty myth' distracts and can prevent women from gaining equality. I don't feel that exposure to such feminist thinking dramatically changed how I felt about my own body, but it did over time lessen the appearance-based pressure I experienced, and I seemed to make a conscious effort to consider my body less for how it looked. At the same time, I did not stop engaging in

beauty practices altogether, and I understand why this is recognised as a challenge for feminism -- how do you reclaim the pleasure, enjoyment, and interest in female beauty? It is not an answer I know, but I believe that at least being aware of the beauty myth provides more opportunities for choice and resistance with respect to feminine beauty.

The way I use Instagram has changed a lot for me. I am aware that seeing homogenising imagery of beautiful women does not make me feel very good about my own body. I eliminated some accounts from my feed. I tried to follow accounts that encourage body positivity or diversity in beauty. This helped a lot, but I know that I am more enthralled by images of women I recognise and identify as 'beautiful.' I am aware of the pressures that other women (from which I am not excluded) face to conform to dominant body images. Therefore, knowing that society has a distorted perception of beauty, I find myself less judgemental towards other women and less harsh on myself. I know that the fantasy that beauty creates for women, i.e., self-worth, confidence, and attention, is neither accurate or completely reflective of the multifaceted and complex experiences of women (even if they do conform to a cultural ideal of feminine beauty), and neither does being 'beautiful' exempt women from the dark persistence of misogynistic violence in society at large.

I feel more educated about body image than I did before. It is difficult to resist the urges, thoughts, and feelings that compel me towards an impossible body type. That's why I hope it does become more of a societal issue. When all that is around you colludes with the ideology of thinness, it makes it *even harder* to resist. Therefore, in order to have real change, in order for women to feel differently, society needs to *respond* and *act*.

Appendix 2   Preliminary Interview Schedule

1. Tell me about how and what you use Instagram for?

- Is there a main purpose to your Instagram use?
- How do you feel about your Instagram use?
- How do you feel about how you present yourself on Instagram?
- What do you mainly post photographs of on Instagram?
- Are there any, if at all, processes involved in deciding if a photograph gets uploaded to Instagram?
- Is there a process involved in displaying your photographs on Instagram? (use of filters/captions/tags)
- If you choose to use filters, are there particular times when you would use them?
- Some people feel Instagram changes how they would take and display a photograph. Others do not. How do you feel about this?
- How do you feel when your photograph does and does not gain feedback? (likes/comments)

- How do you decide to follow someone?
- What makes you want to follow someone? (photographs/interests/associations)
- How do you decide if you like or dislike other's photographs?
- How do you choose who does or does not follows you? (photographs/interests/associations)
- Some people use strategies or techniques to gain Instagram followers or likes. Some people do not. What are your thoughts?

Visual Methods Questions -

- Consider the context of the photograph, where, when, how, why and who was the image taken by?
- Discuss the context in which this photograph was made. What were the filters, editing, or technology applied to the image? What is the aesthetics of the image? Does it conform or not, to photographic or Instagram conventions?
- Why was this particular photograph chosen?

- Who and what is in the photograph?
- Consider what message, feeling, or emotion was being portrayed in the image. How do you think others see this photograph? Was this photograph made with a certain purpose or for someone else?

Can use photographs as a point of reference or interest in the questions which follow.

2. How does using Instagram impact on your body image?

- How does using Instagram impact how you feel about your physical appearance?

Prompts -

How do you manage this? (these thoughts/feelings/behaviours)

How does this impact on your sense of self?

- How does using Instagram impact how you feel about your body?

Prompts -

How do you manage this? (these thoughts/feelings/behaviours)

How does this impact on your sense of self?

- How does Instagram make you feel about being a sexual women?

Prompts -

How do you manage this? (these thoughts/feelings/behaviours)

How does this impact on your sense of self?

- You have told me how Instagram makes you feel about your body image. Some people feel Instagram affects their sense of self-worth or confidence with their body. How do you feel about this?

    Prompt – If yes, how do you cope with this?

- Sometimes people say Instagram can change their feelings, behaviours or mood. Some people do not feel this way. How do you feel about this?

- We have talked about how Instagram may impact on your body image. How do you feel this may affect your relationships with others? (family/partners/friends/peers)

- How does Instagram make you feel about other women's bodies?

    Prompt – Some people feel seeing other women's bodies on Instagram changes how they

    feel about their own body. Some people do not feel this way. How do you feel?

- Some people feel Instagram makes them want to conform to particular expectations regarding their physical appearance or on body image. Some people do not feel this way. How do you feel about this?

Debrief Questions -

- Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience?
- How did you feel answering the questions?
- How do you feel at the moment?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3   Final Interview Schedule

(A) Instagram Use

- Can you tell me what you use Instagram for?

(how, why, when, where?)

(B) Visual Methods Questions -

- Consider the context of the photograph, where and who was the image taken by?
- Discuss the context in which this photograph was made. What were the filters, editing, or technology applied to the image? What is the aesthetics of the image? Does it conform or not, to photographic or Instagram conventions?
- Why was this particular photograph chosen?
- How does this photograph make you feel?
- What message, feelings, or emotions do you get from seeing this image?
- How do you think others see this photograph? Was this photograph made with a certain purpose or for someone else?

Photographs can be used as a point of reference or interest in the questions that follow.

(C) Instagram and Body Image

- How does using Instagram impact how you feel about your physical appearance?

Prompts: in what way? Why do you think this happens? How does it make it you feel?

- How does using Instagram impact how you feel about your body?

Prompts: in what way? Why do you think this happens? How does it make you feel?

- Some people feel Instagram images portray women in a sexualised or objectified way. Whereas some people do not feel this way. I'm wondering what you think?

Prompts: in what way? Why do you think this happens? How does it make you feel? How does it make you feel about others?

- You have told me about how using Instagram impacts you. How do you deal with these thoughts, feelings, or behaviours?

Prompts: does this have affect your daily life in anyway?

- Some people say using Instagram can change their feelings, behaviours or mood. Some people do not agree with this. How do you feel about this?

Prompts: if yes, how do you manage this?

- Some people feel using Instagram affects their confidence with their body. Some people do not feel this way. What are your thoughts?

Prompts: if yes, how do you manage this?

- We have discussed how using Instagram may impact on your body image. How do you think this may affect your relationships with others?

Prompts: family, partners, friends or peers.

- How does using Instagram make you feel about seeing other women and their body?

Prompts: in what way? why do you think this happens?

- Some say seeing other women's bodies on Instagram changes how they feel about their own body. Some people do not agree with this. How do you feel?

Prompt: change – in what way? Why do you think this happens?

- Some people feel using Instagram makes them want to conform to particular expectations regarding their physical appearance or body image. Some people do not feel this way. How do you feel about this?

Prompts: if yes, in what way?

Debrief Questions -
- Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience?
- How was the interview for you? Did it raise any difficulties or issues for you? Offer resources and discuss options.
  ◦ Do you have any further questions about the interview or the process of the research?

Appendix 4   Ethical Approval

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Psychology Research Ethics Committee
School of Arts and Social Sciences
City University London
London EC1R 0JD

9th October 2015

Dear Jasmine Shingadia
Reference: PSYETH (P/L) 15/16 25
Project title: Understanding the impact of young women's experiences of using Instagram on their body image

I am writing to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted approval by the City University London Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee.

Period of approval
Approval is valid for a period of three years from the date of this letter. If data collection runs beyond this period you will need to apply for an extension using the Amendments Form.

Project amendments
You will also need to submit an Amendments Form if you want to make any of the following changes to your research:
      (a) Recruit a new category of participants
      (b) Change, or add to, the research method employed
      (c) Collect additional types of data
      (d) Change the researchers involved in the project

Adverse events
You will need to submit an Adverse Events Form, copied to the Secretary of the Senate Research Ethics Committee ███████████████████████, in the event of any of the following:
      (a) Adverse events
      (b) Breaches of confidentiality
      (c) Safeguarding issues relating to children and vulnerable adults
      (d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher
Issues (a) and (b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than 5 days after the event. Issues (c) and (d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards

████████████   ███████████
████████████████████   Chair
Email: ██████████████████   Email: ██████████████████

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Appendix 5   Research Flyer

Does Instagram impact and affect how you feel about your body?

This study is interested in understanding how Instagram affects how you feel about your body. I would like to hear your story to understand your experiences of Instagram on your body image.

I am looking specifically at young women's experience of using Instagram. If you are female, aged between 18-25 years old, and live in the U.K, and have used Instagram for a minimum of 6 months, and are interested in taking part, then you will be invited for a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 1 ½ hours.

You will be asked to bring three Instagram photographs which impact and affect how you feel about your body. These photographs will be used as a point of reference for discussion within the interview.

This could be a chance to share your experiences, reflections, and thoughts with a Counselling Psychologist in Training, who will listen with empathy, understanding, and free from judgement. This research could help professionals gain insight into how young women feel Instagram impacts on their body image and could guide future policies, guidelines and service developments.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

For more information about this study, or to take part,
please contact: Jasmine Shingadia (researcher) Email:
███████████████████████████████████

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee ███████████████████ ███████████████

Appendix 6   Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title: Understanding young women's experience of using Instagram on their body image.

Instagram is a social media app which is growing in popularity especially with young women. However very little is known about how young women experience Instagram and whether it may impact on their body image. I would like to hear your story, so we can better understand Instagram and use this knowledge to inform future guidelines, policies and service development.

Before you decide whether you wish to take part in the study, it is important you understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

Who is included in this research?
Females, aged between 18-25 years old that live in the UK and have used Instagram for a minimum of six months. Eight participants will be involved in total.

What will happen in the study?
You will be asked to attend a face-to-face audio recorded interview lasting approximately one and half hours. The researcher will collect basic demographic information and information on your Instagram usage. The researcher will ask you questions regarding your experiences of Instagram and how it may affect your body image. To help the researcher understand better your experience of Instagram, you will be asked to bring three photographs from Instagram which have impacted or affected how you feel about your body. For ethical reasons, the photographs will be discussed in the interview but not presented within the thesis.

Do I have to take part?
Your participation is strictly voluntary. If you wish to take part but do change your mind later then you can withdraw from the study at any point up to the write-up of this thesis. This will not affect your rights or disadvantage you in any circumstances. If you do decide to take part then you will be asked to sign an informed consent form.

What the possible risks and benefits to taking part?

The researcher will handle your information with sensitivity, but the interview potentially could bring up issues of a personal nature. The researcher as a Counselling Psychologist in Training will handle your content with empathy and understanding. However, you are under no obligation to continue the interview if you feel overwhelmed. The researcher will provide you with additional resources which can be used if you feel like you need extra support.

One of the possible advantages may be a chance to share and explore your experiences of using Instagram on your body image. It can be an opportunity to be listened to with empathy, understanding and free from judgment. Through your story, other individuals may be able to understand and relate to your experiences.

This research may be able to help clinical settings, service development, and policy making, regarding body image related issues. To date, there have been no psychological studies conducted on how Instagram may impact on body image in young women. This study could help other professionals understand this particular experience.

Will my involvement be kept confidential?

The electronic and paper data will be stored on password-protected devices which will be kept in locked storage that cannot be accessed by anyone apart from the researcher. You will be quoted directly within the thesis however your identity will be protected by pseudonyms and changing identifiable personal information.

The data will be disposed of through deletion and shredding raw materials once the thesis has been evaluated. There will be no further use of any of the personal information supplied.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The thesis will be published and placed within City University's library. I would like the study to be disseminated within journals to make a difference and contribute to the field of psychology. This research may illuminate other professionals in this under-researched topic and contribute to clinical settings, service development and policy making.
.

Who has reviewed the study?
This study has been approved by City University London Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee, approval number.

**For more information about this study, or to take part,
please contact: Jasmine Shingadia (researcher) Email:** ███████████████████████████ ████████

███ **study is supervised by Dr Deborah Rafalin (Registered Psychologist)
Psychology Department.** ██████████████████████████

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance
through the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee, City University
London. Ethics approval number: PSYETH (P/L) 15/16 25**

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the

Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee ████████████████

████████████████████████████

Appendix 7   Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

<p align="center">**Informed Consent Form**</p>

I have read the following statement and if signed below I agree:

I agree to take part in a City University London research project being carried out by Jasmine Shingadia.   The aim of the research is to explore young women's experiences of Instagram's impact on their body image.

I have had the project explained to me and I have read the information sheet.   I have been asked to bring three Instagram photographs which have impacted or affected how I feel about my body.   I understand the Instagram photographs will be discussed within the interview but will not be presented within the thesis.

I know basic demographic information and information on my Instagram usage will be collected.   I understand I will be involved in a face-to-face audio-recorded interview lasting approximately one and half hours.   I am aware I will be asked questions related to my experiences of Instagram and impact on my body image.   I will be asked questions related to the Instagram photographs I bring to the interview too.

I am aware I will be directly quoted within the study, but my identity will be protected by pseudonyms and identifiable personal information being anonymised.

I am aware confidentiality could be broken if I disclose that I am at risk to myself, someone else is at risk of harm, or a child is at risk of harm. Also, if I share knowledge of a crime which has been committed or will be committed in the future.

I agree my participation within the study is voluntary and I can choose to withdraw from the study at any point up to the write-up of this thesis.

Signed..
Date..

I, Jasmine Shingadia, as the researcher agree to protect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of all materials pertaining this research project. All data will be stored in locked cabinets only accessible by me. I agree to protect the anonymity of my participants at all times and adhere to the British Psychological Society ethical guidelines (2010).

Signed..
Date..

Contact Information -

██ ██████
████████████

████████████████████████ ██████████████████████████
████████

Appendix 8   Demographic Questionnaire

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Demographic Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Before the interview begins, I would like to gain some information about you and your Instagram use. This is to show people with different experiences from different backgrounds participated in the study. This information will be kept confidential and anonymous. Please feel free to leave any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

How old are you?

……
…
What is your ethnicity?

………
…
Where in the U.K are you from? Just state the first two letters of your postcode

………
…
How would you define your sexual identity?

………
…
Current marital status? (Single, in a relationship, co-habiting, married, divorced, widowed, civil partnership, etc.)

………
…
How long have you been in your current status?

…...
...
Do you have any children? If yes, how many.

…...
...
What are the highest education qualifications you have?

…...
...
Are you currently employed?

…...
...
If yes, what is your current job?

…...
...
If no, have you been employed in the past?

…...
...
If yes, please provide your last job?

…...
...
How often do you use Instagram?

- **Every 20 minutes**
- **Every hour**
- **Every few hours**
- **Few times a day**
- **Daily**
- **Every couple of days**
- **Weekly**
- **Fortnightly**

- **Monthly**
- **Occasionally**
- **Other (please state)...**

How many followers do you have on your Instagram?

- **0-100**
- **100-200**
- **200-300**
- **300-400**
- **400-500**
- **500-1000**
- **1000+**

How many do you follow on Instagram?

- **0-100**
- **100-200**
- **200-300**
- **300-400**
- **400-500**
- **500-1000**
- **1000+**

How many photos do you have your Instagram account?

- **0-10**
- **10-20**
- **20-30**
- **40-50**
- **50-100**
- **100-200**
- **200-500**
- **500+**

How often do you upload photos?

- **Every twenty minutes**
- **Every couple of hours**
- **A few times a day**
- **Daily**
- **Every couple of days**
- **Weekly**
- **Fortnightly**
- **Monthly**
- **Occasionally**
- **Other (please state)..**

Do you use filters?
- **Yes always**
- **Sometimes**
- **Occasionally**
- **Other (please state)..**

Do you tag others when you upload a photo?

- **Yes always**
- **Sometimes**
- **Occasionally**
- **Other (please state)..**

Do you use tags for other things?

- **Yes always**
- **Sometimes**
- **Occasionally**
- **Other (please state)..**

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire

Appendix 9   Resources List

CITY UNIVERSITY
LONDON

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking part in the study about the impact of Instagram on your body image. However, the interview may have brought up issues or difficulties you require help with. If you have been affected, the following organisations can provide support. Or alternatively speak to your G.P regarding seeking psychological or counselling interventions.

Body Image Organisations -

Beating Eating Disorders – Beat provides helplines for adults and young people experiencing difficulties with body dissatisfaction and body image disturbances.

Phone: 0845 634 1414 (Adult helpline for over 18's) or 0845 634 7650 (Youth helpline for under 25's)

Opening times: Monday: 12 noon to 8.30pm, Tuesday: 12 noon to 5pm, Wednesday: 12 noon to 8.30pm, Thursday: 12 noon to 5pm, Friday: 12 noon to 5pm.

Email: help@b-eat.co.uk (for over 18's) or fyp@b-eat.co.uk (for under 25's)

Website: http://www.b-eat.co.uk (has online one-to-one service)

Eating Disorder Support – confidential help from trained and skilled listeners who had personal experience of an eating disorder.

Phone: 01494 793223 (24 hours helpline)

Email: support@eatingdisorderssupport.co.uk

Seed Eating Disorders – a service dedicated helping individuals who may be experiencing eating disorder symptoms. They offer a drop in service, meetings, and a phone and email buddy system.

Phone: 01482 718130

Email: hello@seedeatingdisorders.org.uk

Website: http://www.seedeatingdisorders.org.uk/

Anorexia and Bulimia Care (ABC) – help and support for individuals who may be suffering with an eating disorder.

Phone: 03000 11 12 13

Website: http://www.anorexiabulimiacare.org.uk/about/contact-us

Body Dysmorphic Disorder – helps individuals who perceive flaws or defects with their appearance or body.

Website: http://bddfoundation.org/ (has resources of how to receive help and website lists support groups available within the U.K)

Internet Addiction -

SMART Recovery – provides support groups within the U.K for anyone experiencing forms of addictive behaviours.

Website: http://www.smartrecovery.org.uk/ (details of time and places of support meetings and can join an online community for support too)

Counselling Directory – search for counsellors who specialise in internet addiction

Website: http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/internet-addiction.html (search by your local area)

Women's Organisations -

Berkshire Women Aid – helps women who fear or are experiencing abuse at home or in a relationship.

Phone: 0118 950 4003 (available 9-5pm on weekdays and in emergencies provides 24 hour help)

Website: http://www.berkshirewomensaid.org.uk

Refuge in partnership with Women's Aid – helps women and children experiencing domestic violence.

Phone: 0808 2000 247 (24 hour helpline)

Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk (respond to emails within 3 working days)

Website: http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/

Living without Abuse – support for those experiencing emotional, psychological and mental abuse.

Website: http://www.lwa.org.uk (provides information on getting help with your circumstances)

Rape Crisis – help for those who may have experienced sexual violence, rape, or sexual threats

Phone: 0808 802 9999 (Available 12-2.30pm or 7-9.30pm)

Website: http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Gender & Sexuality Organisations -

London, Lesbian, & Gay Switchboard – support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities in the U.K.

Phone: 0300 330 0630 (Open daily 10am-11pm)

Website: http://www.llgs.org.uk (has an online instant messaging service available too)

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation – support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals.

Phone: 0845 330 3030

Email: helpline@lgf.org.uk

Website: http://www.lgf.org.uk (provides details of groups, one-to-one services, clinics, police help)

The Gender Trust – support for transsexual, gender dysphoria, transgender, or gender identity issues.

Email: info@gendertrust.org.uk

NHS Sexual Health – confidential advice about sexual health and centres for Sexually Transmitted Infections.

Phone: 0300 123 7123 (lines open Monday - Friday 9am - 8pm, Weekends 11am – 4pm)

Website: http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Talkingaboutsex/Pages/Ineedhelpnow.aspx

General Mental Health Support Organisations -

Mind - provides information, support, and legal advice regarding mental health issues.

Phone: 0300 123 3393 or Text: 86463   (open Monday-Friday 9am-6pm excluding bank holidays)
      : 0300 466 6463 (Legal helpline)

Email: info@mind.org.uk or legal@mind.org.uk

Website: http://www.mind.org.uk (provides information on mental health problems and receiving help)

Samaritans – helps individuals who may be experiencing current difficulties and need to talk to someone.

Phone: 08457 909090 (24 hour helpline)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: http://www.samaritans.org (provides details of local Samaritans branches which can be visited)

SANE – is a national, out of hours helpline, which offers specialist emotional support and information to those affected by mental health.

Phone: 0845 767 8000 (6pm to 11pm everyday)

Website: http://www.sane.org.uk (provides information and support of applying for a text service too)

British Psychological Society – help find a psychologist in your local area.

Website:http://www.bps.org.uk/psychology-public/find-psychologist/find-psychologist

Appendix 10   Initial Coding Example from Natasha's Interview

Initial Codes	Transcript (Raw Material)	Line Number

	Okay. What about the other photographs you picked?	94
Bodies are of similar type or presentation	Erm, this is another one. It's kind of similar.	95
	Mm-hmm.	96
Bone protrusion is constructed as evidence of a very 'thin' body Similar in that hipbone is showing	And again you can see her hip bones sticking out.	97
	Mm-hmm.	98
Constructs body through visible body parts Bone protrusion is further constructed as evidence of a very 'thin' body	And erm she's really bony and like really prominent collarbones and stuff.	99
	So feel this is kind of similar to the other photograph…?	100-101
Justification of woman's body if natural (not achieved through other means?) Difficult to deny the	Yeahh and er maybe she's just naturally like that and that's fair enough. You can't say that she's necessarily	102-105

woman's body is unhealthy Juxtaposes the bone protrusion as symbolic of an unhealthy 'thin' body Woman's body is constructed as perfect Perfect for absence of cellulite/imperfection-free	unhealthy because maybe she's not. But it's just like that it's you know there's is no cellulite there's just noth, it's just perfection. There's just…	
	Mmm.	106
The woman is constructed as looking like a girl not a woman Absence of womanly shape Denial of adult feminine physicality/sexuality	Like nothing on her. There's nothing to her at all. Even though she looks like a grown woman.	107-108
	Mm-hmm.	109
Photograph is not from a fitness account Woman in photograph is pretty Considered attractive for her body Others women desire to look like this woman	And erm this isn't, I don't think this was a fitness one. But still like obviously she's very pretty and I remember looking at the comments and everybody being like oh summer motivation and tagging their friends being	110-113

Considered motivational for individual's own bodies 'Beach body' Body that is worthy of be displayed in public/on holiday Sadness that others desire to look similar to this woman Social value is deferred for body not person	like we need to look like this for our summer holiday and stuff, which is really sad.	
	Mmm. How did it make you feel thinking about that?	114
Returns to construction of girl/woman being too 'thin' – bone protrusion Others wish to look this skinny This what is desired/admired for women/girls to look like by others/society	It, it made me sad seeing more people wishing that they looked like that. Then the idea that this girl is too skinny. It..	115-116
	Okay..	117
Depressed that this body is what is deemed attractive for women/girls	It's quite depressing…	118

	Okay so…	119
Body is not just attractive but is the ideal 'Ideal' body is constructed as 'too skinny'	If this is considered attract, no not attractive but ideal.	120
	Mmm. And, how does that make you feel? To think this is the ideal? And, you also mentioned that when you saw the comments, it kind of made you feel a certain way?	121-122
Explaining	Yeah. So if you do look like…	123
	Okay.	124
Achieving the ideal body accrues social and personal benefits Rewarding and appealing to be desired Rewards of 'thinness' Constructs envy and desire as result of achieving thin and toned body	People will compliment you more, want to look like you, and that is obviously like a rewarding and appealing idea.	125-126

	Mmm. What do you think about that?	127
How she feel towards the ideal and the effects of the ideal changes Part of wished she did not want to look like this Constructs the body as unhealthy and horrible (too skinny) Aware that all women would like to look this Despite, contradictory constructions of the woman's body – too thin, too skinny, unhealthy – she still wishes to look like this woman Power or lure of the 'ideal' Despite 'unhealthy' connation's of body, the body is still desirable	I don't know, it changes. I would like to say that I wish, I wish I didn't want to look like that, it's, it's unhealthy, it's horrible. But I think in reality we all would like to look like that. I definitely would.	128-130

Appendix 11   Thematic Map

Shaping a Woman: Am I meeting expectations?

This is the body I should have

Looking for body inspiration

Comparing myself against these woman

Feeling the pressure: The gap between my body and 'her' body

Fear of not meeting others' expectations

Desire to exercise

Problems with eating

An illusory ideal: Limiting the damage to my own body image

Mythical girls

Working to regain control

Warning others

Appendix 12   Table of Master Themes, Subthemes and Data Extracts

Master theme 1– Shaping a woman: Am I meeting expectations?		
1.1 This is the body I should have: "You're supposed to look a certain way" (India, 166-167)		
India	164-169	Well, I guess it's mainly because these pictures, when you see them, it's like every certain post that you're seeing on Instagram it's going to make you think that you're supposed to look a certain way and that's what comes across. So, when I see these pictures, I'm thinking this is how I am meant to look. (India, 163–169)
India	210-212	Yeah, because it looks like - that she looks that sort of way for like the men maybe. It's like maybe you should be looking - like not only looking good for yourself but looking good for others to see you. (India 210–212)
Frankie	28-37	So before, it was -- actually, probably when Instagram started about four years, five years ago, it was like skinny is great, so I was like - it was probably like long legs, skinny model and that's still around, but like everybody knows that. And then I think after this whole like -- like epidemic of clean eating and like looking good, it's become more like muscles and fitness and healthy life and that's what I look for now. (Frankie, 28–37)
Clara	232-234	I think that this body at the moment is so fashionable and that skinny is kind of out and this is really in. (Clara, 231–234)
2.2 Looking for body inspiration: "That's what I want to look like" (Ava, 457-458)		
Ava	455-458	And as I care about my health, so if I was like looking for inspiration, then I'd probably look at that and be like, 'That's what I want to look like.' (Ava, 455–458)
Ava	486-489	That looks more natural to me and that's more similar to my body type, which is why I'd look at that and rather than someone who I know has completely different shape to me. (Ava, 486–489)
Frankie	42-48	More like delicately fit, and I like that idea. And that's the kind of idea that -- that's what I want to look like. So, I think that I use Instagram to look at people and get inspired but also know that can be done, because I think that it's much more relatable when I can see people were like actually sweating out in the gym. (Frankie, 42–48)
Natasha	37-38	It's just like it's a fitness motivation page. And I look at them sometimes when I have these spurts of thinking I need to be healthier. (Natasha, 37–38)
1.3 Comparing myself against these women: "I will never look like that" (Natasha, 138–139)		
Natasha	138-139	I think that it's annoying because I know I will never look like that. And that does

		upset me sometimes and makes me think that men might never find me as attractive as they find these girls on Instagram. (Natasha, 289–291)
Katy	182-185	Because she does have a really nice body. And it makes you feel a bit like rubbish next to her if I was next to her. (Katy, 182–185)
Katy	96-98	Like you're happy for her but then it's 'I want to look like that'. So, yeah, it's frustrating and annoying. I feel jealous I suppose. (Katy, 96-98).
Rose	136-139	But I just remember maybe feeling a little bit sad that I might never look like that, like be that thin and look that toned and things like that. (Rose, 136–139)
Clara	707-710	I'd never look at a photo and think, 'My body is like that' or 'I feel really proud of my body' It would make me go, 'Oh! That's something I have not got' sort of thing. (Clara, 707–710)
Master Theme 2 – Feeling the pressure: The gap between my body and 'her' body		

2.1 Fear of not meeting others' expectations: "If your body doesn't look like that then you will be judged" (India, 272–273)

India	271-273	So, I feel like if you don't conform and if you're not in line with this sort of this image, if your body doesn't look like that then you would be judged. I feel like that's really what affects me, and this is why maybe I wouldn't want to go out or I would wear something like a long coat because I don't want to be judged, because I don't look like that. (India, 271-273)
Clara	299-304	I don't feel comfortable enough to show my body to do that [post revealing pictures on Instagram]. I'd probably delete it straight away, [because of] people's opinion. (Clara, 299-304)
Rose	360-364	I think I'd wonder what people would think, the reason why I would post such a thing or what they might think of my body if they were to look and judge it. And those are the people that know you rather than just strangers, so it feels more important. (Rose, 360–364)

2.2 Desire to exercise: "I would prefer to have a more toned body and be thinner" (Rose, 667–671)

Rose	667-671	And I would prefer to have a more toned body and to be thinner. So, I feel like sometimes it does make me feel lazy like I'm not doing enough to make my body look like the people on Instagram, my best. (Rose, 667–671)
Natasha	254-256	Erm it makes me feel like I should be devoting all of my time to doing that and, and working way harder because nobody, nobody can look like that without putting in a lot of effort. (Natasha, 254–256)

Frankie	806-809	And now I'm trying my best and I feel like I'm almost there which sounds so lame but it's true because, you know, I've worked hard. I worked fucking hard to look like how I look now. (Frankie, 806–809)
Ava	262-263	I remember going to do the gym, I'm like doing it and literally making me feel sick because it's like so hard. (Ava, 262–263)

2.3 Problems with eating: "Then I felt guilty" (Ava, 268–269)

Ava	268-269	If I ever ate cake or something which is obviously, you know it's bad for you, then I felt guilty. (Ava, 268–269)
Ava	758-763	And then you'd be, 'I don't want a brownie,' and then they'd make you eat it or something because there's some social pressure if you don't eat a brownie, then you get labelled, let's say anorexic or something. So, I'd eat, and I feel worse because I really didn't want it and I just feel sick and then I probably made myself sick. (Ava, 758–763)
India	471-476	I think it was a guilt like if I was then sort of eat a biscuit or eat something, it's like it's not even that bad because you are normally just eating it, but then it makes you feel worse and it feels like, 'Oh, no, I'm doing this to myself.' (India, 471–476)
Frankie	285-291	At the end, there was like a tiramisu and I ate it and hadn't eaten sugar for about three months and I couldn't sleep because I felt so sick. It was like my body couldn't – like it was like, 'Oh, what have I done?' And I was like bloated and horrible and I like regretted it for like a week. (Frankie, 285–291)
Frankie	292-296	Now I know that there's no point. When people are passing around cake and going – there's not one bit of me that wants it because I know the repercussions of feeling so shit afterwards, body-wise and also like, 'What did you do that for?' (Frankie, 292–296)

Master Theme 3: An illusory ideal: Limiting the damage to my own body image

3.1 "Mythical girls" (Natasha, 186–188)

Natasha	186-188	There are just these mythical girls that on the beach all the time or always taking photos with perfect bums and tiny waists and stuff. But it's just not realistic. (Natasha, 186–188)
Ella	1323-1325	No, I don't think -- I feel that way because I can sort of realise the reality of it. And again, it's their jobs. It's their ['celebrities' and models'] job to look like that. (Ella, 1323–1325)
Frankie	933-938	They're probably taken at the time of day when they look their best, so it's probably

		in the morning. It's not going to be after like a huge meal. And like probably they put filters on it. I know that's probably not exactly what they look like in that moment. (Frankie, 933–938)
India	358-361	I understand to myself that this isn't how a normal woman would maybe look like, the average girl would not look like this. (India, 358–361)

3.2 Working to regain control: "I try to handle it in a healthy way and not let myself be controlled by these images" (Natasha, 363–364)

Natasha	363-364	Erm, I try, er I try to handle it in a healthy way and not let myself be controlled by these images. (Natasha, 363–364)
Natasha	435-439	And you know it's a desirable thing and I have had issues with my body image in the past. So that does sometimes bring up feelings of I have had before. Erm, but I would say that, I, I kind of know how to deal with that now. So, it doesn't, it doesn't impact my body image to the extent it would make me change my lifestyle or anything. (Natasha, 435–439)
Ava	370-372	I find it hard to try and find images that make me feel something, but I picked that one just because of how I used to feel [worse about my own body]. I try to work on that, but I don't like - look at it, ever thinking I wish I looked like that. (Ava, 370–372)
Clara	450-456	Yeah, you get into a mindset which you have to pull yourself out of, definitely. But I guess it's a bit like staring at a magazine cover for too long. You to start to think, 'Oh, I wish I could look like that.' It's the same with Instagram, 'Oh I wish I could—' and then you have to pull yourself out of it. (Clara, 450-456)

3.3 Warning others: "I definitely don't think it's healthy" (Ava, 627–628)

Ava	627-628	Yeah. I don't think it's a good -- I don't really think it's a good idea. I don't know who started the craze of making these accounts, but I definitely don't think it's healthy. (Ava, 627-628)
Ava	302-303	I think it definitely has the power to erm to influence the way you think about things. If people actively go and follow certain kind of [fitness] accounts. (Natasha, 405–406)
India	377-382	Yeah because it's like in the sense you kind of expect celebrities to be focused more to body, but when you see now -- well, particularly I feel pissed that a lot of people my age, especially girls, they're doing this which is becoming every post is more sexualised (India, 377-382)

Clara	834-840	But with the way Instagram is at the moment and with women posting selfies of themselves in bikinis or whatever, I think it's sending out the message to young girls by accident to concentrate on only on that and a lot of young girls are only doing that, I think. (Clara, 834–840)

Appendix 13   Participants' Demographic Information and Instagram Usage

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Sexual Identity	Relationship Status	Highest Level of Education
Katy	18	White British	Heterosexual	In a relationship	GCSE's
India	18	White British	Heterosexual	Single	A Levels
Clara	23	White British	Heterosexual	In a relationship	BA Hons
Ava	19	White British	Heterosexual	Single	A levels
Frankie	24	White British	Heterosexual	In a relationship	BA
Natasha	19	White British	Heterosexual	Single	A Levels
Rose	24	White British	Heterosexual	Co-habiting	Postgraduate
Ella	24	White British	Heterosexual	In a relationship	BA Hons

Participant	Frequency of Instagram Use	Number of Followers	Number of Accounts followed	Number of photographs on personal Instagram account	Frequency of uploading photographs	Usage of Filters	If tags are used for photographs	If tags are used for searching on Instagram
Katie	Few times a day	1000+	500-1000	0-10	Occasionally	Occasionally	Occasionally	Occasionally
India	Every few hours	300-400	400-500	10-20	Occasionally	Occasionally	Sometimes	Occasionally
Ava	Few times a day	400-500	300-400	200-500	Weekly	Sometimes	Sometimes	No
Clara	Every few hours	300-400	100-200	100-200	Monthly	Yes always	Sometimes	Occasionally
Frankie	Every few hours	300-400	1000+	500+	Weekly	Yes always	Sometimes	Occasionally
Natasha	Every few hours	500-1000	100-200	50-100	Weekly	Sometimes	Sometimes	Occasionally
Rose	Few times a day	200-300	400-500	200-500	Every couple of days	Yes always	Sometimes	Yes always
Ella	Every Hour	200-300	500-1000	500+	Every couple of days	Sometimes	Sometimes	Yes always

Appendix 14   Case Descriptions

Natasha is nineteen years old and about to enter her first year at university. She lives at home with her family. Instagram is used for social purposes as a way to communicate with her friends and peers, mostly to see others' posts. She uses the social media platform mostly in her spare time, in which it is characterised as something that she does when there is nothing to do.

She explained that the three photographs brought to the interview were characteristic of her general feed. The pictures were generally looked at when she felt a need to be healthier. She admired various aspects of their bodies for being toned and defined. There was an awareness that such women on Instagram were glorified for their bodies by others on the platform, and in society too. She spoke about the disappointment this created towards her own body for not being similar, and the unfairness of an unrealistic and unattainable ideal that is necessary to be considered beautiful.

Natasha said she knew that the body types she saw on Instagram were difficult to obtain, yet could not help but feel this was how she was meant to look. She felt lazy

for not working as hard on her own body - she assumed that the women on Instagram must eat more healthily and exercise more than her.

She told me that she knew that the women's bodies in the image were not realistic - calling them 'mythical.' There was a sense of frustration; she explained that the women's bodies she saw on Instagram created a pressure in her and in other women to look a particular way.

Natasha explained that she had struggled with her body image in her early teenage years, so she felt that the photographs she saw on Instagram would have had a greater impact on her when she was younger. She described herself as more impressionable at fourteen to fifteen years old, and this made her concerned about adolescent girls who were looking at similar photographs on Instagram.

Rose is twenty-four years old, currently studying at post-graduate level and lives with her boyfriend. She describes her Instagram use as frequent - in the morning, at various points in the day, and at bedtime too. She said that Instagram was her preferred social media platform, in particular, she liked that the app was solely based on posting and sharing images.

The first photograph she had chosen was described as her favourite since she admired this woman's body the most. The image had stayed with her; she tracked it down precisely for the interview brief. When describing the photograph, she told me that the woman's body was apparently on display in a well-cut swimsuit - toned and tanned while on holiday. She was envious of the woman's body and recognised that the woman looked 'great.' She recalled that when seeing the photograph for the first time, she was overwhelmed by feeling that it was not possible for her to ever look like that.

Rose described feeling dissatisfied with her own body's dissimilarity to the women's bodies that she admired on Instagram. Going through this particular woman's account, she was aware that a lot of effort is required to achieve such a body. She wished that she was interested and felt motivated enough to exercise because it might help her think she was at least 'moving' towards a different, better body. She felt that having a toned and thinner body would make her feel more beautiful and, therefore, more confident.

Rose wished she felt comfortable enough to post photographs of her own body on Instagram. However, she described this as unlikely at the moment - if she could make her body look like those of the women on Instagram, she might feel differently.

She generally rationalised to help her cope with the adverse effects, including that the women have probably edited or posed for their body to look such a way, or awareness that some women probably exercise frequently with a personal trainer. Mostly, she said that it was about forgetting, in which she tried to get on with her day as usual - putting the bodies of other women to the back of her mind. However, she wondered if because she saw so many similar photographs of other women this made her immune to being negatively impacted?

Ava is nineteen years old and in her second year of university. She uses Instagram frequently, mostly to share and see photographs. However, there was an attempt on her part to use the platform less - finding it distracting, but also to avoid pictures that did not make her feel good about herself or her own body.

Her chosen images showed women as fit, healthy and toned, typically used for inspiration for how she would like her own body to look. She was acutely aware of fitness influencers on Instagram; demonstrating a current preference for those that advocated a less restrictive style towards healthy eating and exercise. Ava was conscious that there had been times where she has struggled with eating and her body image. Therefore, she tried to be less fixated on her appearance, in which there were themes of 'health' - being aware of the dangers of 'eating disorders' while trying to maintain what she believed to be a 'normal' 'healthy' appearance.

In particular, Ava showed concern that specific accounts on Instagram were promoting an unhealthy attitude towards the body, exercise and food. She spoke about being worried that other girls who were even younger than her could be even more impacted by such messages and imagery on Instagram.

Frankie is twenty-four years old and currently in a relationship with her boyfriend. She mainly used Instagram when bored or without anything to do. Her feed was populated with fitness influencers; in particular, she liked the satisfaction of not

indulging in things (that she used to eat), and therefore, such imagery and messages around healthy living were helpful to epitomise the lifestyle she wished to achieve.

Frankie's photographs reflected her preference for thin and toned bodies, which she believed was more in line with what women should look like now. She described following fitness influencers that mainly had gone through a 'transformation' - which showed the effects of exercise and diet in a slimmer appearance. She was aware that looking a specific way took a lot of effort and work, but that it was worth it to be thin and toned.

She talked at length about feeling more confident with her body as she was getting closer to achieving the desired aesthetics. There was a recognition that being thin and toned accrued personal and social benefits. It seemed that changing her appearance was a way to feel more confident too.

Frankie spoke to me about feeling a pressure to work out; if she didn't, she felt very guilty. Similarly, shame and guilt characterised her eating habits too. At the same time, she was proud of her body since it symbolised her hard work.

Her family, friends and boyfriend had noticed the change in how she looked - gaining their admiration and respect. She was curious if looking different changed how others treated her; in particular, her friends responded with a combination of antipathy and envy.

India is eighteen years old, currently about to go to university. She uses Instagram mainly in her spare time as a way to stay up to date with friends - to know what is happening in their lives. When describing her chosen photographs, India focused on how they met expectations of how women are meant to look. She felt very much that it created inadequacy in her appearance, including being aware that often comparisons between herself and other women on Instagram left her upset. She knew that photographs on Instagram could be edited, but this is not what she thought of when seeing other women's bodies on the platform.

There was a pressure to look similar, in which she characterised a need to fit in - to do so, she needed to exercise and eat healthily; if she didn't, it was guilty and shameful. She was fearful of being judged for not looking a specific way. In particular,

using Instagram had heightened her appearance-related concerns, in which she felt a pressure to look good not only for herself but for others, too.

India described Instagram as a platform that encouraged women and girls to post photographs where their bodies were on display in a sexualised manner, and she was angry about this effect.

Clara is twenty-three years old and works in a field closely related to her university degree. She characterised her relationship to Instagram as ambivalent - sometimes enjoying using and platform, and at other times not. When asked further about this, she felt that it could enable a fixation on other's appearances, which for her, inevitably led to appearance-related comparisons that made her feel upset and concerned about how she looked.

In contrast to other the women, Clara's photographs showed a more curvaceous body type, in that she particularly admired curves in a female form. Although Clara desired such aesthetics, she believed it was not possible for her to achieve such a body unless she turned to cosmetic surgery.

She spoke about wanting to feel more comfortable in her own body, considering those who post body-focused images onto Instagram to be 'confident.' Clara wanted to have a similar body so that she could gain the same level of attention and admiration.

We talked about how she coped with the adverse effects; mainly she tried to pull herself out a specific mindset of wishing to look like the women on Instagram, which in part protected her from experiencing negative emotions. She felt that it was sometimes really silly or stupid to be concerned about how her body looked, often reprimanding herself for even having body worries. At the same time, Clara was conscious that the images on Instagram could have an even worse effect on the body image of young girls, particularly by encouraging a focus on their appearance only.

Katy is eighteen years old and is in full-time employment. She told me that Instagram was quite addictive - using the platform frequently throughout the day. Her photographs of other women on Instagram were thin and toned; she was conscious that her own body was inadequate for not being like the desired aesthetics. This left her frustrated, mainly because she believed that others expected her to look like the women

on Instagram. Katy spoke to me about feeling compelled to go to the gym to achieve such a body, and in particular felt a particular pressure from the imagery of thin and toned women.

She talked about trying to feel happy or pleased for other women who had achieved the admired body but struggled with how she also felt upset, angry and annoyed (at herself) for not looking such a way. Despite being aware that such photographs she saw on Instagram were likely to be edited, she still felt that she wanted to look like the women while recognising that it was not natural, healthy or realistic to achieve.

Katy felt particularly annoyed that such imagery on Instagram intensified pressure for her to look like the women, and this could be an expected aesthetic from others. When asked who specifically, she named her boyfriend. She was worried that her boyfriend might find the women more attractive (perhaps because they were thinner) than her.

Ella a twenty-four-year-old woman, is in a long-term relationship and has full-time employment. She used Instagram frequently, mainly to look at landscape photography.

The three photographs of other women that Ella chose were described by her as thin and toned. She was mainly drawn to the fact that they looked happy, healthy and relaxed. She focused particularly on the moods that these photographs evoked: a sense of being confident and comfortable in their bodies that she wished she felt. Ella believed that having a similar body would mean that she could be happy, relaxed, confident and carefree, too.

Ella admired the women in her photographs; she believed that such images instilled motivation to care and look after one's body. At the same time, Ella felt it was unrealistic to expect that she could look like them. When asked about this, she focused predominantly on famous people who have access to resources that enable them to achieve the desired appearance. Ella felt that Instagram could cause or intensify body image difficulties, especially in young people, because it could create an unhealthy focus on body and appearance.

Appendix 15   Summary of Master Themes and Subthemes

1. Shaping a Woman: Am I meeting expectations?

1.1.   This is the body I should have: "You're supposed to look a certain way" (India, 166-167)

1.2.   Looking for body inspiration: "That's what I want to look like" (Ava, 457-458)

1.3.   Comparing myself against these women: "I will never look like that" (Natasha, 138–139)

2. Feeling the pressure: The gap between my body and 'her' body

2.1.   Fear of not meeting others' expectations: "If your body doesn't look like that then you will be judged" (India, 272–273)

2.2.   Desire to exercise: "I would prefer to have a more toned body and be thinner" (Rose, 667–671)

2.3.   Problems with eating: "Then I felt guilty" (Ava, 268–269)

3. An illusory ideal: Limiting the damage to my own body image

3.1 **"Mythical girls"** (Natasha, 186–188)

3.2 Working to regain control: "I try to handle it in a healthy way and not let myself be controlled by these images" (Natasha, 363–364)

3.3 Warning others: "I definitely don't think it's healthy" (Ava, 627-628)

Section C: Client Study

Working Through Countertransference Reactions Evoked in the Analyst:

A Psychodynamic Approach (Redacted due to confidentiality and to maintain client anonymity)

Section D: Journal Article for Publication

How young women construct the impact of using Instagram on their body image

The full text of this article has been removed for copyright reasons

Section C: publishable article pages 276-313

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