Full-Time Side Hustle: The Position and Production of Fitness Influencer and Creators on Instagram

Kyle Kubler

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Matthew Powers, Chair

Christine Harold

Adrienne Russell

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Abstract

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Kyle Kubler

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Associate Professor Matthew Powers
Communication

This dissertation seeks to understand who gets to be a social media Influencer or content creator within the fitness industry, as well as the strategies they use and the content they produce. As new forms of celebrity proliferate online through the use of information communication technologies, there is a parallel growth in the health and fitness industry, with fitness Influencers and creators at the crossroads. Relying on a mixed-methods approach of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and a rhetorical analysis of the Instagram fitness genre, this dissertation argues that social stratification among fitness Influencers and creators shapes their beliefs, strategies, and forms of production on social media. What fitness Influencers and creators believed investments would do for them depended on their position within, or outside of, the fitness industry, which was often shaped by aspects of their lives such as education, employment,

gender, and family or social support. Similarly, the strategies invested in by fitness Influencers and creators varied primarily according to their occupational trajectory, with those looking to create full-time careers in the fitness industry willing to adopt more market rationalized strategies than those who approached social media as a hobby. Lastly, in mapping the genre ecology of Instagram fitness, this dissertation shows how the historically inherited genre of fitness interacts with the features and affordances of Instagram to shape how fitness Influencers and creators use the platform to produce content. These findings have applications for those studying social media Influencers and celebrity as well as scholars of communication and technology. For the former, this dissertation provides new insight into how to organize an analysis of the diversity of people who become Influencers and creators, offering social position as one answer. For the latter, this dissertation uses genre to help explain what shapes the perception of certain sociotechnical features and affordances of information communication technologies.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Vignette 1: The Diligent Amateur

Megan Gallagher, known online as megsquats, is a full-time fitness Influencer and content creator with the goal to get a barbell in every woman's hands. Along with regularly posting social media content on Instagram and YouTube, Meg also runs multiple fitness-related online businesses and has secured a handful of sponsorship and advertising deals. With over half a million Instagram followers and 400,000 YouTube subscribers, Meg is certainly a successful internet celebrity within the field of fitness, but what does this success look like, and how did she get here? In a YouTube video from February 2019, Meg responds to fans who assumed that she came from a wealthy family. Meg explains that she in fact grew up "dirt, dirt poor" in Akron, Ohio with a drug-addicted and abusive step-father (Gallagher, 2019). She mentions that college was the first time she met people with significantly more money than herself and that she was initially quite resentful of the way they lead their lives. The segment of the video is then concluded with Meg explaining that she chose to answer this question because she thought it would be a good opportunity for her fans to get to know her more deeply.

In college, Meg played basketball and ran cross country. After moving to DC for an internship and later a job as a graphic designer, she invested in both fitness and acting, signing up for CrossFit and improv classes. It was in DC, that she met her fiancée, Ryan, who was an economist and policy analyst at the IMF and World Bank. On June 24th, 2014, megsquats posted her first YouTube video; it was accompanied by an Instagram page to document her journey as a competitive powerlifter. As her popularity and online businesses grew, Meg moved to New York, where Ryan took a job with Credit Suisse and Meg became a communications director for

her graphic design company (Gallagher, 2015). After about a year, the couple decided to commit full-time to running their online businesses, and both left their day jobs (Strong Strong Friends, 2018). The couple moved to Los Angeles, where they bought a house and built a home gym in order to make training and filming social media content both easier and more accessible. Just over a year later they sold their home to move to Fort Worth, Texas in order to have more space for their expanding businesses and to be closer to family.

With the increased popularity came various sponsorship and advertising deals. One of the first came in 2015 by Lift Big Eat Big, a fairly small strength training company that mixes online coaching with lifestyle and apparel. Since then, she has partnered with bigger sports-related companies such as GNC and Gatorade, more general health brands such as Kellogg's Special K breakfast cereal, and brands outside of health and fitness such as Target. Along with the sponsorship and advertising deals, Meg also runs an online coaching and personal training business called Strong Strong Friends, a weightlifting equipment and apparel company called Strong Strong Supply, and a supplement company called Buff Chicks Supplements. Strong Strong Friends offers many levels of membership that range from being sent daily workouts to having one-on-one time with Meg as your personal trainer. The majority of the production and distribution of these businesses and sponsorships are mediated by various information communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Stronger by the Day app, with most of the advertising for her own products and those of her sponsors appearing on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

Meg's content on Instagram is a mixture of training videos, workout instructions, selfies, outfit posts and life updates. These posts not only serve to grow her account and keep her name appearing in the feed of her half a million followers, but they also serve to underline the key

aspects of her businesses. Every workout and training video serves as an opportunity to mention her personal training programs and app in the caption section of the post. Her selfies and outfit photos often serve as announcements for new items in her clothing line or offer her space in the caption section to talk about her new supplement company. For Meg, the captions serve to clarify what exactly is being advertised in each post, as well as instructing her fans on how to engage with the post, a practice known as visibility labor (Abidin, 2016). In some cases, this involves directing her fans to a website where they can purchase her products or telling them to engage with her posts by liking and commenting. On YouTube, Meg posts a weekly vlog where she often speaks directly to the camera and engages with her audience by taking them through her day and providing an inside look into her life and training.

Vignette 2: The precarious shifter

Carla, a fitness Influencer and creator I interviewed for this project, also moved from Los Angeles to Fort Worth for her husband's new job as an engineer in the automobile industry. After exposure to a supportive in-person and online fitness community in Los Angeles, Carla was inspired to spend more time investing in health and fitness and began looking for ways to make a career change out of her job in marketing at a small fashion company. When her company downsized and cut her position, Carla took the opportunity to become certified as a personal trainer and start working with clients at local gyms. It was at this time that Carla made a dedicated fitness account on Instagram, which had 649 followers at the time of the interview. While her Instagram page was also a platform for advertising her online personal training services, Carla's goal was primarily to use her Instagram as a way to develop her in-person training business.

The move to Fort Worth came just as Carla was starting to build a clientele in Los Angeles making the transition to a new state and fitness community difficult. By the time I spoke with Carla, she had been able to find a few clients at a local gym but was also relying on her online clients now that she had just moved. Before working in marketing, Carla worked in sales for the CBS television channel, an area of work she disliked primarily because it was too 'salesy.' Carla was not interested in selling people fitness but rather helping people through fitness. Her growth in the industry felt slow, and Carla was ultimately unsure about her long-term career goals; however, she enjoyed her day-to-day work life and was passionate about fitness which was what mattered most.

Carla's Instagram content is similar to Meg's albeit with fewer advertisements. Her posts consist of workout videos, tips about fitness and nutrition she had learned during her certification process, and selfies that are often paired with motivational content in the caption. Carla also regularly features pictures and videos of her dog, giving her audience a snapshot of her life outside of fitness. Although Carla does not advertise for external brands, she will occasionally use workout or nutrition-related posts to advertise for her own online personal training services. These posts are not only an avenue for advertisement but also a demonstration of her ability and skill as a personal trainer. When I asked Carla about her process for creating Instagram content, she mentioned that the caption was really important to her and was the part of the post she spent the most time on. It was critical to make the first two sentences really pop out in order to attract the attention of her audience while at the same time providing enough valuable content in the caption so that it would be beneficial to viewers and not just a waste of time.

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Meg and Carla have had significantly different career trajectories despite having much in common. They are both white women in their late twenties to early thirties with undergraduate degrees outside of the health and fitness industry who recently moved from Los Angeles to Fort Worth and post fitness content on Instagram in part to advertise for their personal training services. In different ways, each also reflect narratives in the popular press and academic literature regarding who gets to be an Influencer or creator and what they do as one. Meg's story is one of the diligent amateur who slowly built up her social media following over years of producing content, eventually leading to partnering with brands and starting her own business. Stories such as Meg's have become a common reference point for those that adhere to what I call the linear playbook model which can be found both in the popular press (Martineau, 2019; Sanders et al., 2019; Ward, 2017) and the academic literature (Khamis et al., 2017; Zulli, 2017). This model moves step-by-step through phases of Influencer development in which platform features and affordances must be harnessed to attract attention and develop a self-brand before promoting brands or one's own business. Further, this model often assumes that most people will start from the first step, and that success is less about who you are and more about one's ability to move through the playbook.

The linear playbook model is often buffered by the proliferation of smartphones (Schiller, 2014) and social media platforms such as Instagram. Created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, Instagram began as a social media platform that prioritized the instant and immediate posting of photographs that could be edited with a wide arrange of filters. Along with past and present competitors, such as Hipstamatic, Snapchat and TikTok, Instagram has greatly impacted how social media users engage with and produce photographs (Jurgenson, 2019). By the numbers, Instagram has recently surpassed one billion users (Carman, 2018), and hosts over

two million advertisements per month (West, 2019). Influencers are thought to play an integral part in this process by attracting large followings, and consistently producing content. With these platforms relying on advertising as a major revenue source, barriers to entry for users are kept low and advertising opportunities are high. When explaining the emergence of microcelebrities and Influencers as a cultural form of celebrity, accounts often point to these social and technical features of platforms such as Instagram (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016; Turner, 2006).

Working to counter popular notions that almost anyone can become famous online, scholars of social media and celebrity have gone to pains to argue that most people who invest in platforms such as Instagram will have experiences more like Carla's than Meg's (Marwick, 2015). These scholars emphasize the economic necessity of self-branding under what they call neoliberal capitalism (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Hakim, 2018; Khamis et al., 2017). Behind the aspiration to love one's career lies precarious employment conditions in many of the industries studied such as adult webcam models (Nayar, 2017), fashion (Duffy, 2017)**,** and publishing (Lukács, 2020), emphasizing the degree to which these investments are forms of often unpaid digital labor (Abidin, 2018).

These stories also reflect assumptions about what one does as an Influencer or creator, particularly within the fitness industry. Influencers and creators are often thought of in relation to Influencer marketing, an industry driven by brands looking for the right spokesperson to advertise their product to a dedicated fanbase built on trust and authenticity (Reade, 2020a). Popular stories are filled with discovering exactly how much celebrity Influencers are making per post and the demands they make of the companies they work with (Lorenz, 2018). While Meg was able to strategically leverage better brand deals as her popularity and success grew, the majority of her content has shifted to the various companies she now owns. Carla, on the other

hand, mentioned being contacted by a number of brands for partnership opportunities but was hesitant to finalize these deals. Her main concern was the legitimacy of the brands she was attracting, mentioning that many of them seemed fraudulent or were not offering much if anything at all in return for free advertising. In working to establish herself as a personal trainer, Carla was wary to advertise for a company that might negatively impact her credibility in the eyes of her audience and future clients.

Lastly, at a more granular level, Meg and Carla offer a glimpse of how Influencers and creators within the online fitness industry actually use Instagram. As more users turn to social media for health and fitness information, public health concerns have been raised surrounding the speed through which image-based platforms can spread information (Fung et al., 2019). For fitness specifically, these concerns have been primarily oriented toward the impact of these images on body image and mental health (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Jin et al., 2018; Slater et al., 2017). If, as Leaver et al. (2020) argue, Instagram is a platform through which photographs communicate, then one answer to the rise of fitness Influencers and creators can be found through the use of Instagram's image-based affordances to communicate the body (Casaló et al., 2018). This seems especially true since health and fitness culture is often understood visually, creating normative cultural standards for what bodies should look like and what they should be able to do (Featherstone, 2010; Synnott, 2002). With this framing it seems obvious that fitness Influencers and creators would thrive on image-based platforms such as Instagram because the medium of communication favors the preferred medium of the genre.

While these accounts can adequately explain the stories of either Meg or Carla, a number of questions arise when trying to use these accounts to explain both Meg and Carla. To begin, why did Meg and Carla approach social media differently, despite sharing so much in common?

While Meg certainly followed the linear playbook, her continual investment in social media came with career success offline as a graphic designer and communications director. Carla, by contrast, reacted to economic precarity by investing in social media but only as a way to promote her offline personal training business, not as a way to slowly attract attention that could eventually convert to advertising deals. With an expressed interest in working with local personal training clients, it is not immediately clear why Carla would invest in social media at all.

The understanding of Influencers and creators as an outgrowth of the digital marketing industry emphasizes strategies that revolve around brand partnerships and advertising at the expense of other strategic orientations to social media. While this approach explains the beginning of Meg's career, in which she was able to craft her own self-brand while partnering with external brands, it does not explain her more recent turn toward building her own companies. For Carla, this approach codes her low number of followers and lack of commercial partnerships as either a lack of successful strategy or an expression of her relatively recent start on social media. There is little room for understanding a rejection of brand partnerships as a strategy within itself, which in Carla's case was used to improve her ability to focus on her own personal training services.

When it comes to how Influencers and creators use Instagram, there is no doubt that visual displays of the body are central to how Meg and Carla communicate. Their bodies both represent and shape norms within the fitness industry around how bodies should look and what they should be able to do. However, the reproduction of these norms and the construction of a self-brand cannot be divorced from the text-based narratives found in the caption section of the Instagram posts. Considering the aforementioned focus on Instagram as a visual and image-based platform, what explains Meg and Carla's fairly detailed investment in Instagram captions?

Not only does it appear contrary to platform affordances and features, but also the genre of fitness, which is thought to prioritize visual mediums of communication. How, then, do we make sense of these text-based practices? Further, how do we understand both the continuity and difference between Meg and Carla's use of Instagram captions?

This dissertation sets out to provide one set of answers to these questions by arguing that Meg and Carla hold socially stratified positions. Social position refers to a place that shapes thought and action for individuals within a hierarchically organized field (Bourdieu, 2000), which in this case is the commercialized cultural field of fitness (Maguire, 2008). Because this field has a discernable cultural history, we need to be able to account for how the history of fitness as a genre impacts the forms that its production takes on social media platforms such as Instagram. Rather than classifying Influencers as a state-based trait, I rely on Crystal Abidin's definition of Influencers as a "genre of internet celebrity […] who are vocational, sustained, and highly branded social media stars," united by a "practice focused on social media-based, multimedia, fame on the internet" (2018, p. 72-73). However, the choice of which practices to adopt and how they are expressed varies substantially across social positions. These questions are important to answer because they allow us to begin to understand the rise and role of fitness Influencers and creators in our world today through a disentanglement of stratified social and economic conditions that have previously been understood as a unity. To begin this disentanglement, I introduce the economic framing behind this dissertation as well as a brief history of Instagram and fitness culture in the United States and Western Europe.

1.1 The political economy of online fitness

We cannot fully understand the relationship between Meg and Carla's experience without considering the economic conditions of the industries in which they operate. One of the

contentions I make in this dissertation is that previous scholarship on Influencers and creators has not sufficiently accounted for these specific conditions, making the relationship between economic realities and investments in social media difficult to conceptualize. As a general trend, scholarship has connected the emergence of the Influencer industry in the United States with the great recession of 2007-2008 (Hund, 2019), as well as its development in Japan in response to its lost generation of economic stagnation (Lukács, 2020). The common narrative about shifts in the global economy in the wake of these recessions is that economic growth is increasingly driven by the financialization and development of the technology sector and an increasingly precarious labor market (McChesney, 2013; Schiller, 2014).

The technology sector is often bundled under the umbrella term known as the digital economy which the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) defines as, "the entire information and communication technologies (ICT) sector as well as the digital-enabling infrastructure needed for a computer network to exist and operate, the digital transactions that take place using that system ('e-commerce'), and the content that digital economy users create and access ('digital media')" (2019). Although the coherency and consistency of the digital economy as a category has been rightly questioned (Jordan, 2020), it is an adequate term for our purposes in that it bundles a number of industries that have outpaced the rate of global economic growth, at an average rate of 9.9% between 1998-2017 (BEA, p. 1). Influencers and creators roughly fall into the latter two categories of the digital economy, which make up between 15-17% of the total digital economy, playing a role in both e-commerce and the production and distribution of digital media content. Although their accuracy is questionable, industry reports suggest that companies spent nearly two billion dollars on Influencer and creator advertising in 2019 with a ten-fold increase projected by 2022 (Business Insider, 2021; Mediakix, 2018).

Dan Schiller argues that the ability of US consumers to increase spending on ICTs in the wake of the Great Recession was due to a continued increase in consumer debt, as well as the steady decline of prices for consumer-grade ICTs, resulting in Americans increasing their annual use of ICTs by 250 hours between 1996 and 2008 (Schiller, 2014). The capacity to purchase these devices precipitated the generalization of social media use which has increased from 5% to 70% of the US population since 2005 with little variance reported between gender, race, education and income (Pew Research Center, 2018). As a result, social media increasingly impacts how people of all ages learn about health and fitness, with Influencers and creators playing a central role (Tennant et al., 2015; Vaterlaus et al., 2015). These material shifts produce what Couldry and Hepp call deep mediatization, highlighting that everyday communication is increasingly mediated at both the qualitative and quantitative level (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 36-38). Not only do ICTs increase the amount we communicate, but the increasing mediation of communication by these digital technologies also impacts what it means to communicate.

Fitness Influencers and creators are a unique case in this economic narrative partly due to the growing health and wellness sector of the economy both in the United States and globally. At the level of the national economy, job growth of personal trainers and nutritionists outpaces the average (BLS, 2019a, 2019b), while internationally, the health club industry has grown over 33% in the last decade (IHRSA, 2018). Data from industry think-tanks reports that the global wellness economy was worth 4.2 trillion US dollars in 2017, and grew at a rate of 6.4% between 2015-2017, twice the rate of the global economy (GWI, 2018). Although not all fitness Influencers and creators are personal trainers, many are, which traditionally situates them in one of the least lucrative jobs in the industry (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018). It is not necessarily too difficult to become a personal trainer, both in terms of employment opportunities and

necessary credentials, but it is difficult to sustain a successful career. In other words, being a personal trainer sometimes means having a bad job in a good industry in a stagnant global economy.

While it is important to recognize that the rise of fitness content on social media is made possible by the concomitant growth of the digital economy and the health and wellness sector, this does not explain the variation in investment among Influencers and creators. While those in the fitness industry do seem to have some protection against the slow growth of the global economy, previous arguments for investments in social media being a reaction to economic precarity may apply to those whose position within the industry is disadvantaged, such as personal trainers. When comparing the cases of Meg and Carla, the impact of one's position within the industry is clear. Due to Meg's successful career outside of fitness, she was able to sustainably invest in social media for a number of years before transitioning full-time into the fitness industry. This allowed her to enter the field as someone who already owned an online personal training business and clothing line. For Carla, the economic precarity she faced outside of the industry forced her to transition completely into the industry in a much lower position than Meg, as an in-person personal trainer. This variation in social position not only impacts what they think investments in social media will do for them, but also how they use platforms such as Instagram.

1.2 Fitness as a commercialized cultural field

As mentioned above, the fitness industry can be understood as a commercialized cultural field which consists of "a network of sites, texts, producers, and consumers that generates practices of exercise and meanings of the exercised body" (Maguire, 2008). When considering the form that the sites and texts take, it is helpful to see the fitness field as having its own genre

where certain conventions and forms of production are inherited historically and are subject to change over time. Coupled with the economic conditions from the previous section, an answer to why the genre of fitness on social media looks the way it does can only be understood with this history in mind. While many contemporary debates about health and fitness information online center around the visual affordances of platforms such as Instagram, a brief look at the history of fitness celebrities in the United States and Western Europe suggests a story in which text-based narratives are an integral part in the reproduction of the fitness genre and the commercialized cultural field.

The shape of the fitness industry today owes much of its form and function to the physical culture movement in fin-de-siècle Europe, which encompassed both the birth of modern bodybuilding and advertising for health and fitness supplements (Roach, 2008). This movement was not only emblematic of the secularization of the body (Featherstone et al., 1991) but also its commercialization. The early physical culture period is notable for the emergence of health and fitness magazines. Some of the most well-known figures of this era, Bernarr McFadden and Eugen Sandow both produced successful magazines. These magazines not only provided images of what physical culture looked like, but they also had to explain what it meant.

Prior to being sold as a mass cultural movement, extraordinary bodies and feats of strength were often displayed in the circus. Sandow is an illustrative example of this era because he started as a circus performer, using his body as a display of the spectacular, before starting his magazine which used his body as an example of what can be achieved by the masses (Budd, 1997). However, these bodies did not make sense on their own. In order to achieve this cultural transition from circus spectacle to everyday pastime, physical culture needed to be explained, and audiences needed to be convinced that they should be participants, and importantly,

customers. These magazines convinced primarily middle and upper-class consumers to invest in their bodies through a welding of image and text-based narrative (Endres, 2011; Newbury, 1995).

Even with the development and expansion of visual communication mediums over the course of the 20th century, such as television and film, the fitness industry continued to have a text-based component (Moore, 1997). Health and fitness magazines flourished at the same time as the releases of *Pumping Iron* in 1977, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Jane Fonda's home workout VHS in 1982 (Rossen, 2015). This period is what Brad Millington calls the first fitness boom, characterized by "fitness 'tools': apparel from companies like Nike and Reebok; equipment such as treadmills for use in the home; and fitness media […] Accordingly, it served an ideological purpose at the intersection of consumer culture and the emerging neoliberal governmental rationality" (Millington, 2016, p. 1185). This analysis connects the form of the commercialized cultural field of fitness with the economic landscape of the 20th century, emphasizing the degree to which the options for investment in social media by fitness Influencers and creators are shaped by these historical developments.

The inherited history of the fitness genre helps explain what appears possible for fitness Influencers and creators such as Meg and Carla. How they choose to communicate fitness on social media is not only impacted by their social position within the commercialized field, but also the pre-existing generic conventions. While the use of captions on Instagram is not exactly the same as fitness magazine articles of the 20th century, there is continuity in their form and function. This framework is not only helpful for better understanding the sociotechnical nature of affordances on Instagram (Evans et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2018; Nagy & Neff, 2015a), it also offers clues as to how the fitness industry may develop in the future. Whereas Brad Millington

argues we are in the midst of a second fitness boom characterized by wearable technology, fitness trackers, and the Quantified Self movement (Barta & Neff, 2016; Millington, 2016), the way that fitness Influencers and creators use Instagram suggests another explanation for the boom. Rather than the success of tools that quantify, the continued focus on text-based narratives speaks to a more qualitatively oriented boom, where fitness Influencers and creators create communities of meaning around investments in the body. It is the commercialization of these communities through social media that suggests an alternate explanation for the very real growth in the fitness industry today.

1.3 The social position and genre of fitness Influencers and creators

As the above two sections have suggested, an answer for why and how fitness Influencers and creators invest in social media must account for the ways in which economic conditions and the commercialized cultural field of fitness have been inherited historically. In order to provide such an account this dissertation answers three research questions. 1) what initial beliefs do fitness Influencers and creators hold when investing in social media? 2) what strategies do fitness Influencers and creators use on social media? 3) how do Influencers and creators reproduce the genre of fitness on Instagram? This dissertation argues that fitness Influencers and creators hold socially stratified positions both from within and outside the fitness industry shaping why and how they invest in social media. Further, because fitness Influencers and creators are operating within the commercialized cultural field of fitness there is an inherited genre ecology of fitness, adopted for platforms such as Instagram, that shapes the form this content takes.

The use of social position comes from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and relies on the assumption that social hierarchies both exist and are discernable through empirical analysis. Bourdieu uses social position as a way to hierarchically categorize actors within communities

and industries based on the unequal distribution of social characteristics such as, but not limited to, occupation, education, cultural tastes, and geographic location. One's position within these communities or industries, which Bourdieu refers to as a field, shapes the type of actions that appear possible to each individual. "This is the *field of possibilities* objectively offered to a given position […] It follows from this that position and individual trajectory are not equally probable for all starting positions" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 110). How positions are distributed within the commercialized cultural field of fitness is due in part to the inherited economic conditions of the industry. When it comes to understand the initial beliefs and strategies of fitness Influencers and creators, social position helps situate these choices structurally, in the sense that not all options are available to each Influencer or creator, while at the same time accounting for a diversity of choices and investments.

Bourdieu's work appears in both the Influencer and fitness literature when discussing social capital, but his work on social position has received relatively less attention. Centering social capital has led scholars to argue that social and potentially economic capital can be outcomes for those who invest in social media (Duffy, 2017; Zulli, 2017) and fitness (Crossley, 2008; Fuller & Jeffery, 2017). Understanding the dynamics of success and failure around converting social to economic capital for Influencers and creators is a valuable outcome of this work (Limkangvanmongkol & Abidin, 2019; Marwick, 2019). However, this focus on social capital has meant that less attention has been paid to why Influencers and creators hold different beliefs about strategic routes to attain social capital. Without an analysis of social position, it becomes difficult to know where this social capital might come from and why certain capital conversion strategies are available to some and foreclosed to others. In the case of Meg and Carla, for example, it is clear that Meg has more social capital than Carla as well as having an

easier time converting that social capital into economic capital. However, without an account of social position the gap in capital between Meg and Carla is left unexplored.

My approach to genre comes from the tradition of rhetorical genre studies which understands genre as "rhetorical insofar as it categorizes rhetorical action, reflecting and shaping the shared rhetorical experiences of the relevant communities" (Miller et al., 2018, p. 270). This places genre as a form of social action (Miller, 1984) which informs how Influencers and creators produce content within the commercialized cultural field of fitness. Beyond offering a way to understand the form of fitness content on Instagram, genre is also tied to exigence, or the social opportunities that call fitness Influencers and creators to act rhetorically. It is through this connection between form, exigence, and action that a rhetorical approach to genre integrates particularly well with a historical and economic account of the commercialized cultural field of fitness as well as social position (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). For instance, the economic history presented above helps explain the technological developments that led to the existence and growth of platforms such as Instagram. Along with the already existing commercialized cultural field of fitness, we can identify a very generalized exigence, which takes the form of using these available technologies to document and communicate fitness. However, an account of social position allows us to go one step further by recognizing that not all exigencies are available to all fitness Influencers and creators and that what they see as an opportunity for social action will vary.

Within rhetorical genre studies there is continued interest in the internet and other ICTs because the adoption of previously non-digital formats onto digital platforms questions the continuity of genre as a structuring force. It is often the affordances of these ICTs, such as spreadability, interactivity, and multimodality that are said to transform or destabilize pre-digital

genres (Nish, 2016; Rea & Riedlinger, 2016). This approach speaks to the sociotechnical nature of affordances by highlighting how genre not only structures social action but provides the possibility to expand and extend social action as well. Scholars such as Leaver et al. (2020) have identified various visual genres of commercialized Instagram content by Influencers, such as shout outs, promos and lifestyle showcases (p. 115). While this suggests that there are certain genres forming on Instagram among Influencers, it is not clear why an Influencer would choose one visual genre over another, nor how this might change when considering the specific case of fitness Influencers and creators.

1.4 METHODS

To answer research questions 1 & 2, this dissertation relies on forty-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with fitness Influencers and creators. Interviews were used to answer these questions because I was interested in learning about past and present experiences, as well as participants' subjective understanding of their work (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). While conducting surveys with open-ended question sections or conducting participant observation and ethnographic, open-ended interviews could have been used to answer similar research questions, neither of these approaches were entirely appropriate for my goals. One of the main strengths of conducting a survey is its consistency across all participants, which lends itself well to large sample sizes for the purposes of making generalizable claims. My aims were not to rely on statistical probability as a justification for what made my sample representative. What surveys gain in breadth, they lack in depth, and the conformity of all questions across each participant would not have allowed sufficient flexibility in participant response to best understand the composition of beliefs and strategy.

For example, my theoretical approach assumed that participants would take different routes to becoming fitness Influencers or creators and in order to best understand what this meant contextually, I needed to ask different follow-up questions for different cases. Further, Bourdieu writes that people are drawn to social positions that appear natural to them, feeling "'made' for jobs that are 'made' for them" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 110). Some participants initially had difficulty expressing how and why they invested in social media because it seemed obvious and natural to them. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to help uncover the process and meaning behind these aspects of participants' lives that may have otherwise gone unrecorded through a different method of investigation.

I was also interested in conducting interviews as an expression of agency for fitness Influencers and creators that may have few occasions to communicate anonymously otherwise. Part of being an internet celebrity in a brand culture that values authenticity means there are few opportunities to go off brand. For those that feel a tension between who they are online versus offline, an anonymous interview may provide them the opportunity to tell a story they have not yet had the chance to tell. While I was confident that Influencers had the "know-how" knowledge about the commercialized cultural field they had entered and helped to co-create, I was hoping my work could provide clarity around "know-that" knowledge for my participants. The term Influencer and creator is used throughout this dissertation to reflect that fact that although all of my participants engaged in the practices that align with academic definitions of Influencers (Abidin, 2018; Alice E. Marwick, 2019), not all of them were comfortable self-identifying as Influencers. While my participants self-identified in a variety of ways, the term content creator was shared among many, hence the use of Influencer and creator.

To answer research question 3, I use Heyd's dual model of genre ecology (2009). This model is appropriate for studying fitness Influencers and creators on Instagram because it addresses core questions at the intersections of rhetorical genre studies and computer-mediated communication (CMC) research. "A genre ecology is proposed that unites both formal and functional, both 'old' and 'new' characteristics of digital genres. In a larger sense, this dual model therefore serves as a powerful tool to explain the 'hybridity' often felt to be at the core of many CMC phenomena" (Heyd, 2009, p. 241). This model includes three main components described in detail in chapter four: generic antecedents, supergenre, and subgenre.

This ecological orientation is supported by other social media scholars regarding the practices of Influencers (Abidin, 2017; Leaver et al., 2020), and the effect of social media exposure on audience self-perception of body image (Burnette et al., 2017). The genre ecology of Instagram fitness speaks to questions of categorization at both the horizontal and vertical level which helps explain how the commercialized cultural field of fitness has blended with digitally native genres of Instagram Influencers. The vertical component of this genre ecology speaks to the inherited history of fitness, which frames the relationship between image and text for Instagram fitness. Horizontally, this approach includes an analysis of how affordances of Instagram inform the expression of Instagram fitness as a mode of social action.

I see my mixed-methods approach as doing the work of triangulation for completeness, where interviews and rhetorical analysis help add depth and richness to my research project (Arksey, 1999). This is opposed to triangulation for confirmation which seeks to use mixed-methods as a form of hypothesis confirmation (Denzin, 2009). It is important to stress that I do not think my two methodological choices complete the gamut of options for studying fitness Influencers but being able to bring the two into conversation with each other offers unique and

valuable insights. For example, mapping the genre ecology of Instagram fitness with the help of interview data allows for a rich understand of who reproduces which aspects of Instagram fitness. Being able to observe and analyze fitness Influencers and creators from multiple vantage points not only helps understand experiences that would not be reached by only using one method, but it also offers a unique account of the construction of social action.

1.5 Overview of chapters

This dissertation is organized in the following order: In chapter 2 I focus on research question 1 which looks at the relationship between social position and the initial beliefs that fitness Influencers and creators hold when investing in social media. This chapter finds a variety of initial beliefs about investments in social media in part shaped by social position. These governing beliefs are divided into four categories of fitness Influencers and creators: Science communicators, Sellers, Shifters, and Sharers. Chapter 3 addresses research question 2 regarding the strategies that fitness Influencers and creators use on social media and how they are shaped by position and occupational trajectory, demonstrating that not all fitness Influencers and creators adopt the same set of strategies. Additionally, while there was some overlap, initial beliefs about investing in social media did not always aligned with strategy. Three different groups are identified that align strategies with occupational trajectory: Career Crafters, Passion Pursuers, and Risk Reducers. Chapter 4 takes up research question 3 which maps a genre ecology of Instagram fitness by looking at the captions of Instagram posts made by fitness Influencers and creators. This chapter uses the genre ecology of Instagram fitness to help explain why text-based narratives in the caption section of Instagram posts are so valuable fitness Influencers and creators despite the largely image-based features and affordances of the

platform. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation through a summary of my findings, suggestions for future research, and a discussion of this dissertation's implications.

Chapter 2. BELIEF & POSITION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

With the growth of Influencer marketing and the digital economy, scholars have sought to better understand how the performance and occupation of celebrity on social media has impacted cultural production, industry, and digital labor. These practices take multiple forms such as microcelebrity (Senft, 2008) internet celebrity, Influencers (Abidin, 2018), and creators (Cunningham & Craig, 2019) suggesting that social media contributes to diverse forms of fame both on and offline. While it is unclear if these trends have made attaining celebrity easier, they have certainly led to an increase in those that perform celebrity on social media. Despite these shifts, most scholarship on Influencers and creators point to precarious working conditions, unreturned investments, and ultimate failure for those who try their hand at social media celebrity (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Duffy, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017). Much like the economy today, Influencers and creators are competing in a highly unequal playing field. For example, a recent study of YouTube view distribution noted that among channels with over 250,000 subscribers, the top 10% of the most viewed videos accumulated almost 80% of total views (Kessel et al., 2019).

If the chances of making a sustainable living online are low, why does there seem to be no shortage of people seeking fame and fortune on social media? One component to this question that has received relatively little scholarly attention is the role of Influencer and creator beliefs about social media. Exploring these beliefs about what social media is for sheds light on what Influencers and creators think investments in social media will afford them. In order to better understand beliefs and how they translate to personal investments on social media, this chapter relies on my interview data to argue that beliefs about investing in social media are likely diverse

and tied to one's social position understood as an unevenly distributed combination of factors such as occupation, gender, education, family and social support.

Four main beliefs emerged from my interview data: 1) Instagram is an effective platform for communicating fitness content (Science communicators) 2) Instagram will improve my existing career (Sellers) 3) Instagram is necessary for transitioning careers into fitness (shifters) 4) Instagram is the ideal platform for documenting fitness (Sharers). More than simply being influenced by the commercialized cultural field of fitness itself, these beliefs were influenced by one's position within the field. For example, personal trainers make up a large portion of employment within the health and wellness industry, as well as in my sample, which influenced beliefs about investing in social media. Current and previous personal trainers were the most likely to see these investments as stabilizing their careers, realizing that in-person personal training in a gym was an unsustainable career in the long term. Careers in personal training are generally seen as unsustainable because they often involve traveling to many different work locations, long working days, seasonally variable employment, and low average wages. However, for athletes or those with advanced degrees, investments in social media were made for different reasons such as documenting athletic pursuits and communicating fitness.

Two main suggestions can be drawn from these conclusions. The first is that investments in social media are rooted in what people believe these investments will do for them. Rather than a supporting argument for unabated idealism, this approach understands belief as being shaped by one's social position within a field which helps contextualize debates about the types of people drawn to social media. Rather than arguing either for a demotic turn (Turner, 2010) or a purely aspirational future for precarious job seekers (Fuchs, 2016), this chapter argues that the effects of platforms and beliefs about social media are distributed unevenly and must be studied

contextually. Second, despite the necessity of context, the use of theoretical concepts such as social position offers one answer for how to generalize the process through which actors engage with platforms and celebrity on social media.

2.2 Literature Review

Defined as a vocational, sustained, and highly branded form of internet celebrity (Abidin, 2018), the term Influencer already hints at a type of professionalization or hierarchy among those with social media fame. The term internet celebrity is itself an outgrowth of Teresa Senft's concept of microcelebrity (2008) which sought to describe how a wide array of internet users could attain a relatively small yet loyal following. These microcelebrities were examples of Graeme Turner's demotic turn, where performance of the ordinary was increasingly valued (Turner, 2006) and a convergence culture where "democratic potentials held by grassroots media production and circulation coexist with increasing concentrated mass media" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 270). This trend was part of a broader divergence from the traditional mass media stars endemic to 20th century consumer culture (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). This position is also echoed in the business and management literature by Audrezet and colleagues (2018) who suggest that social media Influencers are regular users that over time develop "extended competencies in creating sophisticated content" which "may rapidly attract a mass audience and attain fame through accumulation of cultural capital" (p. 1).

However, as microcelebrity fame continues to develop horizontally, this spread is constrained by its subsequent vertical development. The term internet celebrity became a way to reconcile the fact that many microcelebrities were turning into macrocelebrities, at times rivaling their traditional Hollywood counterparts (Abidin, 2018; Hearn, 2017). This was due in part to the geographic and temporal barriers to entry in the social media entertainment industry via capital

investment and Influencer professionalization (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). However, in a survey of over 500 followers of microcelebrities on Instagram, 83% said they aspired to be popular online, many of whom said they hoped it would increase feelings of self-worth (Mavroudis, 2019). With these industry-level shifts in mind, it is important to ask how or if they are felt by the Influencers and creators themselves, particularly in relation to their beliefs about the prospects of their own internet celebrity. What beliefs sustain investment in social media for Influencers and creators?

Case studies of video game streamers, adult webcam models, fashion bloggers and YouTube creators offer valuable insight into the beliefs of those seeking to professionalize their presence online despite increasing barriers to entry. From their interviews with professional video game streamers on the platform Twitch, Johnson & Woodcock (2017) found that "the *immediacy* and (perceived) *intimacy* between the producer and consumer […] are all ways for both streamers and viewers to enhance their visibility to the other, and *Twitch* is thereby extremely appealing for those already creating game content and seeking more intimate interaction with their viewers" (p. 7). In this case, Twitch was seen as a fairly easy addition to the activities that gamers were already engaging in, fueled by a belief that it would make them more popular in their current social field. Many were aware that streaming required a large time investment, but it was often worth the chance to professionalize as a streamer. Nayar (2017) reports similar beliefs among adult webcam models who hoped that part of their streaming work could be fairly passive, allowing them to pursue other hobbies and activities. Both of these cases suggest that previous investments in social fields and hobbies may obscure the real difficulty of making a sustainable career as an Influencer or creator.

Brooke Erin Duffy, in her work on fashion bloggers, contests the popular notion that anyone can make it in the Influencer industry, calling it an "unshakable myth" purported by media outlets that, "routinely profile style influencers who lie at the margins of elite fashion's mainstream" (Duffy, 2017, p. 3-4). Duffy identified three different types of beliefs for engaging in content creation online, which included the belief that social media would lead to greater "creative freedom and personal expression" (p. 52), as well as help in "managing uncertainty in the post-recession economy, and 'breaking in' to the creative industries" (Duffy, 2017, p. 61). The suggestion that Influencers and creators believe investments in social media will help them in times of economic precarity has also been made by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012, p. 56), and Khamis et al., (2017), however this account does not explain why those that have already secured fame and fortune, such as the 'instafamous' studied by Marwick (2015) would invest in social media.

Further evidence of beliefs impacting how YouTube creators approach their work online, comes from Wu and colleagues (2019) who investigated different personifications of the YouTube algorithm. YouTube creators personified the algorithm as an Agent, Gatekeeper, or Drug Dealer, with each personification corresponding to a set of beliefs about what the YouTube algorithm is and how to engage with it. The authors found that YouTube creators come to these different conclusions about the algorithm based, "on their personal experiences of what they believe makes their content gain traction, as well as through discussing their understandings with fellow YouTubers" (2019, p. 18). While this work emphasizes the connection between past experience and belief, it focuses on their experiences as YouTubers, rather than the experiences that led them to an investment in YouTube in the first place.

Lastly, there are a variety of beliefs around how to go viral online and what that can do for one's shot at sustaining fame online. Although Abidin (2018) has clearly demonstrated the cultural, racial, and class barriers to turning virality online into a sustainable career, going viral online is still a possible route to being an Influencer or creator. Brown and Phifer (2019) use the case study of Tumblr microcelebrity, Belle, who was encouraged by one of her posts going viral, believing that it was a sign that her content resonated with others. This led her to find a specific audience on Tumblr for both creating and consuming content which helped her with her self-esteem. Here we see a belief about more than just individual career prospects but also the ability to sustain an online community.

While all of these examples point to important aspects of how beliefs about online celebrity are shaped, it is not immediately clear how to make sense of these different, and sometimes conflicting beliefs. Investing in social media is a choice that all my participants have made, but they have not all done so for the same reasons. I suggest that Bourdieu's concept of social position offers one set of answers to these questions. By synthesizing the relationship between individual level attributes and the social field in which they operate, social position helps make sense of why fitness Influencers and creators continue to invest in social media despite the seemingly slim chances of success.

2.3 Operationalizing & Investigating Social Position

When divorced from a particular social field, position can only be understood in a general, theoretical sense. Particular social positions, both what they look like and who occupies them, are field-specific which means that the social variables making up one's position may also look different across fields. For example, one's past and present relationship to economic production as well as how they socially reproduce themselves are meaningful for the

composition of all social positions across all social fields, but how exactly they impact one's trajectory and position are field-specific. Since there is little extant literature about fitness Influencers and creators, the variables I chose to operationalize social position come from literature about Influencers and creators from other industries. These variables included type of employment, education, and family or social support at time of social media investment, as well as gender. This is not to suggest that these are the only meaningful factors, but simply that they strongly shaped the beliefs of participants in my sample.

Gender has been central to extant scholarship on social media Influencers as the majority of the work from foundational scholars such as Theresa Senft, Brooke Erin Duffy, and Crystal Abidin, have all relied on research primarily conducted with women participants. Although my sample was almost evenly divided between men and women, my participants often thought of Influencers as women, despite the distinction between Influencer and creator largely originating from cross-platform branding (Lorenz, 2019). Although it impacted the discussion of who Influencers typically are, gender accounted for some, but not all, of the divergent sustaining beliefs about investing in social media. Educational access and social support have been identified as impacting who tries to professionalize in the video game streaming world, suggesting that a knowledge of technical skills and friends in the industry make the profession seem more attainable (Johnson & Woodcock, 2017). Scolere and colleagues (2018) found that occupation and career trajectory impact the choice of platform for content creators, suggesting that occupation can impact beliefs about what platforms are for and how one should use them. Lastly, Marwick (2015) demonstrates that for those with family support and inherited wealth, content creation on Instagram is motivated by a desire to display their privileged and aspirational lifestyles.

To understand fitness Influencer and creator beliefs about social media, I asked a series of questions that sought to tie belief to social position. The first question I asked was how they described the work they do online and if they would consider themselves an Influencer. Despite all of my participants performing a form of internet celebrity that fit with Abidin's definition of an Influencer (2018), only a select few actually self-identified as fitness Influencers seemingly due to the gendered connotations of narcissism and assumed lack of knowledge about fitness. However, how each participant explained their rejection of the title provided valuable insight regarding what they thought social media was for. This question was also followed by having participants explain how, when and why they started using social media for fitness purposes. Their answer to this question was what I used to determine when their investment in social media began.

Information that helped shape social position within the field was gathered by asking about, degree and type of employment when they started investing in social media, education, and family or social support. Degree of employment was categorized as either full-time, part-time, or no employment in the health and fitness industry. Due to the high prevalence of personal trainers in my sample, type of employment was operationalized as either personal trainer, non-personal trainer in the health and fitness industry, or non-health and fitness industry employment at the time of investing in social media. Non-personal trainer employment in the health and fitness industry included nutritionists, healthcare workers, researchers, and business owners.

Education was operationalized based on degree type in the field of health and fitness as either a graduate degree, undergraduate degree, or high school/degree in another field. This did not include personal training or other certifications. Lastly, family and social support meant that either a participant had a family member that owned their own business, or they had someone in

their social network that mentored them or helped with their investment in social media. Additionally, a series of demographic questions were asked at the end of my interviews that included questions about income, age, race, gender, and where participants currently live.

When I began analysis for this chapter I looked to identify discrete participant beliefs, engaging in what Robert Weiss calls an issue-focused analysis, where individual accounts are analyzed with the goal of speaking to generalized trends in the sample (1994). This initial analysis offered a clear description of the various beliefs about social media of fitness Influencers and creators, but it did not explain why and how these beliefs were adopted. I was then able to take the information about social position and use it to inform the formation and expression of different beliefs about social media.

This led to a case-focused and generalized report which began by sorting and coding limit cases in my sample that maximized the range parameter of social position. I then began the process of local integration (p. 158) by connecting social position to beliefs in these limit cases. Afterward, I moved to inclusive integration (p. 160) by analyzing more moderate cases and creating typologies that generalized the experiences of all my participants. This process led me to organize my participants into four different groups governed by distinct beliefs about social media. Science communicators believed that social media was an effective place to communicate helpful and scientific information regarding health and fitness. Sellers saw social media as a way to advance and stabilize their careers. Shifters believed that investing in social media was necessary for changing careers into the health and fitness field. Lastly, Sharers saw social media as a place to document their fitness journeys or athletic pursuits. In some of the more moderate cases, participants held multiple and occasionally overlapping beliefs about their investment in

social media. In these cases, participants were grouped by their dominant belief determined by weighing the various expressed beliefs with how they were acted upon.

2.4 FINDINGS

Table 2.1 shows the distribution of the characteristics that make up social position in this chapter. Science communicators came from within the health and fitness industry but were not personal trainers, often holding positions such as researchers, teachers or consultants. Most of them had graduate degrees from within the disciplines of health and fitness. This proximity to the fitness industry is also expressed in their high likelihood of having help starting their social media page. Personal trainers made up the majority of Sellers and were also heavily male. While this may make it seem as if men were more industrious or career-oriented than women when it came to their social media investments, it more accurately highlights a gendered divide around where these investments came from. If both Sellers and Shifters are combined, the two groups with explicitly career-oriented intentions at the time of investment, there are 10 men and 9 women in both categories. This reflects a roughly equal distribution of intention but a division in social position, since over half of those women began making those investments from outside the health and fitness industry. Although an almost equal number of Sellers came from families with and without a parent that was a small business owner, out of the 12 total participants that had business owning parents, over half (7) saw social media as a way to advance (6), or start (1), their career within the fitness industry.

Table 2.1. Distribution of social position characteristics across beliefs

Social Position Characteristic	***Belief at Time of Investment***			
Occupation	**Science communicator**	**Seller**	**Shifter**	**Sharer**
Personal trainer	0	9	0	3
Non-personal trainer health and fitness industry	6	3	0	3
Non-health and fitness industry	0	2	5	10
Gender				
Men	3	10	0	5
Women	3	4	5	11
Education in health or fitness				
Graduate degree	5	2	0	2
Undergraduate degree	1	6	0	3
High school or college degree in another field	0	6	5	11
Parents own a business*				
Yes	2	6	1	3
No	4	7	4	13
Help starting social media page				
Yes	4	7	3	4
No	2	7	2	12

*One participant declined to provide information about their family

Not surprisingly, everyone who was looking to use social media to shift into the fitness industry came from an occupation and educational background outside of the industry. Interestingly, all Shifters were women suggesting a gendered understanding of what the production of fitness content on social media is for. This pattern also appeared for Sharers who were two-thirds women and started largely outside of the health and fitness industry in terms of occupation and education. Sharers started the furthest outside of the industry and with the least support with three-fourths of them not having help starting their social media page. Sharers were also the least likely group to have parents that owned their own business. Overall, the sample was fairly evenly divided by those with employment inside (24) and outside (17) of the health and fitness industry, gender (18 men, 23 women), degrees inside (19) and outside (22) of the

industry, and by those that had (19) and did not have (22) help starting their social media page. The following sections look to explain what it means to be part of each different belief group as well as how these various characteristics of social position work together to shape those beliefs.

2.4.1 *Science communicators*

Science communicators are fitness Influencers and creators who believed that social media was a helpful medium for communicating scientific information about health and fitness. In many cases, as Science communicators started to use Instagram, they recognized a lack of reliable information about fitness on social media. Nancy, a former professor, said, “I don’t know that a lot of people were doing gut microbiome stuff before I was doing it, in that same way […] it’s really frustrating to see all this misinformation and I want to do something about it” (NANCY, 2/25/20). It was often this recognition of a gap between popular fitness content on Instagram and their own knowledge that motivated Science communicators to start posting and investing in social media. This effect was compounded by the fact that Nancy holds a PhD, making the observed knowledge gap often quite large. While Nancy saw a gap between what she learned in the academy and what she saw on Instagram, others also wanted to use the platform to push back against certain dogmas from their own academic fields. Adam, a physical therapist who started to invest in social media while in graduate school, said, “I was frustrated in my educational experience and the information that was available to the general public and wanted to be able to offer as a resource more accurate information to people” (ADAM, 11/5/19).

Having an educational background primarily made up of graduate degrees within the fields of health and fitness allowed Science communicators to see the need for better information on Instagram, but this alone does not explain why they chose to invest in trying to address the problem. Science communicators often had particular experiences or circumstances that fostered

their belief in social media investments. In part due to her early investment (around 2015) into the fitness field on Instagram, Sarah, a current PhD student, had particularly positive feedback from her audience. “I made my page separate from my personal Instagram page because I was getting my master's in exercise physiology and more and more people were asking fitness and health related questions. I wanted to make another space there. I tried to start it with the intention of just sharing things I was learning in my masters” (SARAH, 5/3/20). The audience engagement Sarah received early on helped solidify her belief that investing in social media was an effective way to communicate fitness. This belief was further solidified when she started her online coaching business which led to increased attention to her page. Beyond audience engagement, however, was the recognition that being in a master’s program gave her access to information about exercise physiology that was unattainable to others. Both the audience engagement, and the belief that social media was an effective medium for communicating science came from her position as a graduate student.

Adam’s belief in Instagram as an effective platform came from colleagues in graduate school who encouraged him to start a page. “Some were currently influencers or science communicators that had large followings in the blog format. Those were people that were well regarded in specifically the fitness community and then in the physical therapy world I had people that did not have a following so I said that I should try to do that more for physical therapy.” By seeing the ability to succeed as a Science Communicator of general fitness on social media, Adam figured he would be able to replicate a similar outcome in the field of physical therapy. Coupled with the belief that using Instagram as a successful fitness communication platform was a practical possibility, Adam’s educational background also influenced him to believe in the theoretical impact of fitness messaging. “We have a huge body of literature that

indicates that the words we say as people of influence, have a high impact on people's lives and if that information is not accurate or not representative of what is actually known, it can have a very negative impact." (ADAM, 11/5/19). His access to education contributed both to his self-identification as a person of influence and his desire to correct misinformation on social media.

Along with access to education, and positive experiences on Instagram, Science communicator beliefs were also shaped by their capacity to invest in social media to begin with. Monica, a full-time nurse and bodybuilder, saw other fitness accounts she followed producing educational fitness content, which inspired her to follow suit. As she retained her full-time work while producing this educational fitness content, she was able to sustain a moderate engagement and following without much risk. Harry, a dentist and fitness podcaster, had a similar story. Employment in the health field served the double role of shaping their beliefs about the need for health and fitness education while also sustaining their practices online through stable employment.

2.4.2 *Sellers*

Although all of my participants ended up adopting various degrees of the Seller belief structure, less than half of them started this way. Sellers saw Instagram as a way to either advance or stabilize their career, with specific goals being tied closely to occupation. For those looking for employment in the fitness industry, personal training was a common entry-level occupation even when it was not seen as a long-term career. Explaining his investment in social media, Ian, a personal trainer, said: "I saw from day one being a personal trainer, literally some days are 12 hours long and there's times where you're just sitting there doing nothing, waiting for your next client. And it was just so frustrating. And so after doing that for such a long time, I

knew it was gonna have to evolve to something more than that. Otherwise, I would've burned myself out" (IAN, 3/11/20).

Unlike Influencers and creators in other industries who were looking to find work by investing online, Ian, along with most other personal trainers, were finding ways to manage their work and make it more sustainable. There was also the belief that investing in social media would increase the income ceiling that many personal trainers face.

> It feels draining because you're still having to coach X amount of classes and then if you want to make any more money, like you still kind of hit a ceiling, right? I got to trade my time for dollars and at some point I don't want to keep doing that. But the fact that I'm also able to start an online business […] that feels secure. I want to continue to build on that so that I don't have to continue to just do session to session and class to class. (QUINN, 4/8/20)

Sellers coming from personal training believed in the possibility of finding career success and stability online but in most cases, this came from a fairly pragmatic calculation that the investments would still be valuable even if they did not lead to immediate success. The cultural form of self-branding was already familiar to them as personal trainers, and offering online training rarely required monetary investments. Along with their already existing access to training facilities and work experience, the social position of personal trainers made it so they did not necessarily need to believe that investment would lead to career success, they simply needed to believe it was worth a shot.

For Sellers that came from outside the profession of personal training, more conviction was required. Norm, a college student with a passion for fitness displayed an extreme example of this conviction. "I guess you could group me into that category [fitness Influencer] right now. But this has all been planned by me over pretty much the last seven years of my life where I knew I wanted to change the world. And this is essentially the first step in a long staircase of

goals I have to accomplish. I'm getting into modeling, I'm getting into acting" (NORM, 4/6/20). Coupled with the belief that investments in Instagram will help him grow in the fitness industry there is also the hope that it will propel him into other industries as well. As a young college student without an established career in the fitness industry, Norm is looking to invest in social media as a way to grow his career rather than stabilize it.

Having friends in the fitness industry and parents who owned a business were two social factors that influenced the beliefs of Sellers. In some cases, such as Barry's, social connections were the main reason they began investing on Instagram. "I had a client and when Instagram came out, she was like, I'm using Instagram and I'm pretty famous on that, we need to get you an Instagram. And I was like, I don't want to do that. She's like, we gotta get you an Instagram and we're just gonna post our workouts and stuff. And then I started to slowly grow and over time it just kept growing" (BARRY, 11/22/19). With the implication that internet celebrity could help grow his business as a personal trainer, Barry began by posting workouts and client transformations as a way to promote his services. Barry's access to the support and expertise of an experienced and successful Instagram user came from employment as a personal trainer. It was not only his client's encouragement, but also the relative ease of content production, that eventually convinced Barry to invest.

In other instances, it was being exposed to the practices of entrepreneurship at a young age. For Dylan, a gym owner and online personal trainer, entrepreneurship was always part of his career goals. Before investing in fitness Dylan's career path involved graduating from college and eventually taking over his father's construction business but he eventually realized, "if I'm going to do something for 12 hours a day, I have to love it and I don't love construction. I realized that I can't be a typical trainer. I have to post on social media. I have to have an online

presence." The influence of Dylan's father extended beyond just a potential career trajectory and into a resource for mentorship as well. "I have a few really incredible mentors that were doing very similar things, and I would seek those people out. Um, I had one guy who has owned and consulted gyms for 35 years. He's still my mentor to this day. I was 18 years old. My dad was friends with him, so I'd fly out and do an internship there" (DYLAN, 12/5/19). The differences in social position, and how they shape beliefs about social media, are clear when comparing Dylan and Ian. Although both were Sellers, way they wanted social media to impact their careers was different. Dylan's family and social background in entrepreneurship made working 12 hours a day seem normal, with his goal for social media being a way to make those 12 hours days as profitable as possible. For Ian, who did not have a similar exposure to entrepreneurship, his goal was to use social media in order to avoid working 12-hour days.

2.4.3 *Shifters*

Shifters often had two distinct, but overlapping, belief systems. The first is their beliefs about the career transition into fitness, which, following Duffy's work was largely the hope that they could get paid to do what they love. That every Shifter identified as a woman further supports Duffy's conclusions about the feminized nature of these aspirational attitudes toward work. For the purposes of this chapter however, the goal is to understand why they felt investments in social media would get them to where they wanted to go. While Shifters had a similarly entrepreneurial approach to investments in social media as Sellers, their understanding of social media within the fitness industry was different. Shifters believed in social media because it was often the most accessible aspect of the fitness industry to engage in while transitioning careers. It was a common practice for those employed outside of the fitness industry to build up their social media presence, as a sort of proof of concept, before leaving their jobs.

Compared to Sellers, this occasionally led to an overestimation of what social media was going to do for their careers, because their social position within the online fitness industry was often much less central than Sellers. The centrality of social position, often as personal trainers, made it easier for Sellers to estimate how much time and money to put towards social media than Shifters who had a starting position outside the online fitness field.

Greta, a personal trainer and online coach who was previously in the non-profit sector, explains the typical circumstances of a Shifter. She began investing more heavily on Instagram when she became more and more dissatisfied with her job, believing this would facilitate her career transition.

> I was no longer passionate about what my nine to five job was. Once I started having this feeling, that was when I started looking into, well, how can I become a content creator full time? Maybe I can give the fitness thing a shot and see if that can be my future career […] I got my certification in June 2018 so that was when everything was kind of official and I already had my social media and stuff. So it was easy for me to start branding even more and pushing it out to my following. Like, hey, I'm doing coaching, it's local, I'm doing personal training. And then it just grew from there. (GRETA, 12/18/19)

It was not the desire to leave her job that made her create her Instagram account, as she had been posting fitness content as a hobby for a number of years, but she believed a more organized investment in the page would help solidify her transition into the fitness field. The flexibility of producing fitness content online also allowed Greta to preview her potential success in the field before leaving her previous job.

In some cases, Shifter's beliefs about social media were impacted by early exposures to fitness. Carla, formerly in sales for a fashion company, got into fitness through a community in Los Angeles that combined in-person classes with an online community on Instagram. "I became

a part of this community and it was kind of an accountability account." When Carla's position at the fashion company was cut, she decided to pursue personal training as a full-time career, which resulted in a change to her Instagram account. "Now it's developed into more of my own page and, not necessarily selling myself, but also like taking my career into my account." (CARLA, 11/26/19). This meant distancing herself from her previous fitness community and promoting her own personal training services.

Interestingly, despite changing her online presentation and investing in self-branding, Carla was not primarily looking to expand her business online. Her current and future goals involved growing her in-person client list and building relationships with local gyms. Eventually she wanted to start her own business or perhaps have her own space to train clients, but none of these future goals involved a significant investment in online training. Based on her position outside the fitness field and the type of exposure to fitness she had early on, it felt natural to believe that it was worth investing in social media regardless of one's specific career goals in the fitness industry. Carla's belief was also sustained by her family, primarily her husband, who was able to support her financially as she transitioned careers. Unlike Barry or Dylan, Carla did not know others who were successful in the online fitness industry, or who had experience running their own business. This made it hard for Carla to judge the difficulty of transitioning into the fitness industry. "It has been challenging. I didn't know exactly what to expect, but it's definitely more difficult than I was picturing" (CARLA, 11/26/19).

For those that did have family and social support, it was more than just financial and often played a meaningful role sustaining Shifters' belief in themselves. Helene, a former financial analyst, was first exposed to the online fitness field as the client of an online nutrition coach. Helene's coach ended up moving near her and they became friends. When asked why she

wanted to leave the finance field, Helene said, “I was excelling at it, but I didn't have the passion for it. I also realize how much I am not someone that can work nine to five Monday through Friday at all. It's just not the lifestyle for me at all.” Helene assumed that a career in the online fitness field would change this. As Helene’s interest waxed in fitness and waned in finance, her old nutrition coach, and now friend, offered her advice on how to successfully transition her career to online coaching. This decision was also buttressed by her parents, both business owners, who she described as having an “entrepreneurial spirit.” It was in this context that Helene called her transition into the online fitness field a “strategic leap of faith” (HELENE, 12/20/19).

Similar to Carla, there was an overestimation of the degree and type of online investments made by most fitness Influencers and creators. In order to make her transition to the online fitness industry as successful as possible, Helene took the advice of her nutrition coach and hired an online business coach that specialized in online fitness. When asked how common she thought this was in the industry she replied, “every single person that I know online that is in the coaching space, they don't show it, but I know the programs that they're in and that everyone has basically a business coach for sure” (HELENE, 12/20/19). While this sample alone cannot account for the entire industry, only 6 out of 41 participants mentioned hiring a business coach when either asked directly or asked if they had anyone help them get started on social media. Due to Helene’s position outside the industry, her understanding of the field was excessively shaped by her avenues into the industry, namely, social media and the influence of her friend and former nutrition coach. This belief about what others were doing in the industry shaped her approach to investing in social media in ways that were distinct from others who had more experience in the industry.

2.4.4 *Sharers*

While Sharers shared many qualities with other Influencers and creators, their distinct beliefs about investing in social media were shaped by social positions that were often the least advantageous in the fitness field. The belief that social media platforms such as Instagram were places to post fitness content and connect with others was shared with Science communicators, but due to Sharers often not having degrees in the health or fitness field, this shared belief did not take on the same aspect of science communication that it did for Science communicators. Sharers occasionally followed similar career trajectories as Shifters, using their social media presence to eventually transition into the online fitness field, however, when this occurred for Sharers it was often unexpected. The Sharers that did eventually invest saw themselves as accidental entrepreneurs (Neff, 2012), suggesting that their initial beliefs were distinct from Shifters. Unlike Shifters who were more likely to have a family member own a business or have a friend help them start their page, Sharers were relatively on their own, often starting a page to post about their fitness journeys or to document their athletic careers, with the belief that this was a commonsense way to become a part of a fitness community or have fitness be a part of their lifestyle.

Lisa's start in the online fitness field offers an exceptional example of the accidental entrepreneur, where initial beliefs were simply to document her recreational fitness journey. After leaving friends and family in Texas to move to Southern California, Lisa began working in the service industry and started her fitness journey.

> I wasn't anticipating being an influencer it kind of just happened that way. I started off my fitness page posting my journey and all that progress […] I got into bodybuilding because a lot of people were watching me in the gym and they said you should really look into

> bodybuilding, you would do really well. So, I did my research and then I fell in love with the whole sport. (LISA, 1/29/20)

Eventually, a fitness apparel company contacted her through Instagram which kickstarted her career in fitness modeling and online coaching. “Everything was all foreign and new to me, so I had never done anything in the industry like that before. So, um, I just kind of took a leap of faith” (LISA, 1/29/20). Unlike Helene, this leap of faith was not self-described as strategic, in part because her beliefs about social media had not been shaped by an entrepreneurial family environment or a close friend in the industry.

Although it was common for Sharers to want to display their athletic endeavors on social media, there were a variety of reasons for engaging in this activity online. Bella, an amateur strongman competitor and personal trainer, believed it was a necessary component for advancing her career in strongman. “I started competing in strongman a year and a half ago. Up until then, I had Instagram, I had Facebook, but right now especially like strength community wise, if you want to get sponsored and you want to have sponsorships, then there's a standard you have to already meet for social media stuff” (BELLA, 11/26/19). Bella had recently made an athletic transition from track and field to strongman mentioning she knew only one other person at her gym that competed in the sport. Strongman is a niche sport, one that has grown from exposure on major media networks via the annual World’s Strongest Man competition, as well as on social media. Strongman is also a geographically disperse sport, further connecting the community online. Bella’s belief about social media is thus shaped by the sport itself and her relatively recent athletic transition.

For Ulma, a part-time group fitness instructor and mother, sharing on social media was a way to hold herself accountable on her own personal fitness journey. “I had my own physical transformation and I wanted to start sharing it on Instagram. It wasn't intentional to start a

business […] I was starting to see real results and that was when I started my account at that point just to kind of share what I've been doing and what I learned." Ulma also believed that she would be able to connect with other mothers who were interested in fitness. "from the beginning my goal has always been to show moms that their best body days can be ahead of them. I think a lot of moms think that like, Oh, I'm not 20 anymore, I've had like four kids" (ULMA, 5/7/20). Like Science communicators, Ulma is interested in sharing what she has learned about fitness on social media, however, unlike Science communicators, Ulma's belief about why she should be sharing and documenting her journey is based on her fitness journey being successful. Sharers often did not have advanced degrees in health and fitness, meaning that the insights they thought valuable enough to document on Instagram came from their own experience, which overall had to be seen as successful in order to be worthy of sharing. Seeing their own fitness journeys as successful, Sharers believed they had a form of uncommon knowledge that was worthy of documenting because it might help others in their own transformations.

Beyond the desire to connect with the broader fitness community on Instagram, there were also functional beliefs about the role of social media. For Olive and Teresa, posting powerlifting content on Instagram was primarily a way to communicate with their online coaches. "I was recording all of my workouts predominantly for my coach, but I started to use Instagram as a way to just log my training." (OLIVE, 3/25/20). Teresa's experience was similar, using the cloud storage of Instagram as an easy way to upload a video of her lifting so that she and her coach could, "share it, watch it, and see what we can fix," (TERESA, 5/5/20). As Teresa's page grew, this functional approach to filming and posting content started to be at odds with her audience. When describing why she began changing how she posted content she remarked, "people would comment or DM [direct message] me a lot and ask lots of questions.

And as my following grew, I don't want to say it was annoying. It's definitely, um […] it kind of began to make me feel like, okay, if I just do a better angle, these questions won't pop up anymore cause then they can literally see it" (TERESA, 5/5/20).

This experience highlights differences among Sharers regarding who they believe their audience is on Instagram. While Ulma was documenting her journey for herself and other moms, Teresa was documenting for her coach, initially underestimating how much engagement she would receive from her audience. Misjudging the form and function of engaging in social media factors into the beliefs of both Sharers and Shifters, but for different reasons. Shifters' position outside of the fitness field shapes a belief that social media is a necessary medium for entry into the field which can result in the overestimation of the value of social media. Sharers were often similarly positioned outside the fitness industry when it came to employment, but this was not accompanied by a desire to change careers. Further, Sharers were the most likely not to have an educational background in health or fitness, not have a parent that owned a business, or have people help them with their investment in social media. Considering these characteristics, Sharers had social positions most similar to an average social media user interested in fitness, shaping the belief that social media was mostly for engaging with a community of others interested in fitness online and tracking one's own fitness journey. The underestimation of engagement for Sharers like Teresa suggests they didn't believe social media was going to feel like work, whereas Shifters almost exclusively saw it as such.

2.5 Discussion & Conclusion

With the presence of social media Influencers and creators continuing to solidify themselves in the fitness industry and beyond, there is growing academic interest in understanding who these actors are and what brings them to sustain an investment in social

media. Existing literature suggests that Influencers and creators have a variety of reasons for investing in social media ranging from beliefs about greater social community, career opportunities, or creative freedom. While these insights are all valuable, and in part replicated in this chapter, they come from different fields, making it hard to know how field-specific these investments in social media are. Further, it is not always clear why these beliefs are held by Influencers and creators, particularly when scholarship on the social media industry suggests that making a living as an internet celebrity is increasingly difficult.

This chapter attempts to add to these discussions of online celebrity by drawing from the fitness field and applying Bourdieu's concept of social position. With this conception comes the assumption that people's beliefs are shaped by their social position within a field. By looking at how social position within the fitness field shapes Influencer and creator beliefs about social media, this chapter attempts to further develop and systematize observations from previous scholarship. The four types of fitness Influencers and creators identified in this chapter demonstrate a variety of beliefs about investment in social media as well as using social position to explain why and how these different beliefs are sustained. Additionally, social position helps to identify clear field boundaries in order to demonstrate how fairly generalizable social characteristics such as education, gender and occupation play specific roles for those in the fitness industry. This contribution can help further systematize a scholarly approach to studying social media Influencers and creators by beginning to trace out characteristics that can and cannot be compared between Influencers and creators of different industries.

More concretely, we can see how the belief in increased intimacy between video game streamer and fan (Johnson & Woodcock, 2017), is similar to how Sharers saw their investment in posting fitness content online. However, it is clear that this belief does not sustain all who invest

in social media, in fact, for Sellers, the increased intimacy is often the price, not purpose, of doing business. Further, prior proximity to the field, either as amateur or professional, was a common component of social position that encouraged investment from both video game streamers and fitness Influencers and creators. However, unlike streamers who were mostly looking for a way to get paid doing what they loved and willing to work long hours to do so, many aspiring fitness Influencers and creators were already employed as personal trainers and hoped an investment in social media would reduce their working hours. The extent to which these comparisons can be made is limited by the singular focus on the fitness field in this chapter, but future research would benefit from studying Influencers and creators comparatively. This would give scholars a better understanding of the universal and contextual experiences of Influencers and creators, offering a more comprehensive approach to identifying the role they play in the digital economy.

The four categories of Influencer and creator beliefs, though fitted to the context of online fitness, offer another avenue for generalizing the findings of this chapter for the purposes of expanding qualitative social media research. Since the beliefs about social media expressed by my participants are shaped by their social position, the characteristics that make up social position can be applied to Influencers and creators outside my sample, or the fitness industry. Science communicators had beliefs that were primarily shaped by their access to higher education in subjects related to the field in which they were producing content, Sellers were shaped by the position of their occupation as being a bad job in a good industry, Shifters by the position of their occupation outside of their intended career industry, as well as gender, and Sharers by their relative lack of social advantages in the way of occupation, education, or family and social support. Despite the type of degree varying depending on the population studied, it is

likely that advanced degrees in any field will shape the beliefs of those who invest in social media, reflecting a stratified field of social positions occupied by Influencers and creators. By locating social position as one factor that shapes these beliefs, and approximating these positions through variables such as employment, gender, and education, this chapter also offers a form of exploratory research that could support quantitative research in the field as well.

With the recognition that fitness Influencers and creators hold multiple beliefs about investing in social media, the next chapter investigates the strategies they use to produce and reproduce themselves online. Due to occupation being an influential component of social position in this chapter, the next chapter focuses specifically on how occupational trajectory shapes the strategies adopted by fitness Influencers and creators. Although initial beliefs do influence future strategies, these beliefs were by no means stationary. As fitness Influencers and creators grew in popularity, their social position gave them access to different strategies, the deployment of which often reflected their beliefs about social media and their own occupational trajectory. As we will see in the upcoming chapter, it was common for Sellers and Shifters to adopt market rationalized strategies that would help them grow and stabilize their careers. However, for Sharers and Science communicators, their strategies and beliefs occasionally changed depending on their occupational trajectory and how they decided to invest in social media.

Chapter 3. TRAJECTORY & STRATEGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

"You just have to play the game, you know? You put a title on a thumbnail that makes people think that you're going to solve their problem super fast […] you bring them in with what they want and then once they actually get to the video, we've just done a good job of giving them what they actually need" (CORY, 11/22/19). When speaking with fitness Influencers and creators, the strategy of clickbait, or using mild deceit to preview online content, was fairly common. Some, like Cory, embraced the strategy as simply part of the game, while others were either critical or simply did not feel like it was worth their time. I was struck by the difference in responses among participants that otherwise shared qualities such as style of fitness content, follower counts, engagement ratios, and brand deals. Why such diverse responses to a fairly ubiquitous aspect of the online fitness and social media industry?

In attempting to answer this question, it was helpful to consider what Cory left unsaid, which were the consequences of not playing the game. In a competitive online market, not playing the game means potentially losing viewership, engagement, and revenue to competitors who are willing to adopt strategies such as clickbait. As a full-time content creator and coach, Cory relies on strategies that maximize viewership, while also having the resources to invest in them. The strategy Cory chose seemed immediately tied to the game he saw himself playing, which itself was a product of his position as a full-time creator in the online fitness industry. This became an early clue that occupational trajectory, defined as past, current, and desired future employment, might play a role in fitness Influencer and creator strategy.

In both the popular press (Martineau, 2019; Sanders et al., 2019; Ward, 2017) and academia (Zulli, 2017; Khamis et al., 2017) there is one understanding of Influencer and creator strategy as following a fairly linear playbook that highlights a progression in strategic form while being open to a variety of content. Rather than being governed by a linear playbook, others in the field see strategy primarily influenced by individual qualities (Abidin, 2018; Reade, 2020b) or the quickly industrializing and commercializing Influencer economy (Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Marwick, 2019). While all valuable contributions, these divergent claims are products of a wide variety of Influencer and creator genres such as fashion, fitness, video games, and beauty. Instead of looking at difference across genres of Influencers or creators, this chapter asks how we might understand differences in strategy within the same genre, in this case fitness. I argue that occupational trajectory offers one set of answers to this question.

In chapter 2 I looked at the initial beliefs that fitness Influencers and creators had about investing in social media, finding an uneven distribution of beliefs shaped by a variety of social positions. These beliefs guided different types of investments, which helps set the stage for an analysis of fitness Influencer and creator strategies. In this chapter, I use Pierre Bourdieu's concept of strategy which allows for a relational understanding of occupational trajectory, and the practices of fitness Influencers and creators. This chapter finds that fitness Influencers and creators do adopt discernable strategies to either maintain or improve their social position, but that occupational trajectory better explains why certain strategies are chosen than relying on personal quality or industry development alone. These components still help make sense of Influencer and creator practices, but they cannot explain why those with similar personal qualities or industry entrance would adopt different strategies. Three typologies of fitness

Influencers and creators emerged which demonstrate how occupational trajectory affords and constrains various strategies.

Career Crafters were either already working full-time as Influencers and creators or were working part-time in the industry and looking to transition into a full-time role. Due to most, if not all, of their income coming from their work on Instagram or adjacent platforms, Career Crafters could invest a lot of time into developing content production, distribution and engagement strategies. Consequently, the form that these strategies took were more commercialized than other typologies because they relied the most heavily on income from their role as a fitness Influencer or creator. Passion Pursuers were the opposite of Career Crafters in the sense that most of their income came from employment outside of fitness or social media. Despite sharing similar qualities when it came to fitness, Passion Pursuers adopted an often less-developed and time-intensive set of strategies than Career Crafters because they were not relying on it for income and their pages were less highly prioritized. Finally, Risk Reducers were those that were not making most of their income from being an Influencer or creator but were adopting strategies of Career Crafters because they saw their page as a potential career investment they could access if needed.

The findings in this chapter contribute to scholarship on microcelebrity and the Influencer industry in a number of ways. The first is by recognizing that Influencers and creators do indeed adopt discernable strategies to try and maintain or improve their position and that these strategies cannot be explain by personal quality or genre alone. Emphasizing the variety of occupational trajectories among Influencers and creators adds to discussions about the rapidly industrializing and commercializing social media industry, suggesting that the impact on Influencers and creators will be varied based on degree of market exposure and investment in the industry.

Finally, in response to debates surrounding digital labor that have largely focused on how uncompensated labor impacts how Influencers and creators produce content, this chapter investigates the impact of past, present, and desired work that explicitly is compensated.

3.2 Strategies of Influencers and Creators

Although not always described as specific strategies, scholars have identified various practices frequently engaged in by Influencers and content creators. The process of becoming an Influencer or creator is often described as a linear playbook in which one crafts a self-brand, attracts attention, and then commercializes content through advertisements and brand deals. Two sets of scholarship exist to explain how Influencers and creators navigate these steps and enact the plays of the playbook. The first set often focuses on the qualities of the Influencer or creator themselves, working to identify how they use their qualities, talents, and skills to self-brand within discrete genres. The second set points to changes in the broader Influencer industry, arguing that as competition saturates the market, the ability to industrialize Influencer practices or make deals with third-party agencies is key to making a social media career. While all valuable pieces of the puzzle, I argue that focusing on the occupational trajectory of fitness Influencers and creators can bridge the gap between individual and industrial explanations by demonstrating how both individual qualities and business decisions can be afforded or foreclosed by occupational trajectory.

Diana Zulli offers an example of the linear playbook model for Influencer and creator strategies.

> On Instagram, the glance and social capital almost always precede economic capital. That is, artistic photographs, strategic timing, and intentional branding entices the glance. The more attention users receive, the more social capital they accumulate. Once

> Instagram users amass a large number of glances, or even a few glances from a desirable demographic, they then become valuable to companies with similar brand aesthetics. (2017, p. 9)

While it is certainly the case that Influencer and creator careers have developed this way, the linearity of this model centers one set of strategies (artistic photographs, timing, and branding) as the starting point for the accumulation of attention and social capital without considering if or why those strategies may not be available to everyone. Zulli furthers this point by arguing that,

> "through continued use of Instagram, ordinary users can become 'influencers' […] This type of status requires no specific skill or talent often mandatory for offline celebrities. There is no one brand, identity, or 'shtick' guaranteed to garner more attention than others […] Thus, the appeal of Instagram is that there is no specific prescription for 'success.' Instagram's design and orientation toward transactional glancing leaves open the possibility for any user to elevate their visibility and social status. (2017, p. 9)

Zulli is ultimately critical of Instagram as a platform for democratization of fame, arguing that the never-realized possibility for any user to be successful drives continued engagement, and ultimately profit, for Instagram. However, this conception of how Influencer and creator strategies operate leaves a number of important questions unanswered. Primarily, if there is indeed a linear progression from self-branding and attention to advertising deals, with no need for skill and no discrimination based on one's chosen 'shtick,' why is there an observable variety of Influencer and creator strategies on Instagram?

In contrast, the first set of scholars point to personal qualities, arguing that, "Internet celebrity is a product of performance and perception […] most often, internet celebrities are given attention and celebrated for their exclusivity, exoticism, exceptionalism, and everydayness" (Abidin, 2018, p. 19). Although Influencers are a particularly commercialized form of internet celebrity, a component of their success is still based on their ability to have or

perform these qualities. Authenticity, perhaps the most discussed concept in the Influencer literature, is similarly framed as a quality that must be performed in order to successfully attract a dedicated audience (Audrezet et al., 2018; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Cunningham & Craig, 2017; Jerslev, 2016).

Josie Reade investigated how fitness Influencers in particular express authenticity, suggesting that it takes the form of self-presentation strategies involving "(1) posting the body raw, (2) storying the everyday, and (3) 'real talk' about topics such as body image and mental health […] Such digital intimacies […] assist existing or aspirational influencers to establish branding and commercial value through personal recommendations and endorsements" (2020, p. 17). This set of strategies are different than those presented by Zulli, which again begs the question of why different strategies persist. For Reade and Abidin, the answer is a combination of genre and personal quality. Only some types of people have the ability to perform internet celebrity effectively, and the strategies they take are molded by genre, such as fitness, which is chosen in part due to personal qualities.

The second set of scholars focus on business decisions within a rapidly changing industry. Alice Marwick argues that commercialization via the growth in value of advertising and marketing on social media has reached a stage at which we can not only speak about an Influencer industry on Instagram, but also industrial practices. "The influencer industry has upended many of the amateur techniques established by early bloggers, camgirls and Twitter comedians" (Marwick, 2019, p. 162). Amateur techniques have been replaced by industrial practices which "are imbricated not only with the technology industry and the platforms that host their content, but the vast industry of sponsorship and advertisement that has alighted upon influencers as the most effective way to reach young people" (p. 163). The industrialization of

practices has also been discussed by Leaver et al. (2020) in their thorough history of the commercialization of Instagram as a platform.

As the Influencer economy commercializes, a cottage industry of talent agencies and multi-channel networks has developed to mediate business decisions between Influencer and platform. Cunningham and Craig (2019) provide a detailed analysis of this development, what they call social media entertainment intermediaries, suggesting that Influencer and creator careers can be made or broken based on how they engage with these intermediaries. For some, the increased exposure and access to capital can propel and solidify a career, but if the wrong intermediary is chosen, careers can be tanked by a misalignment of brand management and a perception of inauthenticity with one's audience.

Beyond the Influencer industry itself, Khamis et al. look to changes in the economy more broadly to contextualize some of the personal decisions addressed by the first set of scholars. "Ironically, self-branding can therefore be seen less as a testament to personal control and more as a reflection of unstable labour markets (from sneakers and fast-food to smartphones and furniture) in post-Ford globalised economies" (2017, p. 201). This suggests that the degree to which an Influencer or creator might engage in self-branding would be related to labor market shifts beyond the Influencer industry or even the digital economy. Describing these economic conditions adds valuable context for Influencer and creator strategies while leaving open the question of how occupational trajectory within the changing industries and economies may impact the accessibility of particular strategies.

3.2.1 *Understanding Strategy*

What a strategy is and how they are categorized has been the subject of debate in multiple disciplines, particularly around the questions of neutral utility and embedded structures of social

power (Crow, 1989; Knights & Morgan, 1990). For this chapter, I use Pierre Bourdieu's concept of strategy which attends to their dual nature as both social affordance and constraint. For Bourdieu, "the notion of strategy is… [used] to break away from the objectivist point of view and from the action without agent that structuralism presupposes […] It is the product of the practical sense as the feel for the game, for a particular, historically determined game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 62-63). This means that while strategies are aimed at achieving a specific goal, two actors with similar goals may use different strategies depending on their social position and feel for the game. One's feel for the game is how they operate and understand their social space from their own particular position.

I argue that occupational trajectory, as a specific instantiation of social position, helps make sense of the various strategies adopted by fitness Influencers and creators. I use occupational trajectory to mean one's past, current, and desired form of employment. Past employment provides context to the meaning of one's current employment as well as giving insight into how strategies reflect one's feel for the game. Current employment for fitness Influencers and creators matters because it plays a large role in how much time can be spent on activities such as producing content, engaging with fans, and fostering business relationships. The future trajectory of Influencer and creator careers is also valuable because one's desired movement through social space impacts the strategies they use to get there.

Due to its historical and social contingency, Bourdieu's notion of strategy does not seek to identify which actions qualify as strategies and which do not, but rather to understand the intended goal that gives a set of actions their strategic sense. The strategies I identify in this chapter are sets of coordinated actions aimed toward maintaining or improving one's status as a fitness Influencer or content creator. An example of an action that is not a strategy for

maintaining or improving status would be logging on to one's social media account. While this is an action that Influencers and content creators do every day, it is not a strategy for maintaining or improving status because everyone who posts content on Instagram, for any reason, must log on to an account. Despite not being a strategy for maintaining or improving status on Instagram, logging on to an Instagram account may be a strategy for different ends, such as resetting one's password. The Bourdieusian approach to strategy in this chapter seeks to demonstrate how occupational trajectory affords and constrains the various strategies chosen by Influencers and creators.

Conversely, an example of what is considered a strategy is Cory's use of clickbait in video thumbnails because the goal is to maximize traffic on his YouTube and Instagram pages which educates and motivates viewers about fitness while exposing them to the products and services he sells to make a living. The choice of this strategy is further explained by Cory's occupational trajectory. Before moving into fitness, Cory was a self-described "apptrepreneur", or mobile application entrepreneur, and his future career goals involve wanting to transition out of a full-time fitness creator role into one that focuses more on coaching. This past form of employment shapes Cory's feel for the game and helps explain its expression in his thumbnail strategy. Currently, as a full-time fitness creator and coach, Cory's use of the thumbnail strategy is part of how he maintains his living day to day. The strategy of mild deceit is not fool-proof, and the main concern for many Influencers and creators that use it is a loss of audience trust. One way to explain why Cory is willing to take this risk is because of his desire to eventually switch from being a fitness creator to being a coach.

As a practical sense, strategies can be observed through action itself as well as conversation about past and prospective actions. However, "practice does not imply – or rather

excludes – mastery of the logic expressed within it" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 11), suggesting that strategies can be obscured through direct questions alone. For example, Bourdieu uncovers the strategy of the bluff through asking his participants first about their general knowledge of a subject, such as art, and then asking about familiarity with particular artists. In my interview protocol, I asked a number of questions to uncover strategies that would have otherwise been inaccessible if only addressed head on. Along with asking my participants directly about their career goals, and the strategies they see themselves using to get there, I also asked them to provide an example of both successful and unsuccessful strategies they perceived others using. Having participants group together like cases proved useful in developing my three typologies (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Another way to uncover strategies was asking participants about their work process. This included how they produced and evaluated their Instagram content. This not only helped me understand what my participants saw themselves as doing on Instagram, but in some cases, it revealed a gap between the ideal strategies my participants assumed others used, and their own practices. This became a further indication that not all strategies were available to everyone.

In line with the previous chapter, I began with an issue-focused analysis which offered a clear description of the various strategies engaged in by fitness Influencers and creators, but it did not explain why and how these strategies were adopted. Instead of examining strategies, I went back into the data to look at my participants. I used the variability in expression and intensity of strategies to divide my participants which helped to understand what qualities of my participants aligned with their strategies. It was through this analysis that it became clear how impactful occupational trajectory was for explaining differences in how fitness Influencers and

creators enact their strategies. This then led to a case-focused and generalized report (Weiss, 1994).

This analysis generated three categories of fitness Influencers and creators: Career Crafters, Passion Pursuers, and Risk Reducers. Career Crafters are those that currently make, or are trying to make, the majority of their income from an online business or brand deals associated with their fitness Instagram accounts. Passion Pursuers make the majority of their income from jobs outside the online fitness industry, while occasionally pursuing low-stakes brand deals through their Instagram accounts. Risk Reducers had aspects of the previous two categories but did not neatly fit into one or the other. Risk Reducers either worked in jobs within the online fitness industry that were not associated with their personal fitness pages or were students that had time to invest in their Instagram pages but did not have a clear career trajectory. For these participants, their fitness pages were not necessarily clear careers or passions, but more as a way to reduce risk for an uncertain future.

3.3 FINDINGS

3.3.1 *Career Crafters*

Participants interested in crafting careers were either already working full-time in the online fitness industry or were looking to transition into full-time online work in the near future. Every Career Crafter in my sample was either an online fitness, nutrition or business coach that advertised their business on Instagram. It was common for many of the personal trainers I spoke with to transition into online coaching by taking on fewer in-person clients until they could support themselves completely online. Career Crafters are distinguished both by their explicit goals for growing their business as fitness Influencers or creators, and by the strategies they take to accomplish those goals. More specifically, it is not only that some of the strategies are

different than other types of Influencers and creators, but that the form of the strategy is different. Often without other employment to fall back on, Instagram strategies were business strategies, with the success of the page being related to career success. This means that crafting a career on Instagram requires market rationalized or industrialized strategies with demonstrable performance results (Marwick, 2019). This market rationalization refers to the process through which strategies become business oriented as well as how that shift becomes normative and assumed to be logical or obvious.

3.3.1.1 Evan

Evan is a physical therapist and personal trainer who has been using Instagram to grow his business since the middle of 2017. Business and entrepreneurship are constant themes throughout Evan's life, his father owns a medical care business, and Evan was a salesman before pursuing his doctorate in physical therapy. Combining his passion for entrepreneurship and physical therapy expertise was part of the plan from the beginning, when he started posting content while still in graduate school.

> I knew that even if I got my doctorate in physical therapy, it wasn't going to set me financially free. I couldn't go live the life I want to live, making $70,000 a year, having a job that I worked 50 hours a week. I knew that and I wanted to do something different. I always wanted to be a business owner my whole life. I've had this entrepreneurial mindset of, I want to be different. I want to do something big. My dad always said, you're a visionary, chase that, think big, dream big with it. And God, that was a good thing he told me. And so I always thought I got to do something bigger and better. And I saw all these Instagram accounts, like blowing up. I was like, I feel like I can do this. (EVAN, 12/6/19)

Although he currently still sees in-person physical therapy clients, he wants to transition out of that role as soon as his online business feels more stable. His main source of income is a six-week, online holistic fitness program which combines his knowledge of physical therapy and

personal training. This program is advertised primarily through Instagram, which makes page growth a priority.

Evan sees success on Instagram as creating popular posts that bring him new followers and new clients for his fitness program. In order to achieve this, Evan pays close attention to his Instagram Insights, a feature offered to users with a business account that provides data on the quantity and quality of engagement with specific posts, and the user's account overall. The Insights feature allows Influencers and creators to see who specifically is engaging with their content the most, and how they are engaging with it, which can help them develop a niche within their field and focus in on their ideal follower or customer. When asked if Instagram Insights played a role in how he evaluated the success of a post he replied, "Uh, crucial, yeah. It's like market research for an Instagrammer ya know? […] I don't really know how else I would view it as a good or a bad post." For Evan, the Insights feature is not just the best, most data-driven, or efficient form of evaluation, it is evaluation.

The next step for Evan is what some participants call 'systems work,' which is the organization of content production into a data-driven, repeatable practice that is aligned with the product on sale.

> I came up with a formula based on what was working […] I was like, let me do some market research. Let me dive into these accounts and see which ones are really blowing up. And what I realized is that the ones that were really growing were the ones that had some sort of a theme to them. Their Instagrams are laid out in a very specific fashion, something that looked intentional behind it and it made their page look much more clean, I mean, their page looked much more professional. And I recognized that if I did that, I may be able to create those results […] So it became very consumable content. And I noticed that my insights, my impressions, my reach, my likes, everything were higher in terms of engagement on the ones that were in a collage format that the, you know, more professional style format. And I was like, well, okay

> then I'm just going to continue to duplicate that. So then I just bulleted down all these variables that were beneficial and now my content is really fantastic. I'm growing by like 1,000 followers a week now.

The content production process for Evan moves back and forth between observing the content and growth of other accounts, making adjustments to the posts he makes, and then seeing if it works through the Insights feature. His approach to Insights is connected to his motivation for starting his account in the first place. When he mentioned watching other Instagram accounts "blowing up" he was referring to their rapid growth in followers, which he perceived as a requirement for his own page if he wanted to have a successful online business. This example is indicative of an aggressive and calculative growth strategy, which Evan sees as a necessary step toward leaving his in-person physical therapy work and transitioning to working completely online. Part of what makes this a market rationalized, or industrial, strategy is that the lessons drawn from the Insights feature and observing others are all oriented toward growth of followers and income, with aesthetic arrangements and content serving those ends.

3.3.1.2 Irene

Irene is in her early 20s and has been a personal trainer for the past three years, transitioning last year into working full-time as an online trainer. Instagram is her main platform, and she recruits all her clients through her page. In order for her page and client base to grow, Irene needs to continually produce content on Instagram that is a mix of information about health and fitness, advertising for her services as a coach, and an authentic look into who she is as a person. Irene said the most helpful change she has made since transitioning her business fully online has been hiring a business coach, a well-known fitness influencer who also runs a business mentoring and coaching newer Influencers and creators. "When I started I didn't really

reach out and that was my biggest regret […] I hired a mentor and that helped me level everything up. At first it was all me, which if I went back I would redo it because my Instagram was a mess and I could have done things so much more efficiently and grown so much faster" (IRENE, 1/14/20). Irene's business coach is a conduit for market rationality, giving her instructions for how to use Instagram as an effective business advertising tool. Irene now evaluates her use of Instagram based on how efficient and effective each action is for growing her account and bringing her new customers. Through a combination of her own experience in the field and the advice of her coach, not only are Irene's tastes now more aligned with the commercialized, cultural field, but she can recognize past misalignment.

The coaching that Irene receives is not only limited to what type of photos she should post or what to write in the caption, but also works to rationalize her entire approach to using Instagram. "We do a lot of mindset work, just pushing past limiting beliefs and then a lot of system work. So getting my system up and improving. And then we'll do a little bit on social media, like different marketing strategies and different ways to grow my reach." An example of this system work is building a reliable and consistent content production strategy. "Something that I've talked about a lot with my mentor is getting down a system. So ideally if I stuck to it, it would be educate, educate, connect. So every post is educate on nutrition, educate on training, connect on lifestyle, mindset, an experience that I've had, and then repeat that three part cycle." The 'educate, educate, connect' cycle highlights the need to consistently produce valuable, and useful information that is free to access for her followers, while also letting her followers learn more about her life and who she is as an individual.

This 2:1 ratio of education and connection is not an industry standard, but rather an approach to posting content that was specifically crafted for Irene by her business coach, based

on who Irene is, and her future goals in the fitness industry. Irene wants to be known as a fitness coach who is an expert in her field, but in order to align these career goals with her self-presentation on Instagram she needed a change in strategy.

> It's a little bit confusing cause even my mentor will say I'm a little bit in between influencer and coach and I really want to be known as a coach, but I understand that I have both roles […] I made a big shift this year going from just cute, fun mindset posts into more education and at first it felt really unnatural and I didn't really align with it. But now that I've done that I kind of merge the two. You can still have an aesthetic Instagram but still provide the kind of value and show people that you're an expert in a space.

By producing twice as much educational content as content focused on audience connection, Irene hopes to shift how she is perceived by her current audience and continue to attract a new audience that is more interested in what she has to offer as a fitness coach. By using his previous success and experience in the online fitness field, Irene's mentor helps her see a misalignment of intention and action that had previously gone unrecognized. While the work of aligning one's personal brand with the goods and services offered is a widely observed mark of success for fitness Influencers and creators, the form this strategy takes varies depending on the person.

Irene's willingness to change the way she posts in order to make her Instagram content better align with her coaching services demonstrates a form of strategic flexibility. Influencers and creators who are exposed to the market pressures of Instagram are constantly paying attention to Instagram's search and ranking algorithms, with the goal of producing content that the algorithm will favor.

> People like to share things like quotes and infographics, and then sometimes demonstration videos. But usually I have a lot of resistance to posting quotes and words cause I was like, no way. That's why people use the Instagram algorithm. It's about posting faces and things like that. But I think it's definitely changing cause

> some of my quote posts will do really well and it's less production time for me cause I don't have to take pictures. So I kind of like it, I've warmed up to the idea of that.

Irene initially thought that the algorithm favored posts that had pictures of faces but learned that simple pictures of written quotes also do well, so she added them into the rotation of her posts. Although the outcomes of these efforts vary, Influencers and creators are well aware that they do not make the rules of the game, which requires a constant willingness to be flexible and experiment with different formats of content production. As we will see with Influencers and creators that have full-time jobs outside of the online fitness industry, there is less of a willingness to change their approach with every new feature, tweak to the algorithm, or viral trend.

3.3.1.3 Marshall

Similar to Evan, Marshall knew he wanted to start an online business while he was finishing his undergraduate degree in exercise science. “I wanted to do personal training, but you don't make a lot of money doing that. So I'm like, how can I pursue a career in fitness and be able to make good money and have my own business? And then that's where it naturally came to. I discovered that people were coaching people online” (MARSHALL, 4/1/20). This discovery came through following a couple of fitness Influencers and creators that also offered business coaching services. Marshall attended a live speaking event about how to be an effective fitness Influencer, as well as enrolling in a course for online personal trainers which helped him refine his growth strategy and systems work early in his career.

Marshall’s first strategy was trying to figure out what made him stand out from other accounts, eventually landing on infographics. Infographic fitness pages are a subgenre of Instagram fitness, described in detail in chapter 4, that consist primarily of graphic images

offering easily consumable fitness tips and nutrition guidelines. For accounts in the evidence-based fitness community this can also include summaries of academic research.

> Everyone's posting shirtless pics at the gym. And I knew I wasn't gonna be able to grow my account that way because I don't have an elite physique […] So I saw other pages having success with posting infographics and I was like, this is a great opportunity for me because I know I could make infographics and I can make them really good.

Similar to Evan, this early strategy of distinction was based on the belief that he needed an account with lots of followers in order to have a successful online fitness business. Not too long after he started his account, Marshall was offered a paid position to produce infographics for a well-known fitness Influencer. Instead of payment, Marshall wanted mentorship, suggesting an interest in long-term career development over short-term financial gain.

As Marshall's account grew, the way he posted and evaluated content changed as well. When he started, he posted once a day, seven days a week, and spent a lot of time analyzing data from the Insights feature.

> I used to analyze that a lot and I found that I was focusing too much on that and not sharing enough content. And that's when I was doing one time a day. I always fiddled with the hashtags and tried to figure out what worked, what time to post. But when I just started posting at the same time, 12:00 PM and 10:00 PM every day no matter what. That's where I saw the most growth.

Unlike Evan who used the Insights feature to refine the quality of his posts, Marshall doubled the quantity of his posts. What at first appears as a different strategy is really the same strategy in a different form. Both approached the platform with the goal of owning their own online fitness business and both perceived that a rapidly growing account was an integral component of that

goal. They both spent time and resources experimenting to find the particular form of Instagram post this strategy would take, and once they found it, they committed.

Soon, Marshall was posting twice a day on his own account as well as twice a day for his mentor, seven days a week. The frequency and quantity of posts required a manageable and rational system of content production.

> That's a shit load of content. So I figured out, okay, here are the seven types of content […] Then I would write out all my topics for the week and then normally I would create […] all the graphics, all the visuals, get into that workflow and then I'm going to write all the captions for all of them and get into my writing flow. So when I started working in that system, it made it a lot easier creating content and getting it all done in less time.

Systems and strategies can look different based on the needs of the specific Influencer and creator, but they are more often intensified and systematized by those who make, or are aspiring to make, the majority of their income from online businesses associated with their Instagram account. Irene's system of 'educate, educate, connect' seems relaxed when compared to Marshall's, but the relative ease of producing infographics compared to photos and workout videos makes the market demand for content different across those two forms.

3.3.2 *Passion Pursuers*

Despite the headlines suggesting the ease with which one can make money as a social media Influencer, most Instagram users that would otherwise fall under the term Influencer or content creator do not make most of their money online. As Crystal Abidin (2017) points out, most Influencers and creators in North America start out as hobbyists, with relatively few crafting an actual career. Participants in my sample that wanted to pursue passions were distinguished by having full-time jobs outside of the online fitness industry and having an

explicit disinterest in making a career out of their Instagram page. This did not mean that they didn't occasionally make money from a sponsor or do an advertisement campaign with a brand, nor did it mean that they were not trying to actively grow their pages. Not wanting to make a career out of Instagram stemmed from a disinterest in turning their hobby into a job, and not wanting to leave their currently careers which often felt stable and fulfilling. These careers protected those pursuing passion from needing to invest in market rationalized strategies. Passion Pursuers chose strategies based on interest, ease, and efficiency, choices that were often not available for the more market exposed Career Crafters. While there was significant overlap between the types of strategies chosen by both groups, the degree and consistency of investment was quite different.

3.3.2.1 Larry

Larry is a calisthenics content creator from Canada. Calisthenics has a long history as part of the European and American physical culture tradition, popularized by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and the Turnvereine movement in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The practice is a combination of bodyweight exercises, gymnastics movements, and acrobatics, with each exercise broken into two distinct categories: strength movements and dynamic movements. Larry has spent nearly a decade lifting weights but was inspired to start calisthenics training five years ago, by watching YouTube videos. The practice of calisthenics, sometimes known as street workout today, had a worldwide resurgence in the late 2000s riding the early wave of YouTube virality with impressive displays of athleticism. Larry is now doing the cross-platform work of bringing the sport of calisthenics from YouTube over to Instagram.

Larry's approach to posting calisthenics content on Instagram is about having fun. When he started his page, the goal was to display his progress in the sport, "my plan was to show only

my best skills. Like the thing I was proud about. No tutorials, no workouts, just my best skills, the hardest ones" (LARRY, 3/27/20). Calisthenics moves are not only visually impressive, but more importantly, the majority of them are visually impressive to the untrained eye, a feature that played a role in the sport's viral resurgence on YouTube, as well as the growth of Larry's Instagram page. The prospect of his videos going viral is a strong motivator for Larry, and he has developed a sense of how to do this. Larry has had a few of his posts go viral, meaning that other popular Instagram pages have reposted them, leading to millions of views. The fame accrued from these posts has most recently landed Larry on a local game show which pits performers of different genre against each other with audiences voting on the most impressive feat.

In one example, Larry mentions his viral performance of a maltese, a calisthenics movement performed by holding one's body horizontal to the ground using only one's arms. "The environment really changed the game. Like if I do a maltese in the gym where people train it will do normal. I did a maltese in a boat while my friend was driving the boat and it goes viral". This is his favorite type of content to produce, combining the skill of calisthenics, with the creative skill of finding environments or scenarios that will make the content stand out. For full-time Influencers and creators, focusing solely on viral content is a high-risk, high-reward strategy since making content go viral is quite difficult. However, Larry is shielded from most of the risk by his job outside the online fitness industry.

As a full-time engineer, Larry is happy with the relative fame he has attained from his Instagram page. "Because I have an Instagram with a couple of followers, I can have free gym, I have free clothes, free stuffs like this. So my purpose is to create original content to have views and to be known and to have free opportunities […] So I did it and now I'm happy about it." While Larry does make some money through his channel from sponsorship deals, most of his

income is from his engineering job. The commercial pursuits Larry invests in are primarily for novelty and social distinction rather than financial ends, which is demonstrated by the commercial opportunities that Larry rejects, such as online coaching.

> Some people propose it to me but no. It's like more a hobby […] I really just want to be an engineer. And okay, that's good if calisthenics bring me money, but I don't want to do four hours a week of courses. I'd prefer to have my weekends free. So I don't want to start working throughout the weekend to do more business related to my sport. So no, I'm not really into it. I don't try to make money from my sport.

Aside from the commercial aspect of his Instagram development, there are other strategies for page growth the Larry rejects simply because they are not of interest or would take too much work, such as writing detailed captions for each post.

> No not at all it's something that I should improve. Like most of the time I just named the skill like iron cross or inverted muscle-up with an emoji and that's it, a couple of hashtags. But no, no, I don't spend much time to write a quote or something like this to describe my video or to try to inspire people.

When I followed up about how he decides which hashtags to use it was similarly for descriptive purposes. "I never explore which hashtag was more efficient, or which one was less efficient. I just describe the video with the hashtag. Like if I'm doing iron cross, I will do #ironcross." Hashtags and captions are all valuable opportunities to grow a following by targeting your message to potential new followers that may eventually become customers. Larry recognizes that he should spend more time doing some of these activities, but since he does not rely on the account for income, he is not very willing to be flexible to market demands. Larry's approach to his Instagram page has aspects of a system in the sense that he is aware of various practices that

could help his page grow, but time constraints from his job and lack of necessity mean these practices are not always performed.

3.3.2.2 Francene

At first glance, Francene may look like an influencer or creator motivated by crafting a career online. She has over 100,000 followers, has appeared as a contestant on a nationally syndicated fitness game show, is sponsored by a supplement and clothing company, and has a side business selling diet-friendly desserts that she makes. However, Francene's approach to using Instagram is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. As a full-time nurse, mother, and powerlifter, she is motivated to use Instagram to share her own athletic journey and educate people about the sport of powerlifting. Unlike Larry who is motivated by the viral impact of his posts online, Francene highlighted on multiple occasions that she was ultimately interested in the impact her online actions would have for her community offline.

When I asked who she thought was doing a good job in the fitness industry online, the distinction was immediate "Like in terms of selling themselves and being successful with Instagram or actually making an impactful difference in the fitness world? Because I think those two are very different" (FRANCENE, 12/9/19). Francene said one of her personal goals in the fitness industry is "to get a barbell into as many hands as possible", a goal that has many potential routes to success. More career-oriented participants with similar goals, such as megsquats, accomplished them by exposing more people to their online training programs, coaching options, or apparel brands, with the main medium of transmission being social media. For Francene, this goal was achieved through volunteering for the powerlifting community offline.

> To kind of like talk the talk, walk the walk, I got certified to be a powerlifting referee. I got approved to be a meet director so I can put on powerlifting meets in my area. And then I just became the state chair of a powerlifting federation for my area so that I have the resources to actually get a barbell into more hands and give people the platform to compete.

Being a full-time nurse enables and constrains how Francene uses Instagram in various ways. Having a stable career outside of the online fitness industry gives Francene more freedom to ignore certain Instagram strategies that are either unintuitive or uncomfortable, since she does not rely on income generated from the growth of her page. For example, Francene ignores the Instagram Insights feature, which many Career Crafters rely on to evaluate posts and segment their audience. “I have looked at analytics in the past, and I'll be really honest, I think they're kind of silly […] I don't try to pay that much attention to it because it doesn’t really make that much sense to me anyways.” The use of this feature was not particularly intuitive to Francene, since she felt that the relative success of one post over another was fairly random. Unlike those whose careers are pinned to the success of their Instagram account, the trade-off for ignoring the feature was low.

Francene takes a similar approach toward posting content on Instagram. When asked what her strategy is for posting content she replied,

> I don't know that there is, sometimes there isn’t. I feel like there's no rhyme or reason. Sometimes I’ll just kind of be in a cheeky mood and put like a funny movie quote under the picture […] some people put a lot of thought into their captions and want to really, you know, elaborate on their life stories or how they were feeling when they were lifting. I don't typically dig that deep mostly because I don't like sharing a lot of personal information on social media.

Unlike other participants, Francene has a fairly relaxed posting strategy, relatively free from demands such as posting frequency, segmenting her audience with varied content, and constant

self-exposure. This does not mean that no strategy exists, but there is less of need to develop a market rationalized system of production than others with more financial exposure to the market.

Having full-time work outside of Instagram also constrains certain actions that Francene would otherwise like to take if more time and resources were available.

> Influencers who have people legit follow them in the gym with awesome videography gear, it's pretty impressive. I just don't really have the time or resources to commission someone to do that. So not that I don't, I don't know that I would really want that either because I feel like the videos I make in the gym, a lot of it, I end up just sending to my coach to get feedback on form.

Despite having a different occupational trajectory than Career Crafters, Francene is still able to recognize and, on some occasions, envy the strategies of full-time Influencers and creators. Employment outside of the fitness field does not preclude Influencers and creators from sharing aesthetic taste with those that invest full-time, but it does limit their choices to strategies that are most helpful and convenient.

3.3.2.3 Frank

Frank is a strongman competitor, who started using Instagram so he could share videos from his competitions with his friends and family. Similar to calisthenics, strongman as a sport is viral-friendly when it comes to its distribution on social media and cable television. The sport involves feats of strength such as truck dragging, keg tossing, log pressing and stone lifting. It is one of the few strength sports currently shown on ESPN through the annual World's Strongest Man competition. Along with being a competitive strongman, Frank is also a video game streamer on the platform Twitch, as well as an energy drink reviewer. Frank currently has a full-time job at a video game retail store but has long-term career goals of becoming a professional strongman or strongman coach.

Frank told me that the transition from simply being an athlete on Instagram to also being a content creator was not totally intentional. At first it was just about recording his lifting, “I just post on social media to kind of archive it and saw that I was getting more and more followers. It's just one of those things that I didn't focus purely on, like getting followers” (FRANK, 12/11/19). Once his page started to grow, he was able to pick up a few sponsorships which only somewhat changed his approach to posting on Instagram. “They do want you to post a little bit about your sponsorships every once in a while. So that's the only social media requirement that I have. Other than that, it’s my personal social media where I just kinda post here and there and talk to people and that’s about it.” For Frank this means posting content when he wants to, without a strict system of content production outside of expectations from his sponsors.

Despite this fairly relaxed approach, Frank has still invested in some strategies to grow his following, such as doing research on the most effective hashtags to use in posts. “That was the big one. I've got groupings of hashtags, like really popular ones saved on my phone. So if those hashtags pertain to that day's post, then I'll use some of them.” Another research topic was the optimal frequency for posting sponsored content. “I did a little bit of research on the internet, just Googled it, about how often to post about sponsored content, and most of the places I saw was one to two times a week […] you don't want to take away from what makes you, you.” Frank’s full-time job outside of the online fitness industry does not preclude him from being interested in, and even implementing, similar strategies used by Career Crafters, but it does limit the amount of strategies that can be invested in at once and the intensity of investment in each strategy. When I asked if he used the Insights feature, he responded, “Uh, no. I probably should, but I mean if it grows, it grows. I understand that you can make social media and content creating a full-time job, but at the end of the day, right now it's not paying my bills.” In line with

both Larry and Francene, Frank's full-time job also gives the ability to ignore strategies that he knows would be helpful but does not have the time or interest to pursue.

The relative reprieve from market pressures also means that Frank does not need to specialize in a niche that is likely to have high financial returns and can instead develop his own personal brand around what he enjoys and is passionate about. Speaking about how he incorporates his energy drink reviews into his page about strongman and video game streaming, Frank said, "it's just what I do for fun […] Video gamers aren't going to look at lifting videos or lifting people probably won't look at video games. There are people that don't lift or play video games that drink energy drinks all the time. So having three different, I guess types of content can help kind of spread that whole potential following." Frank's perceived growth strategy is based around enjoyment and accurately representing who he is offline rather than immediate financial gain.

3.3.3 *Risk Reducers*

Naturally, there were Influencers and creators that were not neatly crafting careers or pursuing passions. In my sample, these cases had roughly two different origins, but they both resulted in seeing one's Instagram page as an investment that might be capitalized on in the future. A clear example of this is participants that had full-time jobs as social media managers or content producers for gyms and fitness companies. This often meant that many of the market rationalized systems and strategies they learned and used through their work would spill over into their personal accounts quite naturally. Their relatively stable employment shielded them from market exposure personally, but the nature of their work was intimately embedded with the online fitness industry. This created cases where many career crafting strategies were used successfully, but further commercialization was halted by the time constraints familiar to those

pursuing passions. Due to their acquired skills, these participants felt like they could make a career out of their own personal pages if they wanted to and continued to develop their pages in the present as a way to keep that option open.

Unlike the Career Crafters that were still holding on to some of their in-person clients while looking for a relatively immediate transition into coaching fully online, others had more distant goals of turning their Instagram page into some form of business but did not yet have a clear plan of action. In many cases, these were university students, or young workers who started their page as a personal hobby but gained popularity quicker than expected. This initial growth triggered a more active engagement in developing systems and strategies, but there was no specific career to craft. While these young adults were uncertain about their futures, they saw their successful Instagram accounts as a potential career option down the road. They saw the work they were doing in the present of growing their page and attracting sponsorships as an investment in their uncertain future.

3.3.3.1 Jill

When I spoke to Jill, she was in the middle of switching jobs and had just relocated from Los Angeles back to her hometown. Jill spent the past three years working as the social media manager for an online fitness company and was now transitioning into a new role as a sales manager for a supplement company. The job posting for the fitness company, which she found on Instagram, was originally for a customer support role, but after being hired she was quickly moved into social media management. “I think I had 17,000 [followers] just naturally from posting CrossFit and workout stuff. And then the content creation people, they literally were just like, we feel like this is your strength and so we're going to push you into this role” (JILL,

1/16/20). Jill's role as a social media manager included, "creating recipes, selling eBooks and then doing videos for YouTube and […] turning out all the content creation around Instagram."

Jill used the unique resources available through her employment to develop content production strategies and learn about the online fitness market. One example of this was through personal development. Jill's company paid for her integrative nutrition certification which gave her more knowledge to better inform client management for her company, but it also allowed her to take on nutrition clients through her personal Instagram page.

> I do plan on keeping my personal brand and just using it to be myself on and help people and wherever that goes. My two bosses want to also help me to grow that, which is interesting […] they're like, 'you have so much knowledge and this could be something that you make money on if you do a six-week program around hormones.' […] I don't know yet what that would look like or when I'll have time to do it. But that is something that I would like to do at some point cause I do think that there's money to be made there.

This is not only important because it helped Jill distinguish her personal brand through industry-recognized expertise, but it also allowed her to start a side business while working full-time, shielding her from market pressures common to many new entrepreneurs. However, the market protection comes with the trade-off of investing her time in her job rather than her personal page.

Another example of Jill's use of company resources stems from the content production process. Jill had access to expensive cameras, videographers, lighting equipment, and editing software, which gave her the opportunity to evaluate the return on investment on these means of production without having to invest herself.

> It really depends. Sometimes a professional video will crush it, and sometimes a video with no makeup on, doing a workout outside on the iPhone crushes it. It's really weird. It's just testing things where a company would test literally anything and see how people react to it and what the sales look like from it.

This uncertainty around the effectiveness of expensive production equipment versus using an iPhone was common among my participants, but Jill was one of the few who could learn this without investing between $200 and $1000.

It was fairly easy for Jill to take her work experience and apply it to her personal account, which she often described as natural and intuitive. When asked about how she decides when to post sponsored content on her personal page she said, “I just do what I feel is best.” I followed up by asking her to give an example of what it would look like to advertise for sponsored products too often.

> I guess it's more just subconsciously, I'm not super conscious about it, but I also know that I need to be, it can’t be a swipe up every single story. I need to also just be like, ‘Hey, here's my dog.’ Or, ‘here's me working out.’ So the people are like, ‘okay, I know this girl, I trust her.’ […] it's not something, again that I planned out. I think it's just like intuitively I'm living my life and I'm kind of filming it and then eventually a swipe up will pop in there cause I'm using that product.

The Instagram story feature allows users to post photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. The swipe up feature within Instagram stories allows users to link to an external website embedded in the post that will activate if the viewer swipes up on their screen. When Jill is referring to a swipe this is a post on her story that is explicitly advertising for a sponsored product. Her past experience in the field, both personally and through her work, aligned her personal tastes around advertising frequency with the rules of the game to the degree that it felt unconscious.

Along with time constraints, the experience and tools Jill gained from working as a social media manager also came with reservations about the online fitness industry that have currently dissuaded her from making a career out of her personal page.

> I think the money will be there for sure. But […] on a daily basis, my biggest question is, do we look good in this video? Is this video going to get sales? And for me, mentally it's not a good mind space to be in. Every time we have a photo shoot, I might come back feeling a little bit worse about myself and I've done a lot of work around that and I feel like I have a healthy relationship with my body and food and fitness, but it's still just so prevalent and when it's my whole life and my career, it's really hard to get out of that mindset.

The result is the continual investment in her personal page with the awareness that it could be capitalized on in the future, but without a clear plan to do so. Jill's recent job change from social media manager to sales manager may indicate the need to step away from social media in a professional setting, although it has not stopped her from taking on personal nutrition clients and regularly posting on her personal Instagram page.

3.3.3.2 Patricia

Patricia is a 20-year-old student who is working as a nutritionist for a supermarket while finishing her nutrition science degree at university. Although she has been using Instagram for a number of years, she made the switch to a dedicated fitness account in the summer of 2019. Accepting her job as a nutritionist meant having to move away from her hometown, which motivated her to start her fitness account. "I had to move like 400 miles away from home and didn't know anyone. So I thought I was gonna use it as a hobby" (PATRICIA, 4/2/20). Patricia's account has grown fairly quickly and is changing from simply being a hobby to something that might turn into a career investment. "Only in the last couple of months I've felt a bit more influence-y because I sometimes work with brands." She has developed a few successful strategies, but has struggled in other areas of her page, making her future plans ultimately uncertain.

One of the successful strategies that Patricia has invested in is engagement groups. “So you'll have groups of people that like each other's posts, comment on each other's posts, support each other […] I would, buy a guide, by an influencer. And then they would have their own private Facebook page and then I'd be part of that and then people would post about groups and things.” These engagement groups helped Patricia grow her following and appeal to brands because they focus on everyone in the group engaging with each other’s posts which makes those posts more likely to be ranked highly in Instagram’s search algorithm. Brands tend to look at engagement ratios (usually the difference between number of total followers and likes and/or comments on a post) because they see it as a more accurate predictor of how likely a follower will become a customer than total follower count alone.

Despite having a successful engagement and growth strategy, Patricia has struggled to come up with a content production system that is time efficient and high quality. Patricia also wants to produce high quality content with an educational component, often in the form of recipes or workout videos.

> It's been difficult to say the least. It feels like one of these things that’s going to just be so easy. Just post a video of you working out online. It's not at all. Cause even being in a gym like filming at an angle where someone's going to be able to understand how you set up. And then also editing, like have you filmed enough for it to work? The tempo, everything, adding music so it's actually entertaining. And then uploading, Instagram always has a fit every time it's the wrong size or too many gigabytes […] I never used to do workout videos and I just didn't know anything. Um, so I just Googled things along the way and kind of built my own way of doing things. So I might not necessarily do it the way that it should be done, but I guess I'll just do it how I should feel is easy.

Without the guidance of a business coach or an employer in the online fitness industry, Patricia has to learn through trial and error. Similarly, without relying on her Instagram page as a primary

source of income, there are not immediate market pressures that would require her to quickly learn the most efficient content production methods.

Although she is willing to invest most of her free time into her account at the moment, some of the more frustrating aspects of Instagram make her unsure if she wants a career as a fitness Influencer and creator.

> "I've got other focuses I guess, right now in life. So although it's fun and it's like my downtime at the same time, I have to be realistic and think, how much can I actually do with this right now? And I wouldn't want it to not be fun, but one day if I did that, it would, it could potentially one day make that shift and I don't know how I'll feel about that."

Using her knowledge of the field, Patricia realizes that if she did make it a full-time career that she would likely also need to be a personal trainer, which would require further certification.

> I'd love to make my page actually more useful with like science-based research and like nutrition and things like that […] once I qualify I can then speak about those things and also obviously the hand in hand is personal training. So potentially there is the potential to grow into more of a business, but I'm not 100% sure whether that's something that I'll do, something that I've thought of, but not necessarily something that I'll do.

Patricia is a Risk Reducer because her approach does not sit easily with Career Crafters or Passion Pursuers. She is interested in investing in strategies to make her account grow, and unlike Passion Pursuers, she is willing to endure a certain amount of frustration to put out the best quality content possible. However, unlike a typical Career Crafter, she is both a student and has a full-time job that currently limit her possibilities as an Influencer and creator. Patricia is

uncertain about her future career but is aware that there could be a career to make out of her presence on Instagram, which rationalizes her present investment.

3.4 Discussion

The strategies used by fitness Influencers and creators on Instagram appear homogenous at the level of the commercialized, cultural field but become more heterogeneous once we account for occupational trajectory as a form of social position. These findings contribute to conversations about what strategies exist for fitness Influencers and creators and who they are available for. Against the linear playbook model that offers one set of sequential strategies seemingly available to everyone, the analysis of occupational trajectory taken up in this chapter demonstrates that not all strategies are equally available. Further, as an intervention into debates around personal or industrial strategies, these findings suggest that neither can fully explain the types of strategies adopted by fitness Influencers and creators. Using occupational trajectory as a starting point helps to understand how exactly both personal and industrial strategies are enacted by highlighting which of these strategies are available for use. The rapid commercialization of Instagram as a platform is suggested by some as an explanation for unified motivations of fitness Influencers and creators in the form of financial gain, as well as being the cause for a distinct logic of labor performed on the platform. My findings not only point to divergent motivations for fitness Influencers and creators based on their occupational trajectory, but also demonstrate how the actual enactment of strategies can vary significantly despite roughly ascribing to the same cultural logic of entrepreneurship and risk.

The biggest divisions between those with occupations associated with their Instagram accounts, and those working jobs outside the online fitness industry were free time and exposure to market risk. Often, strategies such as the systems work of posting regularly, having thoughtful

captions, and scheduling out content was recognized as valuable regardless of occupational position. The difference between the groups arose around those that had the time and desire to enact them. This shows that despite being in different social positions, both groups of Influencers and creators had a sense of the game, despite different interpretations about how to play by the rules. Although it is certainly the case that commercialization has produced an Instagram industry, transforming amateur techniques into market rationalized, or industrial practices, those that are shielded from market exposure due to their full-time jobs outside of the online fitness industry, often cannot or do not need to compete at an industrial pace of content production.

A desire for increased attention and page growth existed for many of my participants, but not all of them could pursue this goal as they pleased. Where Career Crafters often felt market pressure to grow their pages, as they were directly related to their business, Passion Pursuers and Risk Reducers had more freedom to tailor their strategies around those they enjoyed while neglecting the strategies they found bothersome. Considering enjoyment as a factor that shapes strategies also helps explain why systematic, industrial practices are less common among Passion Pursuers than Career Crafters. Larry, for example, is motivated by his enjoyment of making viral calisthenics videos as well as the attention and page growth that comes with it. Setting the scene of the video, figuring out which tricks to do, are all content production strategies that not only help the video go viral, but that Larry enjoys. However, other aspects of Instagram content production, such as writing the caption or using appropriate hashtags, are not similarly invested in, despite Larry acknowledging their importance. Larry's full-time job as an engineer gives him the freedom to only invest in aspects of strategies that he enjoys, limiting the degree and quantity of market rationalized, industrial practices.

To draw from Abidin's categories of Influencer qualities (2018), Larry is certainly exceptional, with his calisthenics skill essential to going viral. However, by understanding his occupational trajectory we can more certainly say that an increase in Larry's skill, or general exceptionalism, is unlikely to make him more successful as an Influencer or creator at the level of follower count or revenue. At the same time, an industry-level approach that focuses on business deals and industrialized practices may misinterpret Larry's appearance on the talent show as a professionalization strategy. Occupational trajectory clarifies the role that his exceptionalism plays in his success while recoding a potentially industrial practice of appearing on a television game show as simply a fun activity since his full-time job restricts the resources and desire to further professionalize on Instagram.

The findings in this chapter confirm and develop the claim by Khamis et al. (2017) that strategies of self-branding are connected to the status of labor markets. Although the findings affirm the existence of fitness Influencers and creators across a wide range of occupational trajectories it is ultimately labor market conditions that shape what that range looks like. Fitness Influencers and creators with unstable or part-time jobs were more likely to be either Career Crafters or Risk Reducers than Passion Pursuers, pointing to labor precarity, either currently experienced or anticipated, as having at least some impact on the form of self-branding adopted. Due to the aspirational nature of being a fitness Influencer or creator, where it is often difficult to predict when investments will pay off, it was rare to be fully unemployed without either being in school or receiving support from family. This points to the Influencer and creator economy relying on forms of underemployment similar to the gig economy (Benanav, 2019). In the next chapter, I take the considerations of social position and occupational trajectory and map the genre ecology of Instagram fitness. This approach offers a way to see what the inherited

commercialized cultural field of fitness looks like on Instagram and helps explain the relationship between the form and function of fitness content and the sociotechnical affordances of Instagram.

Chapter 4. THE GENRE ECOLOGY OF INSTAGRAM FITNESS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters I discussed how social position and occupational trajectory informs the various beliefs and strategies of fitness Influencers and creators in the online fitness industry. In this chapter I turn toward Theresa Heyd's dual model of genre ecology (2009) as a way to explain the form and function these beliefs and strategies take on Instagram. This model has three main components which include the generic antecedent, supergenre, and subgenres. Concerning both language and social action, genre works in tandem with social position as a force that shapes the possibility for action. By drawing on my interview data and analyzing the captions of Instagram posts by fitness Influencers and creators, I make two claims: the first is that despite the focus on the visual components of Instagram as a platform, and fitness as a genre, Influencers and creators rely heavily on textual production and discursive narrative when producing Instagram content. Second, the way that fitness Influencers and creators tailor their content for their perceived audiences is shaped by their social position and occupational trajectory. Drawing on Carolyn Miller's rhetorical approach to genre, and her call for better understanding the relationship between sociotechnical affordances and generic antecedents (Miller et al., 2018), I map the genre ecology of Instagram fitness.

The first step in mapping this genre ecology is identifying the generic antecedent of Instagram fitness, which refers to past genres of fitness content that have influenced how fitness is produced on Instagram today. As mentioned in the introduction, fitness has always been visually and textually mediated. Early instantiations of fitness culture online flourished in magazines and message boards, which serve as the generic antecedent for the contemporary supergenre of Instagram fitness. Textual production on Instagram found its way into the caption

and comments sections of posts, despite the variety of sociotechnical affordances that categorize Instagram as a distinctly visual platform. This combination of textual and visual production forms the supergenre of Instagram fitness which functions to describe and display exercise, motivate and educate audiences to adopt fitness-related behaviors, and build personal connection between the Influencer/creator and their fans. These functions are expressed through the subgenre forms of workout posts, infographics/how-to posts, and before and after posts that are both influenced by and deviant from generic antecedents of Instagram fitness.

These subgenres not only serve to diversify Influencer and creator content, but also to distinguish them among their peers. It is here that relative social position plays a role in the uptake of these multiple subgenres. Although subgenres of Instagram fitness are shared by Influencers and creators from different social positions, how they perform social action through these subgenres is distinct. The majority of this distinction occurs in the captions section of the Instagram post where Influencers and creators connect with their audience based on if and how they use Instagram as a revenue source. This view offers an analysis of genre as social action that does not overly constrain actors by the bounds of formalism. Instead, the functional approach to the genre ecology of Instagram fitness demonstrates how these actions are both distinct and constrained.

4.2 Instagram and the Visual

When interviewing participants about their specific strategies on social media I was initially puzzled by how much they emphasized the written captions of their Instagram posts. While there was plenty of talk about the right poses, lighting, and outfits, they also emphasized phrasing, word choice, and caption organization. When asked what the most important aspect of an Instagram post was, 12 of my 41 interview participants said the caption and 14 said that the

photo and caption were equally important, or they could not decide. This meant that over half of my participants suggested that the photo alone was not sufficiently communicative. When asked to explain their choice, participants often said that while the photo might help bring new followers to their page or attract attention, the caption was where they really provided value, which varied in meaning from education to inspiration, personal connection, or advertisement.

This was surprising at first because most of the scholarly work about Instagram highlights its visual features and affordances. The name itself is a portmanteau of the words "instant camera" and "telegram" suggesting the communicative nature of sharing photography through a social network. Nathan Jurgenson argues that applications such as Instagram and Snapchat create what he calls social photography. "What fundamentally makes a photo a social photo is the degree to which its existence as a stand-alone media object is subordinate to its existence as a unit of communication" (Jurgenson, 2019, p. 9). A similar argument is made by Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield, and Crystal Abidin in their book, *Instagram*. "The *communication* that photography allowed, rather than fidelity to the photographic form, is at the very root of the platform's success" (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 9). This framing seemed to suggest that Instagram affords the image with a unique quality of communicability supported by platform affordances of spreadability and sociality.

Scholars studying visual rhetoric, such as Robert Hariman and John Luis Lucaites, have also analyzed the communicative capacity of images. In their book, *No Caption Needed,* Hariman and Lucaites offer a valuable analysis of how iconic images such as Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* and Jeff Widener's *Tank Man* communicate social knowledge, and present five vectors of influence for iconic photography: "reproducing ideology, communicating social knowledge, shaping collective memory, modeling citizenship and providing figural resources for

social action" (2007, p. 9). More recently, they have addressed the role of the iconic photo in digital media by comparing it to the rhetorical power of memes suggesting they are, "both plastic and polysemous, as well as grounded in appropriation, evoking active spectatorship and pluralistic responses, and working through decontextualization and recontextualization" (2018, p. 322). Hariman and Lucaites offer an insightful model for how images communicate social knowledge, despite the fact that captions are indeed needed for Instagram fitness.

The blending of the iconic image and the meme create what Leaver et al. (2020) call templates which circulate on Instagram through the Discover feature. "Templates, we argue, are not cultural norms, nor hegemonic, but are visually memorable and memorizable visual stylings, settings and practices that can be replicated with relative ease to the extent that they become, for a period of time, iconic" (p. 214). The Discover feature allows users to see similar content they already engage with, but from pages they do not currently follow. This can create a feedback loop because Influencers and creators want to be shown on the Discover feature in order to grow their following which leads to an adoption of visual templates perceived to be popular. For the genre of Instagram fitness, an example of an iconic template is the gym mirror selfie. These shots are often taken after a workout in a mirror either on the gym floor or in the locker room and will generally include the Influencer or creator striking a pose or flexing their muscles. Although this example of an iconic template demonstrates belonging to the fitness genre of Instagram content creation, my participants needed to communicate more information than the template alone allowed. It was the caption that completed the template, providing it with the capacity to express the vectors of influence mentioned by Hariman and Lucaites.

Although most of the literature studying the production and circulation of fitness content on social media focuses on images (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Fung et al., 2019; Jin et al.,

2018; Slater et al., 2017), Josie Reade's work on fitness Influencers on Instagram offers one example of how the image and caption operate together to produce these vectors of influence. Reade's work suggests that many fitness Influencers are invested in posting "authentic" content both in the sense of an honest narrative of one's life and experience but also in the sense of the image being unedited and unfiltered. Reade points out that the caption will often include a statement that the photo is unedited and an explanation of why that aspect of the photo is important. Captions can also be places for "'real talk' about topics such as mental and physical health, body image, competition preparation and recovery" (p. 14). Adopting the iconic template of the gym mirror selfie, my participant Patricia details this process. "I work 50-hour weeks, so I go to the gym in the evening, take a photo in the toilet and then post that and then just try and post [in the caption] something that was going to be of use to someone or post what my workout was" (PATRICIA, 4/2/20). The quick mirror selfie in the bathroom of the gym, and the relatively short caption were all authentic expressions of Patricia's life and the amount of time she could dedicate to content creation.

Understanding how fitness Influencers and creators use images and captions to produce content on Instagram not only serves as a way to describe and map Instagram fitness, but it also offers a unique case for studying sociotechnical affordances. How do we explain the persistence of text-based narratives on a platform that centers the visual? If, as Nagy and Neff (2015) suggest, affordances are imagined as much as they are materially available, then genre as social action (Miller, 1984) can play a role in shaping the possible. Mapping the genre ecology of Instagram fitness shows how fitness Influencers and creators imagine the affordances and features of Instagram and offers one answer for why the caption plays such an important role in the Instagram post.

4.3 Genre Ecology

In order to analyze and map Instagram fitness, I use Theresa Heyd's dual model of genre ecology (2009), which comes from the tradition of rhetorical genre studies (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010). In this model, the ecology of genre is divided horizontally and vertically, and made up of three different components: a generic antecedent, a supergenre, and subgenres. In this case, Instagram fitness is a supergenre functionally defined as documenting and communicating fitness and with clear genre antecedents from the history of fitness magazines and message boards. On the relationship between supergenres and subgenres Heyd writes that "functional entities tend to act as holistic supergenres and formal instantiations constitute the more atomistic subgenres," (Heyd, 2009, p. 244) and that, "functionally defined supergenres are medially stable and have relatively clear genre antecedents in pre-digital discourse, whereas formally defined subcategories are more diverse" (p. 241). The dual model of genre ecology helps explain both the stability and instability of genres as they are produced through new ICTs.

Three different subgenres of the Instagram fitness supergenre discussed in this chapter are: workout posts, infographics/how-to posts, and before and after motivation posts. To identify and better understand the production of these subgenres, I analyzed the Instagram posts of my participants and compared those with posts from some of the most popular fitness Influencers on Instagram. Since these Influencers have the largest followings within the field, they represent what most users are likely to see when searching for fitness content on Instagram. While these subgenres reproduce the function of the supergenre of Instagram, they are less medially stable meaning that they are more influenced by genres outside of fitness. In Patricia's case, for example, she often relied on the iconic visual template of the bathroom mirror selfie which spans many different genres found on Instagram. However, she mentioned that her captions were still

related to what her workout, suggesting that despite the post sharing visual forms with other genres, it still served the function of the Instagram fitness supergenre.

Applying Heyd's dual model of genre ecology to Instagram fitness responds to Miller et al. (2018) in their call for a better understanding of the relationship between sociotechnical affordances and generic antecedents. By providing a model of how generic antecedents impact the function of supergenres, there is a distinction between genre as an inherited structure for action and the sociotechnical affordances of platforms, such as Instagram, that may facilitate the creation of new genres. In the case of Instagram fitness, this model allows us to ask how the history of mediated fitness content through magazines and message boards impacts the form and function of Instagram fitness today. More specifically, it helps explain why so many of the fitness Influencers and creators in my sample relied on the text-based features of a platform that affords image-based visibility. In Heyd's own application of the dual model to the genre of digital folklore and its transmission via email, she argues that "the technicalities of email as a sociotechnical mode can therefore be said to afford the phenomena of Digital Folklore" (2009, p. 251). By applying the model to Instagram fitness, we see an example where the mode of communication affords the phenomena both because of, and in spite of, its sociotechnical affordances.

The vertical division between supergenre and subgenre is also valuable for this project because it allows for an analysis of how the production of subgenres varies among producers. As the previous two chapters have demonstrated there is an unequal distribution of beliefs and strategies among fitness Influencers and creators which suggests that the form their content takes will differ as well. By taking examples of the most popular fitness Influencers and comparing them with content from Influencers and creators from my sample, it allows for a range of content

and demonstrates how social position and occupational trajectory can create variation in those forms. The next sections maps the genre ecology of Instagram fitness, starting with generic antecedents and moving to the supergenre and subgenres.

4.4 Generic Antecedents of Instagram Fitness

Despite the often blunt focus on appearance, fitness culture has rarely relied on the image alone. Only recently has it even been possible to conceive of a fitness culture without the speech act or written artifact, due to new image-based social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram. However, this conception usually derives from an analysis based on sociotechnical affordances of these platforms, rather than an analysis of how they are actually used to produce fitness content. The accompaniment of the text is not because the body has nothing to say on its own, it often says quite a lot, but because text-based narratives can create distinction among competing actors in a commercialized social field. As addressed in the introduction, early forms of physical culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries served as a generic antecedent for Instagram fitness today. These antecedents not only shape the form that Instagram fitness takes today, but also how possibilities for social action are understood by Influencers and creators, and their audiences.

Jacqueline Reich provides one example of the narratives that emerged from this period in her analysis of the career of physical culturist and entrepreneur Charles Atlas, dubbed 'the world's most perfectly developed man' (Reich, 2010). As an Italian American immigrant in the inter-war period, Atlas looked up to figures such as Eugen Sandow, and gained fame in the physical culture community by winning a contest through Bernarr McFadden's popular magazine, *Physical Culture*. Atlas soon began working with an advertising agency to create his own fitness plan, dubbed Dynamic-Tension, that he would sell as a pamphlet. Reich focuses on

racialization and masculinity in her article, demonstrating how Atlas, born Angelo Siciliano, was able to use physical culture as a way to become a properly masculine and white American. Reich considers, “the Atlas fitness plan as a manual of formation of mainstream American masculine identity” (p. 445) which achieved success, “through the use of two emerging media, one visual and the other print: bodybuilding photography and the creation and marketing of his iconic fitness plan,” (p. 450). Advertisements for Dynamic-Tension included a comic strip of how Atlas used Dynamic-Tension to transform himself from a skinny, weak, child to a muscular and strong alpha male.

For Atlas, both the text and the image operate as mediums for sense-making and distinction. His fitness program was divided into 12 lessons, and each came with a story. As Reich points out, these stories were often filled with religious and masculine narratives that helped make sense of bodybuilding as a cultural practice. What distinguished Atlas’ fitness plan from contemporaries was his focus on bodyweight exercises and stretching over the use of barbells and weight machines that were popular at the time. To sell this approach as superior, Atlas used images (both photographs and comics) of his muscular body as a form of evidence, but he also used text to create persuasive narratives. For example, the origin story of Atlas’ Dynamic-Tension program suggests that Atlas was inspired to use bodyweight and stretching exercises by watching tigers and lions stretch and move at the Bronx Zoo. If the king of the jungle didn’t need barbells to get big and strong neither did humans.

Before the advent of social media platforms such as Instagram, fitness enthusiasts gathered on message boards and forums which rooted these communities in practices of image and text-based communication. The production of content on these message boards brought the fitness genre to a digital platform for the first time and represents the most immediate generic

antecedents to Instagram fitness due to the continuity of content and actors. One example of these communities and practices comes from Smith and Stewart (2012) who conducted a virtual ethnography of a bodybuilding and powerlifting forum. The authors outlined how text and image were used by members of the virtual community to maintain or increase their cultural and symbolic capital. "Whereas the accumulation of cultural capital was built on the back of knowledge and supported by tangible muscle, symbolic capital could be acquired through something as simple as posting an impressive photo along with a post" (p. 980). Not only does this example demonstrate the form of online fitness content, but it also hints at how text-based narratives within fitness content varies among producers.

While there were clear community norms around valued fitness behaviors such as workout and diet instruction, there was a discursive social hierarchy between junior and senior members of the forum. "Senior members of the forum assumed the right to judge those who did not perform on the social field," while, "junior players in the social field offered ingratiating posts to those with power" (p. 975). This suggests that not all forms of content production are available to all members equally, pointing to the type of post that one makes as indicative of their social position. As the previous two chapters have argued, beliefs and strategies for fitness Influencers and creators are not evenly distributed, and this example suggests that the same is true for access to particular forms of fitness content.

Beyond impacting the genre of Instagram fitness, forums and message boards also impacted beliefs and strategies of a number of my participants who saw the production of fitness content on social media as an extension of what they had already been doing for a number of years online. One in particular was Quinton:

> I would seek out a lot of information on lifting weights, getting stronger and building muscle. And one of the places I found myself coming upon was the message boards. And so that was kind of an early form of social media in so far as you can post pictures and you can have a dialogue with people, exchange ideas, have debates, that sort of thing that we all know about and do on social media today. I started doing that back in 2001 (Quinton, 5/1/20).

Quinton's experience highlights the continuity of the visual and textual for communicating fitness online, as well as how genre stabilizes across mediums. It was Quinton's direct engagement with posting on fitness message boards that informed how he later posted on Instagram. In other words, he very directly brought the genre with him. Quinton is also an example of how exposure to generic antecedents can impact who gets to be a fitness Influencer and creator. What Quinton learned through his engagement with message boards informed his beliefs about what social media was for and shaped how he produced content on Instagram.

These examples bring up two important aspects of the relationship between sociotechnical affordances and generic antecedents. The first is that throughout the changes in medium, from magazines to online forums, the communication of fitness has always included a textual or discursive component to complement visual displays of the body. These components serve to create discursive communities and help make sense of exchanged images. The second aspect speaks to the particular relationship between the social and the technical for the commercialized cultural field of fitness. The production of fitness on Instagram is unique because it is the first time the genre has stabilized on a medium that was designed primarily for image-based content. As we will see in the next two sections, this stabilization has occurred because users continue to rely on the limited text-based features of Instagram, primarily in the caption section of posts.

4.5 Instagram Fitness Supergenre

The previous case studies show both the past composition of the commercialized cultural field of fitness, while also showing how, and through what mediums, it was communicated. This section addresses the contemporary supergenre of Instagram fitness by outlining its various functions and highlighting the relative stability of these functions in the generic antecedents presented in the previous section. For Heyd, supergenres, "can be defined solely through aspects such as communicant motivation, communication pathway, and pragmatic effect" (2009, p. 251). These are the components of Instagram fitness that are historically consistent through the transition from non-digital to digital communication mediums such as social media. This does not mean that all functional components have always operated to the same degree and in the same way as they do for Instagram fitness, but rather that Instagram fitness can be reasonably argued to be a summation of these past iterations.

Although understanding communicant motivation can be difficult, the previous two chapters on social position and occupational trajectory offer one way to understand why fitness Influencers, creators, and fans produce content. While there is a unified desire to engage with the online fitness community by posting on social media, these engagements vary at the level of professionalization. For fitness professionals such as Sellers and Career Crafters, content creation was about engaging the community in order to promote a self-brand or business. Sharers and Passion Pursuers, on the other hand, wanted to share their personal fitness journeys and find a like-minded community. This group also included athletes who wanted to share training footage with their coaches or fellow athletes. The degree to which these pursuits are professional or commercial is navigated through the caption section of Instagram posts where Influencers and creators show their audience how to read and make sense of their content.

For those that were professionally motivated, we can trace generic antecedents from Charles Atlas and Jane Fonda, through to the fitness Influencer and creator on Instagram today. All of these actors produced and distributed fitness content in order to make money, but they also served the purpose of educating about fitness, demonstrating fitness, and motivating others to exercise. For the amateurs that wanted to share their journey and find community the strongest generic antecedent is the forum and message board communities, but there is also a connection to pre-digital forms through the various contests and challenges that fitness magazines would host. This is particularly true for Charles Atlas who became a fitness professional through winning a contest hosted in Bernarr McFadden's magazine, *Physical Culture*. Athletes have long attracted sponsorships and commercial opportunities due to their social position, however the production of educational and descriptive content from athletes themselves is less common. *Pumping Iron*, was an exception to this because it documented the lives and training of many professional bodybuilders, including Arnold Schwarzenegger, leading up to the Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia bodybuilding competitions. For many fans and fitness enthusiasts alike this back-stage content served as a form of workout demonstration, education, and motivation.

Instagram fitness reproduces itself primarily through users creating, sharing, and engaging with fitness content on Instagram. Although the focus here is on Influencers and creators, there is no Instagram fitness without fans, both at the level of cultural and commercial production. Fitness content spreads on Instagram by users choosing to follow fitness accounts, which triggers the platform to suggest more fitness content through the Discover feature, as well as exposure to more fitness-related advertisements. These pathways of communication create segmentation and specialization of content on the platform, providing users the ability to curate what they are exposed to on Instagram. Users adopt features such as hashtags, tagging, mentions,

and comments to bring specific individuals and communities together through the production of content. While these modes of communication are similar to those found on message boards and forums, the choice of following certain fitness Influencers and creators is similar to subscribing to a fitness magazine.

Aside from the technical pathways through which Instagram fitness is communicated, its circulation and growth would not be possible without certain material conditions of its users. Income made through advertisements and personal businesses provides the material support necessary for Influencers and creators to set community norms for the quality and quantity of content produced. This is what Marx refers to as socially necessary labor time as it is not the quality or quantity of Instagram fitness content produced by any one Influencer or creator, but the social average, realized at the level of community, that sets the standard. As we saw in the previous chapter this quality and quantity can change drastically among fitness Influencers and creators, due largely to their occupational trajectory. These distinctions among fitness Influencers and creators generally mean that as popularity increases, reach across platforms grows as well, suggesting the blurred edges of Instagram fitness as a genre ecology interacting with other platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

It is also worth considering the question of barriers to entry for the genre ecology of Instagram fitness, as this is often cited as a unique quality of digital ICTs such as social media platforms. Barriers to entry are important for the communication pathways of Instagram fitness because they impact the number of participants through which the genre can spread, as well as how many pathways pass through each user. It is certainly the case that more people can participate in Instagram fitness than previous generic antecedents, as the costs of creating an Instagram account and posting fitness content are relatively low. However, this owes as much to

social media as it does to decreasing costs of smartphones, widespread access to wireless internet, and the consistent growth of health and fitness facilities starting in the 1970s as part of the first fitness boom (Millington, 2016). Despite these new opportunities for visual and discursive participation, one stable and functional components that Instagram fitness shares with antecedent genres is the stars, gurus, and professionals that persist as points of convergence for many communication pathways of Instagram fitness.

The pragmatic effect, or outcome of these motivations and communication pathways is the creation of a commercialized cultural field of Instagram fitness. Based on the networks built through producing, sharing and engaging with Instagram fitness content, a variegated social field emerges through which genre is reproduced. These actions, along with the subsequent reactions of Instagram's algorithms, fill user feeds with a continual stream of fitness content leading to both an inadvertent and explicit specialization within the field. This capacity to specialize leads to large inequalities among Instagram fitness community members, with some rising to the level of being internet celebrities (Abidin, 2018). Due to the field's commercialization, the ability to build a career out of Instagram fitness is one aspect that it shares with previous fitness eras. There is further similarity in the types of content produced as well, which generally includes workouts, fitness education, motivation and personal connection. These types of content are transmedially stable throughout the history of fitness culture but take on new forms in the genre ecology of Instagram fitness.

4.6 Subgenres of Instagram Fitness

The form of Instagram fitness subgenres combines themes and structures imported from previous eras of fitness and from stylistic qualities native to Instagram more broadly, what Gibbs et al. call the platform vernacular (2015). Platform vernaculars are developed through "design,

appropriation, and use" (p. 257), in line with Hariman & Lucaites' iconic image sets of digital media (2018), and highlight how "genres and stylistic conventions emerge *within* social networks and how – through the context and process of reading – registers of meaning and affect are produced" (p. 258). Leaver et al. (2020), following Gibbs et al., have identified visual forms of Instagram's platform vernacular such as selfies, throwback posts, and pictures of pets, however, the focus here is primarily on the visual. The focus of this section is to include the visual component of the Instagram post, but primarily focus on the captions. Images and identifying hashtags have been redacted from content produced by my participants in order to maintain confidentiality. This serves to describe subgenre forms within Instagram fitness, and demonstrate how different performances of these subgenres are connected to the social position and occupational trajectory of the producer. Instagram fitness functions to demonstrate and educate about fitness, motivate audiences, and make personal connection. As a commercialized cultural field with high levels of personal branding, advertising pervades all of these functions such that it is difficult for content produced by a fitness Influencer or creator not to be identified as advertising. The form that these functions adopt all take on the platform vernacular of Instagram while also retaining aspects from previous eras of fitness. The forms discussed below include workout posts, how-to posts, infographics, and before and after posts.

4.6.1 *Workouts*

Posting an image or a video of a workout is an essential form of fitness content on Instagram. At a very basic level, it demonstrates how to exercise and what exercise should look like. Workout descriptions have been a staple within the commercialized cultural field of fitness for a long time, and at a functional level have remained transmedially stable. However, the workout post also takes many of its formal cues from a popular type of content from Influencers

outside the realm of fitness, which is the Outfit of the Day (OOTD) post. For fashion or lifestyle Influencers, the OOTD post connects Influencers with their audience by sharing detailed descriptions of outfits while also providing a natural way to advertise various brands and products. The workout post almost takes the form of a workout of the day and functions similarly by giving the audience an inside look into how the fitness Influencers or creators exercise as well as providing an opportunity to advertise a product or brand. Workout posts also follow the freemium model of content distribution popular in the digital economy today, where some content is offered for free, and others must be purchased. For fitness Influencers and creators, workout posts often serve as an example of the types of workouts provided in a workout plan or personal coaching service that they sell.

Figure 4.1 is an example of a workout video by popular fitness Influencer @ulissesworld (7.4 million followers) where he makes a post describing a leg workout.

Figure 4.1. @Ulissesworld, workout post

The five videos that make up the post demonstrate Ulisses performing various exercises which are listed in the caption. The caption is broken up into various thematic sections. The first part of the caption directs and orients the user, suggesting that they try the workout, as well as sharing and saving the post so they can refer to it later. Sharing and saving are relatively new features that are recorded and tracked through the Instagram Insights feature. Fitness Influencers and creators regularly mentioned the importance of tracking shares and saves not only because they thought it helped their posts rank higher on the Discover algorithm, but also because it indicated that their fans found their content valuable enough to save and return to later.

After explaining how to engage with the post, the second section records the exercises performed in the video which includes the total amount of sets and repetitions done for each exercise, since the entire workout is not recorded on video. The following section contains hashtags related to Ulisses' personal brands. These hashtags keep the post searchable for those using his hashtags, while also providing an advertising opportunity. The t-shirt worn in the workout videos is from Ulisses' apparel line, U Apparel, which is hashtagged in the caption as #uapparelarmy and #uapparelworld. The final section of the caption lists the creator of the music in the background of the video and tags the artist in order to easily direct user traffic to their page and avoid any potential copyright and fair use issues. Breaking the caption into segments and inserting emojis throughout the text is a strategy used by Influencers and creators to encourage the viewer to actually read the caption. Using an emoji to add a burst of color, or having short sentences spaced apart help the caption compete with the visual stimulus of the image or video. This segmented form of captioning has also come to signify a degree of professionalism. Many of my participants mentioned changing the composition of their captions once they decided to be more serious about using Instagram to make money.

As an established fitness Influencer with multiple businesses and websites, Ulisses does not need to rely on Instagram as his sole point of contact with customers, nor does he advertise a personal training service, meaning that he does not need to spend much time building personal connection with his audience, and his Instagram posts can mostly be descriptive and advertorial. On the spectrum of internet celebrity, with over seven million followers, Ulisses is closer to a mainstream celebrity than simply being famous on the internet. If we compare a similar workout post from one of my participants on the opposite side of the internet celebrity spectrum, we can see how personal connection weaves its way into the caption despite the post being primarily descriptive in nature.

Violet is relatively new to Instagram fitness, starting her account in 2019. At the time of our interview, she had 3,574 followers and was using Instagram to promote herself as a personal trainer offering both in-person and online training. Figure 4.2 is an example of the caption for typical workout post.

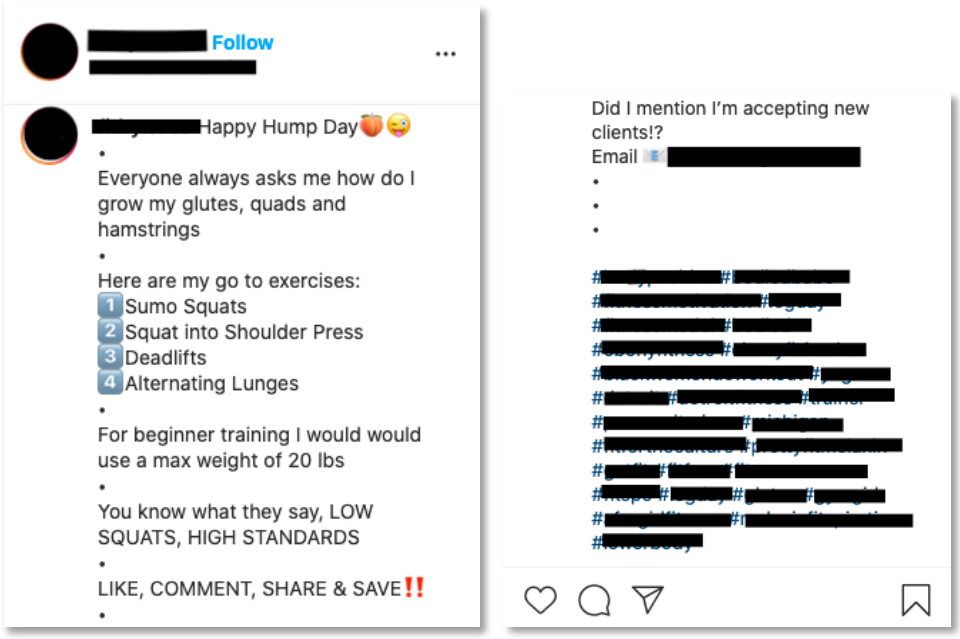

Figure 4.2. Violet, workout post.

The general layout of this post is similar to Ulisses in that they both have clear segments that include a mixture of text and emojis, beginning with orienting the audience, presenting the workout, instructing their audience, and then concluding with an advertisement. Although not shown above, the video footage in the post is also similar to Figure 1, composed of a series of clips that demonstrate the workout listed in the caption. The main difference is the way that personal connection is built into the caption. Violet starts the caption with the phrase, "everyone always asks me", intimating a conversational tone with her audience. This makes the subsequent workout feel as if it is coming from Violet's unique experience as a trainer. After the workout description, Violet also provides a suggestion for how much weight beginners should use, another example of how she works to co-constitute the workout experience for her audience. Followers are not just doing any workout; they are doing Violet's workout. This further develops a para-social relationship between Violet and her audience that can be leveraged to turn her audience into a client base.

The last component of the caption that distinguishes Violet from Ulisses is the form of advertisement at the end. Due to Ulisses' material resources and position in the social field, he can be more flexible with the type of advertising he chooses to pursue in each post. Some can be direct and simple advertisements for new products, and others, like the Figure 1, can be subtle. Since Ulisses already owns an apparel company with its own hashtag of over four thousand posts, simply wearing his own brand in the workout video and providing the hashtag in the caption is sufficient. For Violet, who does not have those material resources, she must again rely on personal connection. The way she advertises her personal training services at the end of her post is in the form of a conversational rejoinder, almost as if it was an afterthought. Closing her post with the phrasing, "did I mention" aligns with her opener of "everyone always asks me".

The only component of her post that belies her casual tone is the seemingly out of place command toward the end of her caption that instructs her audience to “LIKE, COMMENT, SHARE & SAVE!!” Violet also uses 27 hashtags, none of which revolve around her own personal brand, which suggests she is looking to grow her page through connections with other popular content on Instagram, rather than being in a position where she can grow her own hashtag and get others to use it.

4.6.2 *Infographics/How-to Posts*

How-to posts are a subgenre of Instagram fitness that focus on education often through a binary heuristic. In some instances, these posts are about exercise technique, with the Influencer or creator demonstrating both proper and improper technique in a photo or video. In other cases, how-to posts explain how to set up an exercise routine, and how not to, or what foods to eat, and not eat, during a diet. This style of post has become quite popular for Instagram fitness because of their dynamic capacity to be valuable to users both at the level of the photo or video and the caption. Only viewing the photo or video often provides the viewer with a clear answer to what is right and what is wrong, but this part of the post rarely provides any explanation. The caption is where explanation occurs, providing more education value for those that are interested.

Figure 4.3 is an example of a how-to post by popular fitness Influencer @kayla_itsines (12.5 million followers) where she provides tips on how to properly perform a number of common exercises.

Figure 4.3. @kayla_itsines, how-to post

The video in this post goes through four different exercises in both the top and bottom panel, with the top panel being the correct way to perform the exercise, and the bottom panel demonstrating common mistakes in exercise technique. The caption begins by repeating the

phrase “Do vs Don’t” superimposed on the video, which acts to draw the reader’s attention. Only the first line of the caption is visible when using the mobile app, making the first line of text a hook that will hopefully persuade the user to click on the post to read the full caption. Stylistically, the form of the caption is similar to the workout posts above in the sense that they are segmented into coherent chunks and contain a mix of characters and emojis. The content of the caption follows along with the video explaining the correct cues and tips needed to perform the demonstrated exercises correctly.

Like Ulisses, Kayla has multiple companies and products of her own, which appear as hashtags at the beginning and end of her caption. This how-to post not only works as an explicit channel for advertising her workout programs and online community, but also as a preview of some of the exercises offered in her programs. This helps reinforce a sense of community and care for those that have already purchased her products while also advertising to new members. The aspirational aspects of Instagram as a platform are clear, with content such as workout and how-to posts helping bridge the gap between aspiration and actualization. Almost everything in Kayla’s post is aspirational, from the exercise technique, the background décor, and her fit-ideal body, with a purpose of getting people to buy into a process of realizing those aspirations.

A different type of how-to post common among my participants is the infographic. As a portmanteau of information and graphic image, infographics are visual representations of data, created by fitness Influencers and creators for the purpose of educating their audience. Since the educational goals for most fitness Influencers and creators are to explain complex topics in a digestible way, infographics are a common choice. Infographics need to catch the eye of a user scrolling through dozens of other images by being bright, clear, and unique. As with other subgenres of Instagram fitness, the infographic needs the caption in order to provide context and

explanation for the image. Posting infographics can be a way for fitness Influencers and creators to provide free and valuable content to their audience, while also demonstrating their knowledge of the field, setting them apart from other potential competitors.

Figure 4.4 is an example of an infographic caption from Randy, a participant in my interview sample with approximately 65,800 followers. The image accompanying the caption is a multi-colored bar graph displaying levels of different hormones and how they change while dieting.

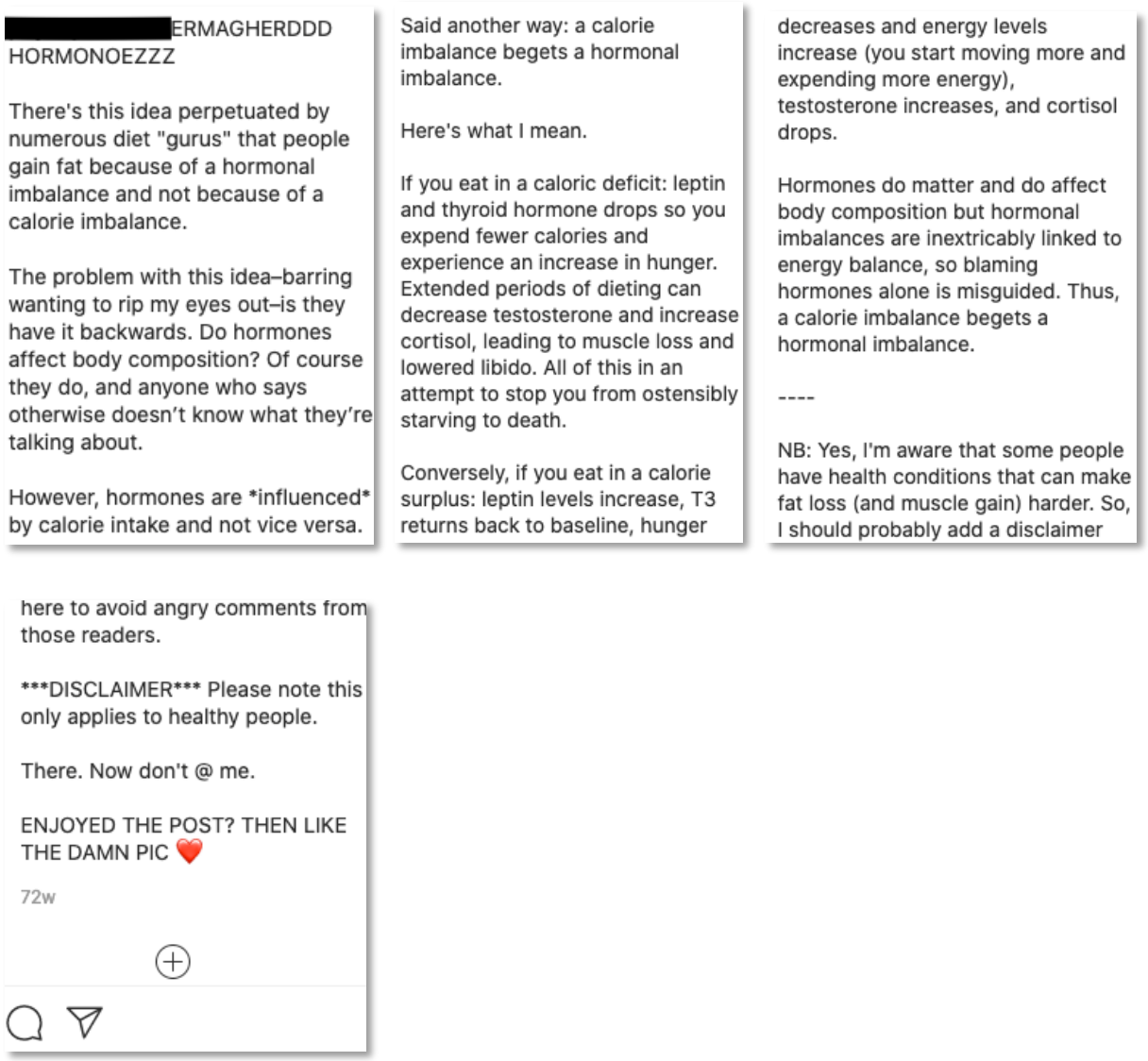

Figure 4.4. Randy, infographic post

Similar to Kayla's post above, the caption begins with a short phrase in all capital letters with the hope of encouraging the user to engage with the post and read the entire caption. With the goal of simplifying a complex topic and addressing a commonly held opinion among fitness "gurus", Randy segments the caption, asks clarifying questions, and reframes the answer multiple times in order to make the information as clear as possible. One of the strategies he uses to keep the audience reading the entire caption is to present his answer fairly early on in the caption, while using the latter half of the caption to explain the answer. The infographic and the caption work in tandem to titrate information and educational content so that the full value of the post is only realized at the end of the caption where Randy asks his audience to engage with the post by pressing the like button.

Unlike previous posts we've seen so far there is an absence of hashtags or direct advertising pitch in Randy's post. There is also a seemingly strange moment at the end of the caption before he tells viewers to like the post, and also says, "there. Don't @ me." In reference to his disclaimer about his post only applying to healthy people, Randy is requesting for people who comment on the post not to tag him in their comments, which is done on Instagram by using the @ symbol. Instead of welcoming audience engagement on his post, something most Influencers and creators strive for, Randy is purposefully foreclosing this opportunity. Without knowing much else about Randy, we might assume that this is either a missed opportunity, or a strategic move to appear authentic. As others have argued, authenticity can be performed through the selective use of advertising, meaning that not every post will include an explicit advertisement. While this explanation works for many of the fitness Influencers and creators in my sample, Randy's occupational trajectory offers a more accurate answer for the absence of

expected advertising and his disinterest in engagement, not just in the above post, but in the majority of the content on his page.

Randy is a personal trainer who works exclusively through training clients online and was one of a handful of my participants that built their Instagram fitness accounts making infographics. Randy began to transition from in-person training to online personal training before Instagram fitness became popular, gaining a following by having potential clients sign up for his weekly email newsletter. For Randy, Instagram is a secondary source of advertising for his services, noting that he uses Instagram primarily as a way to grow his email-based newsletter following. Randy mentioned that he felt compelled to join Instagram, and would rather not have to create content, despite the relative success of his infographics on the platform. “If you're trying to build a business online or you're trying to create things, you have to be a marketer, you have to be customer service, you have to be a content creator” (RANDY, 5/8/20).

As a full-time personal trainer with an established online presence outside of Instagram, coordinating brand deals and advertisements for sponsored products is not worth Randy’s time or money, making the composition of his content distinct from other scholarly accounts of fitness Influencers (Reade, 2020). Although his occupational trajectory impacts how he advertises and engages with his audience, this does not mean that Randy disregards all the rules. The generic conventions of breaking the post into segments and the rhetorical use of clarifying questions and leading sentences all suggest that there are clear and observable formal structures to this subgenre of Instagram fitness. However, what the example of Randy demonstrates is that occupational trajectory will influence the degree to which these rules are followed, which at the collective level subsequently shapes the composition of the same rules and norms.

4.6.3 *Before & After Motivation*

Motivation posts function to keep Instagram fitness followers engaged in a steady stream of content while also encouraging a positive experience with exercise off of the platform. By motivating their audiences to exercise or diet with them, fitness Influencers and creators develop aspirational communities which encourages engagement with posts and the purchasing of advertised products. A common form that motivation takes is the before and after post. Before and after photos in the commercialized cultural field of fitness are highly transmedially and historically stable, dating back to the physical culture era of the late 19th century and continuing consistently through magazines, home videos, and online forums (Budd, 1997). Before and after content has remained a popular motivator by providing an aspirational vision of the impact of diet and exercise while also obscuring the lived experience of those activities which can range from positive and affirming, to negative and traumatizing.

Figure 4.5 is a typical example of a before and after post by fitness Influencer @paigehathaway (4 million followers).

paigehathaway • Follow
Dallas, Texas

paigehathaway SWIPE >> to see our 5 week transformations with my @fitin5challenge!

Here I am #7monthspostpartum. This is Jason 7 months postpartum also 😂
For me.. This journey hasn't been easy but I'm slowly getting the result that I've been working so hard for! I lost so much muscle during pregnancy and after birth. Even though I've been working out for nearly 10 years it's still been quite tough for me to get my fitness back. After having P I've felt like a beginner again (could barely do 1 push up or pull up) literally starting all over! 😒
This has been tough for my ego also

APRIL 23

Add a comment... Post

paigehathaway • Follow
Dallas, Texas

This has been tough for my ego also because I'm used to being capable of so much more.

Nothing beats hard work and consistency though — NOTHING!! I'm not "there" yet (where ever there is lol) but Im definitely getting "there" and I'm feeling a lot more comfortable and confident with my results! I'm finally feeling "STRONG" again 😤 (slowly but surely) — biggest thing I had to do was CHANGE MY MINDSET and learn to be my biggest fan. We can be our own worst enemy sometimes.

We did my @fitin5challenge the last 5 weeks to help us both stay motivated while sticking to a plan. 🥳These are our results and we will

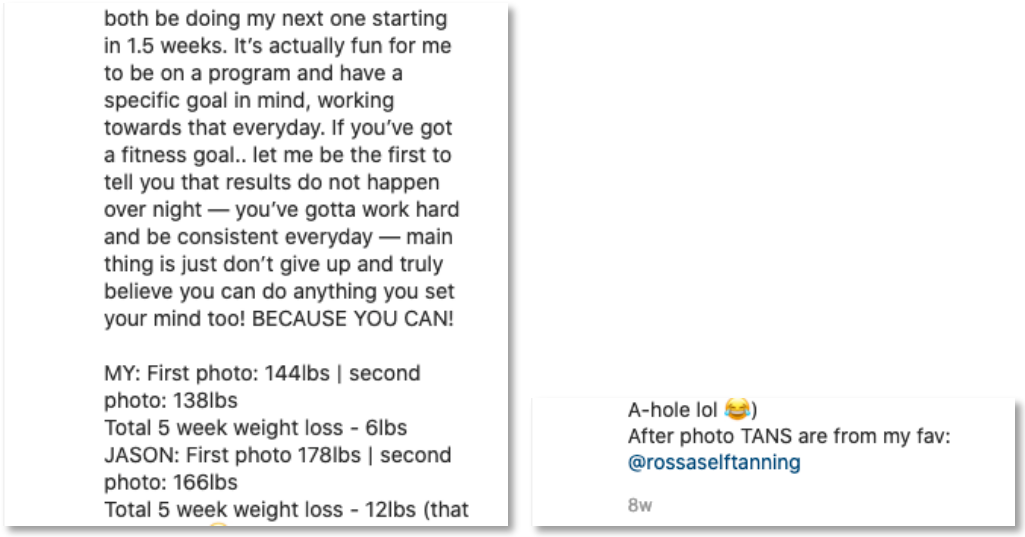

Figure 4.5. @paigehathaway before and after

In this post, Paige includes the results of both herself and her husband participating in her own fitness challenge (@fitin5challenge). The challenge involves signing up for a five-week diet and exercise plan for $199, with the most successful five-week transformation winning $5000 as a cash prize. The inclusion of her husband helps promote the challenge in a number of different ways. First, it indicates that Paige's products and services in general, and the @fitin5challenge in particular, are targeted toward men and women. While it is not clear how the gender of the Influencer or creator impacts the gender of their followers, my interview data suggests that fitness Influencers and creators tend to sell services and products to customers that share their gender. This is both due to the long history of gendered assumptions and practices in the commercialized cultural field of fitness and to the explicit exploitation of those assumptions by Influencers and creators that segment their advertising along those same lines. Along with bringing in a mixed-gendered audience, Paige's husband also adds a degree of personal connection by including a family element that is connected with the reference in the caption of Paige being seven months post-partum.

The caption follows a trajectory of personal connection and motivation by recounting the struggles of Paige's post-partum journey, and how being on a dedicated fitness plan can be helpful after "setbacks." The image and caption work well together because the caption fills the narrative gap left by the before and after picture. Since there is no visual middle, only a beginning and end, the caption allows Paige to control the difficult experience of being in between the before and after. The purposefully stark contrast of the image is used to draw attention to the post, and the caption motivates while providing answers to the gaps left open by the image. Phrases such as "MINDSET" AND "BECAUSE YOU CAN" are capitalized to emphasize how viewers can be successful with the @fitin5challenge, the weight loss results at the end of the caption provide a benchmark for what success looks like. As with other popular fitness Influencers, hashtags are kept to a minimum, and tagged accounts include one advertisement for a spray tan company, and the separate Instagram page dedicated to the five-week challenge.

Another example of a before and after post comes from Ulma, a fitness coach and podcast host with an Instagram following of approximately 48,100.

Figure 4.6. Ulma, before and after

The narrative progression in this post is fairly similar to Paige's post in that they both detail the trials and tribulations they have had with their bodies, along with the key elements that helped them make a change. Another similarity between the two posts is that they both serve as a time-sensitive advertisement for a product or service. For Paige, the post serves as a gentle reminder

to her audience that the next @fitin5challenge starts in a week and a half, for Ulma, there is a more explicit call to action to sign up for her coaching program that will soon close and to watch her upcoming Instagram Live video where she answers questions about the program. Even though there is a large difference in time between the before and after in each photo, five weeks for Paige and 15 years for Ulma, the difference is aligned with the product being advertised. Ulma's targeted audience is primarily mothers in the 30s and 40s, making Ulma's after picture a form of relatable and aspirational proof that the transformation is possible for her audience.

Most of the differences in the two posts can be attributed to the difference in audience size between the two pages. Ulma encourages her audience to send her a direct message so she can personally answer questions and show her audience where to sign up for her coaching program. This is an advertising and engagement strategy that works for Ulma but simply cannot scale to Paige's millions of followers. It is likely the case that Paige cannot answer all of the direct messages she receives, so asking for more from her audience without responding to them would end up hurting her relationship with her audience. Another difference between the two posts is the amount and placement of hashtags. Where Paige only uses one hashtag, Ulma uses 21, posting them as a separate comment on the post instead of in the caption. This is likely due to a combination of an aesthetic choice to make the caption look less cluttered, and also a feature constraint of running out of space in the caption section.

The relative restraint in hashtag use by Paige and their liberal use by Ulma offers insight into effective advertising strategies for fitness Influencers and creators of different field position and occupational trajectory. With approximately 4 million followers, the fastest route growing her business will not necessarily be through attracting more followers, but rather working to convert more of her followers into customers. Since hashtags are ways to expose your posts to

different audiences that are not already followers, Paige does not need to use them in the same way as Ulma. The only hashtag Paige uses, #7monthspostpartum, is tied to her new identity as a mother, which might suggest more targeted advertising to this demographic in the future. For Ulma, the use of 21 different hashtags represents a desire to grow her following while also converting her followers to customers. Although redacted to preserve confidentiality, the hashtags cover a wide range of topics including diet, exercise, mindset, mothers and coaching. In the same way that it does not make sense to define an Influencer by their follower count alone, this is not to suggest that there is a certain number of followers one must surpass before they switch strategies. The decision to make audience convergence rather than audience growth the primary strategy is one that involves many factors including the type of product sold, the price point of that product, and the amount of time the Influencer or creator has to invest in advertising.

This points to one of the ways that before and after pictures can be formally different from antecedent genres within the commercialized cultural field of fitness. Due to the platform affordances and features of Instagram, fitness Influencers and creators can segment and target their audiences with more precision, allowing for a more flexible use of the before and after picture. Compared with antecedent modes of technological production, content creation on Instagram has relatively low time and resource costs, often resulting in daily reproduction. The result is that all posts, including before and after pictures, are produced within a larger discursive ecology and narrative built by the Influencer or creator. That messages are influenced by their communicative and technological conditions is not novel, instead it is the ability of the producer to choose how closely before and after pictures adhere to that narrative which produces new forms of the subgenre.

As Ulma is advertising to a more general audience outside of her regular followers, the discursive form more closely follows generic antecedents such as Charles Atlas's comic strip. The caption is straight forward and accessible without assuming much prior knowledge from the anticipated audience. While her post may still operate as a form of motivation for her regular followers, Ulma's post is ultimately oriented toward growing her audience. The discursive form of the caption makes no assumptions about the audience's previous exposure to Ulma's content. Paige, on the other hand, casually talks about her husband and new baby without introducing them because she assumes that the audience she wants to target has been following along with her life as it is reproduced on Instagram. Unlike Ulma's caption, there is little description of what the fitness challenge is or how it works, because again, the assumption is that the intended audience has been exposed to a previous explanation or are already following the separate Instagram page for the challenge.

4.7 Discussion & Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the genre ecology of Instagram fitness in order to investigate the functional role of its content, the various forms that content takes, and how it has been influenced by the history of modern fitness as a commercialized cultural field. The production and reproduction of genre provides a valuable framework for assessing the relationship between social action and technological affordances, offering one set of answers for why the commercialized cultural field of fitness has been so successful on Instagram. This analysis adds to scholarly debates about Instagram as a visual and textual platform, as well as answering Miller et al. call to better understand the relationship between sociotechnical affordances and generic antecedents (2018).

Mapping the genre ecology of Instagram fitness provides an answer to why captions of Instagram posts play such an important role on a platform primarily described as visual. By taking into consideration the history of antecedent genres we can see that text-based and discursive arguments have always worked in tandem with the visual when advertising and communicating the commercialized cultural field of fitness. It is not only the historical component that has strengthened the value of captions for fitness Influencers and creators, but also the demands of increasing commercialization. Iconic and vernacular image types proliferate within the genre ecology of Instagram fitness, with captions providing the discursive space for Influencers and creators to distinguish their products and services from competitors. The genre ecology approach demonstrates how this discursive work functions similarly in antecedent genres but takes on particular subgenre forms influenced by existing platform vernaculars on Instagram (Gibbs et al., 2015). By tracing the development of various text-based features on Instagram, we see how commercialization on the platform not only incentivizes the use of these features by Influencers and creators, but also the production of these features by the platform owners. In other words, it is both platform users deviating from intended use, and platform owners responding to that use, that contribute to changing features and affordances on Instagram.

The particular focus of this chapter on generic antecedents shows that it is no accident that fitness as a genre has performed so well on Instagram. The long history of fitness gurus and celebrities, coupled with the entrepreneurial professionalization of personal trainers, provided a material and cultural base that was easily transportable from the non-digital to the digital. In an attempt to answer the call by Miller et al. (2018) I have outlined the transmedially stable functions of Instagram fitness as a supergenre, demonstrating continuity in the desire to produce content that serves to demonstrate and educate about fitness, motivate audience to participate in

fitness, and build personal connection. I argue that, in the case of Instagram captions, fitness Influencers and creators have used sociotechnical affordances of the platform in atypical ways so that they can produce content similar to what was produced by antecedent genres. The commercialized cultural field of fitness has never been able to rely on images alone, despite the self-avowed desire by many consumers of fitness products and services to change how they look. The process through which a consumer is convinced to undergo an often-uncomfortable experience of bodily change is a discursive one which provides meaning and context to aspirational images of fit bodies. Further, as a commercialized cultural field, these discursive arguments that appear as Instagram post captions serve to distinguish their authors among competitors, hoping to convince their audience that they are the best person with which to undergo their bodily transformation.

Although similar in function, sociotechnical affordances and features of Instagram produce unique forms of subgenres that serve the functions of the supergenre. In this chapter I have provided four examples of these subgenres: workout posts, infographics, how-to posts, and before and after motivation posts. One of the main sociotechnical aspects contributing to these subgenre forms is a low barrier to entry on Instagram compared to previous mediums of communication used by the commercialized cultural field of fitness. Unlike magazines, television and home video, the per unit cost of content production is very low on Instagram. This results in highly specific subgenres that are thematically much narrower and more targeted than content produced through previous mediums. Instagram does not require one to be a professional, or have significant capital, in order to produce content, which uniquely affords professionals and amateurs similar production tools on the platform.

Despite this proliferation of producers, comparing the posts of high, mid, and low tier fitness Influencers and creators points to similarities and differences. While these similarities support the argument that Instagram fitness is a coherent genre, we still need to account for the differences. Extent literature demonstrates that social media Influencers produce aspirational content (Reade, 2020) and perform authenticity (Abidin, 2017; Banet-Weiser, 2012) often under highly precarious conditions (Duffy, 2017), but it is not always clear how those conditions impact the type of content produced by the Influencers. This chapter argues that fitness Influencers and creators tailor their Instagram posts based on the audiences they have cultivated and the product or service they provide, which is often influenced by aspects of occupational trajectory such as being a fitness Influencer or creator full-time or having to work multiple jobs. These findings help further scholarly debate by tying the material conditions of fitness Influencers and creators to the form of their content, suggesting a relationship between occupational trajectory and performative qualities such as authenticity which find their expression through the genre ecology of Instagram fitness.

Chapter 5. CONCLUSION

As both the fitness industry and the use of social media platforms continue to grow, microcelebrities, Influencers and content creators have populated the digital landscape. Research at the intersection of these two fields has been primarily interested in the social effects of mediated fitness, particularly as it relates to body image (Robinson et al., 2017; Slater et al., 2017; Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2018), gender (Hakim, 2018; Jong & Drummond, 2016), and aspirational lifestyles (Baker & Rojek, 2020; Reade, 2020a). However, relatively less attention has been paid to the fitness Influencers and creators themselves and how they decide to invest in the production of social media content. Previous attempts to explain the rise of entrepreneurial activity on social media such as self-branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012) have largely argued that in response to economic crisis and precarity, potential Influencers and creators are enticed by the promise of career success through online celebrity (Duffy, 2017; Lukács, 2020; Alice Emily Marwick, 2013). Despite sluggish economic conditions, both the fitness industry and the so-called digital economy (Jordan, 2020) continue to grow at impressive rates. Given this backdrop, this dissertation seeks to explain how and why fitness Influencers and creators invest in social media.

Through the use of in-depth interviews and a mapping of the genre ecology of Instagram fitness, I argue that social stratification among fitness Influencers and creators shapes their beliefs, practices, and forms of production on social media. Although it is certainly true that a wide diversity of people seek online celebrity, what people believe social media will do for them and the strategies they use online, are shaped by their unique social position within, or outside of, the commercialized cultural field of fitness (Maguire, 2008). The use of social position first assumes that our social world is hierarchically stratified with an uneven distribution of

opportunities for action. Drawing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2000), social position is one's place within this hierarchy, which is shaped by factors such as, but not limited to, occupation, education, cultural tastes, and geographic location. The form of content produced by fitness Influencers and creators is also shaped by the genre ecology of Instagram fitness. A genre ecology approach (Heyd, 2009) offers a framework for understanding how genres evolve over time and adapt to digital platforms. In the case of Instagram fitness, the genre ecology affords and constrains the composition of content produced by Influencers and creators in ways that overlap with social position. These findings are discussed in more detail below.

5.1 Review of Findings

5.1.1 *Beliefs*

The first step toward explaining the rise of fitness Influencers and creators on social media was to understand the beliefs that motivated their initial investment in seeking out fame online. Although all of my participants identified to some degree with the label of fitness Influencer or creator, not all of them had this outcome in mind when they started investing in social media. This question was important to pose because while the existing literature suggested a variety of potential beliefs, it was unclear what exactly shaped these beliefs. Studies addressing video game streamers (Johnson & Woodcock, 2017), adult webcam models (Nayar, 2017), fashion bloggers (Duffy, 2017), and YouTube creators (Wu, 2019) pointed to beliefs being meaningful component of who invests in social media, however, the diversity of industries made these studies hard to compare when analyzing what exactly shaped these beliefs. What fitness Influencers and creators hoped social media would do for them varied based on their social position within the field. These governing beliefs fell into four categories: Science

communicators, Sellers, Shifters, and Sharers, each related to various components of social position which included occupation, gender, education, family support and social support.

Science communicators believed that they had access to information that most others did not and that social media platforms like Instagram were effective mediums for communicating that information. They saw the online fitness field as populated by misleading and potentially harmful misinformation and believed they had a responsibility to correct it. This belief was shaped by their unique access to higher education often in the form of either a Masters or PhD in the health or fitness field. Science communicators also all had non-personal trainer positions in the fitness field at the time of their social media investment which meant that they were not primarily interested in immediate financial rewards from their activity online, allowing them to pursue their belief of social media as an outlet for public service.

Sellers sought to further their careers either by offering online services to potential clients, or by attracting partnerships with brands via social media advertising. Investments in social media were ways to branch out into online coaching and personal training which promised more clients and the ability to handle more clients per hour. This belief was grounded in the experience of feeling like there was a clear ceiling for how lucrative being a personal trainer could be as a career. Sellers were mostly male personal trainers with strong family and social support, often representing the highest social position in my sample. This support often took the form of having either friends or family that had owned a business or who were also active on social media. This allowed Sellers to view social media as a business opportunity sooner than other participants.

Shifters wanted to change career paths into the fitness industry and believed, often more strongly than others, that investing in social media was their ticket to achieve this goal. Not only

was social media seen as the way into the industry, but Shifters also believed that social media was central to the fitness industry itself. They felt that if they could build a successful online presence before leaving their current job that this would eventually lead to a stable career in the fitness industry both on and offline. The social position of Shifters was somewhat of a mirror-image of Sellers in the sense that they were all female and had beliefs about social media shaped by their employment outside of the fitness industry rather than at its center. Unlike Sellers, few Shifters had industry-specific or entrepreneurial family support, but over half of them had friends who were currently making money through some type of online fitness activity.

Lastly, Sharers believed social media was an appropriate place to share their fitness hobby or athletic pursuits. Some of them saw platforms such as Instagram as a digital fitness journal with the belief that sharing their training online with their coach, trainer, or community would help them stay accountable to their fitness goals. These beliefs were shaped by the fact that Sharers had the lowest social position in relation to others. They were often the most surprised when they achieved some level of online celebrity as a fitness Influencer or creator because they were often not employed in the fitness industry and frequently lacked family or social support. Sharers were also highly likely to have an educational background that was outside the fields of health and fitness.

By identifying ways that the social position of fitness Influencers and creators shapes their initial beliefs about what they think they can do with social media, this chapter furthers scholarship on the role of social stratification in determining who attains online celebrity and how that celebrity is shaped. Although various beliefs have been identified in the literature on Influencers and content creators, the focus on the fitness industry in this chapter makes it possible to see more concretely the relationship between one's social position and their beliefs.

This not only reinforces previous claims about the uneven accessibility of online celebrity but goes further by aligning those unevenly distributed social characteristics with sets of beliefs that inform particular strategies and practices online.

5.1.2 *Strategies*

In chapter 3 I shifted from asking about initial beliefs to asking about the specific strategies fitness Influencers and creators use to realize those beliefs. Literature on the topic of strategies often points to the individual characteristics of Influencers and creators (Abidin, 2018; Reade, 2020a) or the shifting market conditions (Marwick, 2019; Leaver et al., 2020) but there is insufficient clarity about how these two important components are related. Further, there is a tendency among some scholars to assume that online celebrity operates through what I call a linear playbook, where the pathway to being an Influencer or creator is organized around a set of strategic practices that assumes a linear pathway from attracting attention to content monetization (Zulli, 2017; Khamis, 2017). Based on their investment strategies, fitness Influencers and creators were characterized into three different groups: Career Crafters, Passion Pursuers, and Risk Reducers.

Career Crafters were often made up of Sellers and Shifters either having transitioned into working in the fitness field or starting there as a personal trainer. Their strategies for producing content were the most industrial and market rationalized due to their often full-time employment in the fitness industry. Career Crafters thought about their social media practices as part of their business and sculpted them in ways that maximized efficiency and audience engagement. Their strategies were the most metric-driven, and they were the most likely to hire others to help with their social media production.

Passion Pursuers were similar to Sharers in that they were mostly not employed in the fitness industry and did not have immediate goals to transition into the industry in the future. Working a full-time job outside of the fitness industry meant that they had less time than Career Crafters to invest in producing content on social media, which included market rationalized strategies. Passion Pursuers did not feel pressure to pursue social media practices they did not enjoy, which often resulted in producing content whenever they wanted, in contrast to the fairly strict posting schedules common among Career Crafters.

Risk Reducers fell between Career Crafters and Passion Pursuers in that they often had current employment similar to Passion Pursuers, but their strategies were slightly more aligned with Career Crafters because they were potentially interested in using their social media presence to make fitness part of their future career trajectory. Their initial beliefs were primarily similar to Sharers but, in some cases, resembled Shifters. Another way to understand Risk Reducers are as Sharers or Science communicators that were more successful than they thought they would be in attracting online celebrity. This led to the adoption of certain market rationalized practices they felt were necessary to maintain and grow their page, while still feeling uncertain about being a fitness Influencer or creator full-time.

In line with the previous chapter, the division of these strategies suggested forms of social stratification among my participants. It was occupational trajectory, as a form of social position, that shaped these different investment strategies. The groupings of strategies were different than the belief groups despite the consistent role of social position because of the way that strategies evolved over the course of participants' investment in social media. For example, although most Sharers started off as Passion Pursuers, their strategies changed along with their occupational trajectory. It was common for Sharers to later adopt strategies of Career Crafters as

they decided to invest in being a fitness Influencer and creator full-time. Occupational trajectory involved aspects of past, present, and future employment which meant that the past experience of fitness Influencers and creators on social media impacted their strategies as much as where they wanted their careers to go in the future. The way that occupational trajectory shaped strategy was both in the degree to which strategies were market rationalized, defined as taking on a form that participants felt would either bring them money or attention, as well as how much time could be spent on these strategies and practices.

The central impact of occupational trajectory on Influencer and creator strategies demonstrates, among other things, that the linear playbook of online celebrity is not a universal formulation, but rather one of many strategic approaches. One's position within the socially stratified field of the online fitness industry affords them certain strategies and restricts others. This account acknowledges both personal traits and commercializing market conditions as factors that shape the strategies of Influencers and creators on social media while emphasizing that the role they play is unevenly distributed based on one's social position. In doing so, the results from this chapter offer a helpful starting point for further scholarship on Influencers and creators by demonstrating the need to first identify factors such as social position in order to craft an account of practices and strategies.

5.1.3 *Genre Ecology*

While the chapters on the beliefs and strategies of fitness Influencers and creators helped to explain who invests in social media and what shapes those investments, chapter 4 turned to the commercialized cultural field of fitness to understand the role that image and text play in the production of fitness content on Instagram (Maguire, 2008). Although fitness culture and

Instagram are often categorized as prioritizing visual mediums of communication (Carrotte et al., 2017; Leaver et al., 2020), many of my interview participants stressed the importance of what they wrote in their Instagram captions. This emphasis on the text-based captions of photos and videos also conflicted with scholarship on visual rhetoric that argued for a relationship between digital media and iconic images (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2013; Jurgenson, 2019). This chapter sought to contextualize discussions around the sociotechnical affordances of social media platforms such as Instagram by using a rhetorical approach to genre to analyze the form of fitness content on Instagram.

Following Theresa Heyd's dual model of genre ecology (2009), I suggest that the supergenre of Instagram fitness is composed of the generic antecedent of fitness magazines, and online message boards, as well as the subgenres of workout posts, infographics/how-to posts, and before and after posts. I analyzed Instagram captions from well-known fitness Influencers and creators, as well as participants from my sample. Genre ecology shapes the form that fitness content takes on Instagram, offering a set of choices for fitness Influencers and creators about what and how to post on their pages. How Influencers and creators select these choices is further impacted by social position and occupational trajectory. Influencers and creators that were personal trainers tended to rely on workout posts and before and after pictures because of their employment, while Science communicators could leverage their access to education in producing infographics and how-to posts.

These findings develop the relationship between the genre of online fitness content and the sociotechnical affordances of Instagram. Instagram fitness is a case of users relying on text-based narratives on a platform that prioritizes visual content (Leaver et al., 2020). While the success of Instagram fitness is often attributed to the visual display of fit bodies, a look at the

generic antecedents of Instagram fitness shows that, even as far back as the physical culture movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the fit body cannot simply be displayed, it must also be explained in context. The relationship between generic antecedent and sociotechnical affordance in this case is that the generic antecedent pushes fitness Influencers and creators to rely heavily on features of Instagram that are not prioritized on the platform, such as the caption, working within and against some of the platform's key affordances.

As affordances require conceptualization from the perspective of the potential user (Nagy & Neff, 2015), this chapter offers a case study of how genre and social position impact affordance conceptualization. The commercialized cultural field of fitness has identifiable generic antecedents that leveraged both visual and textual forms of communication that carried over to Instagram in various subgenres. What Instagram afforded fitness Influencers and creators was in part determined by the genre ecology of the commercialized cultural field of fitness. Further, participants did not reproduce each subgenre equally, suggesting that social position is also a meaningful factor in how people conceptualize and make sense of sociotechnical affordances.

5.2 The broader relevance of fitness Influencers and creators

The growth of Influencers and creators in the commercialized cultural field of fitness is a case of investment in social media and the adoption of microcelebrity and internet celebrity practices within a thriving industry. Of course, that an industry is growing says little about the experiences and conditions of those who work in the industry, but it does offer a distinct case from previous studies that have seen investments in social media as a way to survive amidst industries on the decline. It is specifically the consideration of social position that helps sort out the disparity in advantage among those in the industry, which helps explain the different courses

of action pursued by fitness Influencers and creators. For example, personal training is a bad job in a good industry and holding this position within the field shaped a number of beliefs and practices regarding social media. For those interested in the relationship between the economic conditions of specific industries and its relation to social media adoption, fitness Influencers and creators are an illustrative case.

The practices of fitness Influencers and creators, as well as the generic form their production takes on Instagram is also valuable for those studying the communication of health and fitness on social media (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Burnette et al., 2017; Millington, 2017b; Vaterlaus et al., 2015). As more people rely on social media for their information about the world, let alone health and fitness, the working and life conditions of those who produce that information are key to understanding how and why health and fitness are communicated. While much of the discussion around health and fitness communication on social media is focused on the sociotechnical affordances of various online platforms (Elise R Carrotte et al., 2015; Cavusoglu & Demirbag-Kaplan, 2017; Lee & Cho, 2017) fitness Influencers and creators offer a case where the form of content production was shaped as much by the mediated history of the fitness genre as it was by platform affordances. For those considering recommendations for health and fitness communication on social media, this case is a reminder that genre shapes communicative form and calls to change that from academics and professionals will have to contend not only with history, but the varied social positions of the content producers, whose action is constrained and enabled by their very position within the field.

As mentioned above, the degree to which the experiences of fitness Influencers and creators reflect the experiences of other types of social media industries is both a story of industry and occupation. Like Influencers and creators in other industries such as fashion and

food, some fitness Influencers and creators look to online celebrity as a way to establish themselves in their industry, while others use it to propel already existing careers. Another fairly universal characteristic of the fitness industry that is shared with other industries that have witnessed the growth of Influencers and creators is the relatively high availability of self-employment and entrepreneurship. Unlike fields such as healthcare or education, being self-employed or running a small business as a coach or personal trainer is fairly common. The incentives for investing in social media for those in the fitness industry are shared by those in other industries that share these occupational arrangements.

5.3 Limitations

The method of investigation for this dissertation allowed me to focus on the beliefs, strategies, and content of fitness Influencers and creators. The use of in-depth interviews and rhetorical analysis offers not only a descriptive account of Influencer and creator experience but also an avenue for what those experiences mean. Doing so came at the cost of a more expansive and descriptive account that could have been achieved with the use of surveys. Although the sample of interview participants is not statistically random, I did sample for a range of participant characteristics such as brand partnerships, follower count, gender, employment, and education. In an attempt to reach certain fitness Influencers and creators that would otherwise be difficult to contact, I also engaged in snowball sampling with participants in my sample. This choice of method also meant that I relied on participant accounts of their work on social media. As always, this comes with the risk that accounts of behavior may be inaccurate, and the certainty that accounts only came from those who were willing to talk with me. While ethnographic participant observation would have offered a more granular approach to understanding the practices and strategies of fitness Influencers and creators this would have

come at the cost of the number of participants I interviewed, which could have further obfuscated patterns of social stratification.

The choice of mapping the genre ecology of Instagram fitness and a rhetorical analysis of Instagram captions also came with a set of limitations, in particular, the relatively concentrated and narrow focus on a number of rhetorical artifacts. Sacrificing the breadth of exemplars that could come from a discourse or content analysis allowed me to argue for a particular way of seeing Instagram fitness as constituent of a genre ecology. The effect of this analysis is an understanding of how the form of certain Instagram posts are representative of a genre of Instagram fitness that encompasses hundreds of thousands of similar posts. This focus also allows room for an analysis of how the history of the commercialized cultural field fitness shapes its contemporary generic expression and how the demands of Instagram fitness as a supergenre compete with the sociotechnical affordances of Instagram.

While this dissertation focused primarily on the strategies and content produced on Instagram, it is clear that celebrity online is practiced and experienced across many platforms. The term Influencer is synonymous with the rise of Instagram as a platform due to early platform features around monetization (Lorenz, 2019). Where early fitness YouTubers were paid directly through the platform via YouTube's (now Google's) Adsense program, a similar program was initially absent from Instagram which meant that advertisers and brands both sold ads to the platform and partnered directly with Influencers as advertisers and brand ambassadors. Instagram was chosen as the main platform of study because of its relationship with the rise of Influencers and because its primarily photo and video-based affordances make it an interesting platform on which to study text-based communication. As mentioned in chapter 4, the communication of

fitness online has flourished on internet forums, Facebook, and YouTube, with Instagram representing one of many platforms with a vibrant fitness community.

Lastly, it feels as if any account of a dissertation conducted in 2020 is incomplete without at least some discussion of COVID-19. While my recruitment and overall findings were largely unimpacted by the pandemic, there are certain aspects of how fitness Influencers and creators understood COVID-19 that are worth mentioning. My collection period, from November 11th, 2019 to May 18th, 2020 spans the trajectory of COVID-19 from isolated outbreak in Wuhan, China, to a global pandemic. Despite not asking directly about the impact of COVID-19 on the work or lives of my participants, it first appeared in my sample on March 13th, ironically just one day before I contracted the virus. The initial response from my participants was one of concern, mentioning a drop in clients as gyms closed and the economy ground to a halt. There was a feeling that spending on health and fitness was a luxury that would be cut from clients' budgets if they began to feel economically constrained. While this dissertation set out to understand what explains the rise of fitness Influencers and creators on social media, I began to worry that I might also have to explain their demise.

Despite the undeniable social and economic destruction that followed COVID-19 becoming a global pandemic, as I continued with my interviews it became clearer that the worst expectations for fitness Influencers and creators did not come true. In April and May, participants had found that their clients did not want to give up their investment in fitness and were asking for home workout alternatives as a way to stay in shape during lockdown. Some participants even reported that various degrees of global lockdown had significantly disrupted exercise habits to the point that they were bringing on new clients looking for exercise alternatives. For my participants that did not make their money as personal trainers, they

regularly felt that they were able to continue growing their Instagram pages because people were spending more time online during the pandemic.

Based on the type of data I collected, it is not possible to know for certain why fitness Influencers and creators have managed to so far weather this storm, but I would like to offer a few suggestions. Perhaps most obviously, those that made most of their money from online personal training fared better than those that saw the majority of their clients in-person. For these participants, COVID-19 confirmed their instincts that transitioning to online coaching was not only more efficient, in the sense that they could service more clients per hour, but that it was also more stable in the long term. It is also likely that clients who seek out online coaching and personal training are relatively wealthy and hold occupations that are disproportionally sheltered from the current economic recession.

Fitness Influencers and creators that were looking to grow their following and advance their careers through brand partnerships and advertising did not seem to notice a drop in advertising opportunities due to COVID-19. This is in line with recent advertising data that suggests digital advertising, particularly on platforms, has been one of the advertising categories least impacted by COVID-19 (Li & Hall, 2020). Fitness Influencers and creators that are able to secure lucrative advertising deals benefit for the relative lack of clarity on the relationship between sales and behavioral online advertising (Frederik & Martijn, 2019). Although the suggestion that increasing online advertising may not lead to increased sales has been argued a number of times academically (Lewis et al., 2015; Mitchell & Makienko, 2014), there is a mix of both risk and lack of incentive among firms that seems to keep investment in online advertising high, particularly during COVID-19. Again, since my data collection ended in May of 2020, only so much can be offered here regarding the long-term outcome of my participants.

Despite the constraints of COVID-19, there does not seem to be a reduction of those looking to use social media to enter or advance their position within the fitness industry. Most accounts of working conditions as an Influencer or creator speak to a highly unequal playing field, long hours, and unstable pay, raising important questions about why people continue to invest in these activities. There have been two main answers as to why this is, one that focuses on the industries from which people are making these investments, and the other on the affordances and features of social media platforms. The industrial account correctly points out that many people invest in social media when jobs in their industry become destabilized or disappear, a phenomena well-documented in the field of journalism and the creative industries (Duffy, 2017; Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2019; Lukács, 2020). Alternatively, the account that focuses on affordances points to how certain genres of cultural performance fair well on platforms such as Instagram due to the affordances of visibility and spreadability, as well as the how the platform privileges features such as photo and video over text (Abidin, 2018; Leaver et al., 2020). As summarized below, this dissertation affirms the importance of industry and affordance but adds that social position and genre ecology are also important for understanding how people enter the industry and the type of content the produce when they get there.

5.4 Future Research

Future research on Influencers and online celebrity would do well to focus on longitudinal studies of career development as well as comparative studies of Influencers and creators within different industries. While this dissertation focused heavily on how social stratification shapes one's entrance and action in the online fitness field, the long-term career consequences of this social stratification are not immediately clear. This longitudinal approach could not only shed light on these long-term consequences at the level of individual Influencers

and creators, but also at the level of the industry itself. Many of my more seasoned participants remarked that they felt the online fitness industry was becoming too saturated and that they would not have had the same success if they were starting today. Research along these lines could also have significant theoretical significance by observing the development and relationship between a social field and one's position within it, which could further explain the degree to which certain positions may be more or less insulated from shifting field conditions.

Comparative work would also be valuable, especially concerning the role that genre and industry play in shaping the practices and strategies of Influencers and creators. Although a variety of online celebrities from a number of different industries have been studied, there has been a lack of comparative work that would help strengthen accounts across industries. While this dissertation accounted for difference in social position within one single industry, it is not clear that the exact same differences would operate similarly for other genres of Influencers and creators. Although the types of differences at the level of social stratification are likely to be constant, what they mean in each case can vary. There are a number of ways scholars could go about conducting this research. One option could be to compare two different groups of online celebrities operating within similar genre ecologies, while another could find two groups of online celebrities with similar social positions in different industries.

5.5 Implications

For those interested in the rise of online celebrity in popular culture, this dissertation offers a reminder to consider the social conditions of possibility for being an Influencer or creator. Lifestyle creators, video game streamers and fitness Influencers all share certain experiences as micro and internet celebrities such as the need to keep an engaged audience, and sustainably produce monetizable content, but how these experiences are structured depends on

one's position within a specific industry. The generally positive economic conditions in the fitness industry structure the field of possibilities for those within it, while social position is the expression of its unevenly distributed organization. Investing in being an Influencer or creator has been previously characterized both as precarious and aspirational due to irregular pay, long hours, and relative lack of legal protections (Duffy, 2017; Abidin, 2018) as well as being a relatively comfortable display of previously attained wealth (Marwick, 2015). Attention to social position and industry conditions offers one way to make sense of both realities by placing them in context.

For fitness Influencers and creators that were personal trainers, they responded less to immediate precarity, and more to the future ceiling of their profession. Investing in online celebrity was less of a risk because they did not have to give up their current job in order to pursue it, rather it offered additional job security and the possibility of career advancement. The aspirational components of Influencer and creator investments outlined by Duffy (2017) were the most salient among those looking to use social media to transition into the fitness industry. While explicit displays of wealth were not common among my participants, the feeling of having something unique that should be shared on social media primarily came from those with the highest level of education. These Influencers and creators believed that social media was a valuable medium for communicating science and information that they had privileged access to through their schooling.

This diversity of social position also has implications for how we understand the practices and strategies of fitness Influencers and creators. The common understanding of what Influencers and creators do, and how they do it, follows what I call the linear playbook model. This model suggests that most Influencers and creators start relatively unknown and post content

with the goal of attracting attention and social capital that can then be converted into advertising deals and brand partnerships. Attention to social position, primarily in the form of occupational trajectory not only reveals multiple pathways toward becoming an Influencer or creator, but also that strategic arrangements may look similar despite meeting very different needs. This focus on occupational trajectory gets at the fundamental question of who Influencers and creator are. An understanding of this practice that only sees Influencers and creators as a new wave of digital advertisers relying on para-social relations to circulate commodities misses the reality that in many cases they are also small business owners, entrepreneurs, and producers of commodities.

Even in the instances where Influencers and creators are acknowledged as producers of goods and services, this is often characterized as the end result of a linear process that started with building online celebrity through attracting attention on social media. Echoing work by Crystal Abidin in her research on Singaporean blogshop owners, this dissertation demonstrates that many fitness Influencers and creators often rely on the money and fame from their offline careers in order to sustain their investments in online celebrity. The lesson here is that the pathway to becoming an Influencer or creator may share certain characteristics in common but that the order and organization of those characteristics depends on the relative social position of those investing in social media. This means that the impact of Influencers and creators on our social world is hard to generalize and must be understood contextually.

This dissertation also has implications for scholarship on affordances by suggesting that genre ecology and social position play a meaningful role in how affordances are imagined and conceptualized. How fitness has been historically communicated shapes its expression on Instagram which happens to coalesce around the use of text-based narratives on a platform that prioritizes images and videos. Due to fitness Influencers and creators being embedded in the

genre ecology of Instagram fitness, they could perceive the caption feature on the platform as one of the main mediums for communicating valuable information and connecting with their audience. However, this distribution of perception was not evaluated or performed evenly, with social position impacting the particular way in which subgenre forms were produced within the genre ecology of Instagram fitness. These findings further scholarly discussion around the relationship between sociotechnical affordances and generic antecedents (Miller et al., 2018), as well as how to conceptualize social constraints in imagining and conceptualizing affordances (Nagy & Neff, 2015).

Lastly, there are implications for the future of the fitness industry itself, particularly as it pertains to the relationship between the commercialized cultural field of fitness and the information communication technologies that mediate it. The growth of fitness Influencers and creators offers another way to think through what Brad Millington has referred to as the "second fitness boom" (Millington, 2017a). While the first fitness boom in the 1970s revolved around the growth of commercial gyms and exercise practices such as jogging, resistance training and aerobics, according to Millington, the second fitness boom is centered around wearable technology and fitness trackers. "For many, fitness remains a profitable domain. Yet the claim that we are witnessing a new fitness boom is based not just on the proliferation of fitness technologies; it also stems from the idea that these technologies are helping to *fundamentally transform* the nature of fitness activity" (p. 4). As addressed in the introduction, it is true that the fitness industry is booming, but perhaps not due to the proliferation of wearable, gamified fitness technologies. While these companies have had their moment in the venture capital spotlight, many of the companies Millington cites as recently as four years ago, no longer exist or fail to produce stable profits year over year. Tracking fitness has certainly grown enormously as a

practice, but it is not yet profitable enough to fully explain the contemporary growth of the fitness industry.

This dissertation offers another way to understand this current period of fitness industry growth by centering the fitness Influencer and creator. Rather than a disruptive force of technological innovation that is qualitatively changing fitness, Influencers and creators use social media as a way to advance and stabilize careers that mostly already existed in the industry. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that although Influencers and creators may start with a number of different beliefs about social media, the primary way they made money within the fitness industry was through personal training and coaching (either online or in-person). Other options included selling fitness apparel, supplements, or advertising for fitness products, however this last option was commonly regarded as the least lucrative. Beyond working with paid customers, fitness Influencers and creators have many followers that rely on their content for fitness inspiration, information, and community (Boepple et al., 2016; Carrotte et al., 2015; Reade, 2020). This view suggests that the embrace of social media by current and aspiring fitness professionals is not necessarily about "the discursive positioning of fitness technologies as coaches and trainers," (Millington, 2017, p. 129) but instead about how Influencers and creators use technology to center their role as producer and distributor of fitness.

Chapter 4 not only shows the form of fitness content on Instagram, but also how fitness Influencers and creators practice authenticity and share information in order to build a relationship of trust with their audience. It is this relational narrative, so often built through Instagram captions, that attracts potential customers to sign up for online coaching or buy the right athletic gear. Rather than a fitness boom structured by the precise measurement of sweat Ph level or rapid eye movement (REM) sleep cycles promised by wearable fitness technologies,

fitness Influencers and creators succeed by sustaining relationships of trust with their customers and providing sense-making structures of fitness through telecommunication technologies that work to break down barriers of time and space (Greene & Joseph, 2015). Despite offering a different view of what our current fitness boom looks like, investments in social media and investments in wearable technology are motivated by the same economic pressure to put technologies toward increasing the productivity of producing fitness. It is from this starting point that this dissertation offers a novel way to approach the rise of fitness Influencers and creators and their unevenly distributed use of social media.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS

RECRUITMENT

This dissertation relies on forty-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with fitness Influencers and creators between November 2019 and May 2020. My recruitment strategy was primarily electronic and based on Instagram. I created a research account on Instagram, @kubler_uw, where I would post roughly once a week about research on the fitness industry and Influencers. The goal was to gain some level of in-group credibility with an active and legitimate page through which I could contact participants who I did not otherwise know personally. I contacted my participants either through the direct message function on Instagram, or through email, if that information was available on their Instagram page. Most interviews occurred over the phone, with a few of the international interviews taking place over WhatsApp, Google Hangouts, and Instagram Voice. Interviews were confidential and all participant names were pseudonymized.

I considered anyone a fitness Influencer or creator who regularly posted exercise and fitness-related content on Instagram while pursuing the vocational, sustained, and branded practices as defined by Abidin (2018). Although fitness Influencers and creators engage in different types of exercise such as weightlifting, yoga or cycling, they can be considered a cohesive group due to their similarity in practice. Posting content regularly, increasing professionalization through various forms of certification or commercial partnerships, and balancing online and offline performance and presence are consistent across various types of fitness. Duffy (2017) takes a similar approach when studying fashion Influencers, using fashion a

general heuristic for categorization, rather than dividing by subgenre of fashion Influencer such as, luxury, street wear, plus-sized, etc. Further, previous studies of fitness content on social media have sampled using the hashtag #fitness, the most popular and universal fitness hashtag, rather than identifying one specific type of fitness behavior or activity (Boepple et al., 2016; Carrotte et al., 2017; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017; Slater et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018).

COLLECTION

To collect my sample, I relied on both purposive sampling for range, as well as snowball sampling, due to limited access to certain participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Weiss, 1994). My goal with sampling for range was to find clearly different cases of social position in order to best understand how this impacted the beliefs and strategy of fitness Influencers and creators given my otherwise limited sample size. Because social position is not always immediately evident before the interview, I used current occupation and employment information, the type of content they produced on Instagram, and Instagram follower count, drawn from either personal communication or public facing social media accounts to best judge differences in position. Instagram currently allows users to write a bio about themselves that appears at the top of the page, and it is common practice for fitness Influencers to use their bios to list sponsorships, businesses, and certifications or degrees. In order to determine saturation for my sample, I made sure certain range parameters were met, which were developed based on my research questions. The range parameters I used were the ability to partner with brands within or outside the fitness industry, follower count, gender, employment type, parental occupation, and education.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

This interview protocol was used for all 41 interviews. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, not all questions on the protocol were asked to each participant or asked in the same way. Question order primarily followed the ordering in the protocol but was also varied depending on the responses from participants. Prior to being used in this dissertation, an earlier version of this interview protocol was tested in 5 pilot interviews which helped me refine both interview questions and question order.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date of Interview: _____ Location: _____
Time Begun: _____ Time Completed: _____

Introduction and Purpose of Interview

I am conducting this interview as a part of a communication research study at the University of Washington. I am interested in learning more about how you became an Influencer, how you make money, and how you communicate commercial opportunities to your followers.

Would you mind if I audio recorded this interview and took brief notes?

Remember that you do not have to answer any question(s) that you are not comfortable answering and you can stop this interview at any time if you so choose. Also, please know that all information shared in this interview is confidential. Once our interview is recorded it will be transcribed and your information will not be attached to the recording or the transcript in any way. Your name will not appear in the data, nor will the names of your family members. Pseudonyms will be used in any papers written for this project.

We also want to take this time to see if you have any questions.

Are you ready to begin?

Who gets to become an Influencer?

The first question I want to ask is how you describe the type of work you do online. Would you consider yourself an Influencer, creator, communicator, or something else?

How have you arrived at where you are today? How did you become an Influencer (or other

label)?

- Was there a moment when you decided you were going to invest and commit to this profession?
    - Why?
- Were you considering other career or job options?
    - If so, which ones?
- What did your parents do for work when you were growing up?
    - Were or are there certain expectations from your parents about what you should do for work?
    - Where did you grow up?
- Are you an Influencer full-time or do you do other paid work as well?

Did anyone help you get started?

- Did anyone inspire you to start?

What equipment do you use to produce content?

- When did you buy it? (ex: camera, phone, data plan, etc)
- Do you feel the quality of production equipment matters? If so, how much and why?

Who produces your content?

- Can you walk me through the production process of an Instagram post from beginning to end?

Who is a good example of someone on social media in the fitness industry?

- What about a bad one?

How long do you want to do this work for?

- What do you want to do after?

Influencer Strategies

What are some strategies of an effective Influencer?

- What are some ineffective ones?
- Which ones do you use?

What does being authentic mean to you? Does it play a role in your work as an Influencer?
How do you evaluate the success of a post or video?
Are there strategies you use as a fitness Influencer that other types of Influencers do not use?
What are the different ways that you monetize content on social media?
What are other ways you make money as an Influencer or otherwise?
What is your primary source of revenue?

- What is your least lucrative source of revenue?

If Influencer works with sponsor ask: Is there a difference between how you see success and how your sponsor determines success?
How do you decide which commercial opportunities to reject or accept?

- What are some examples?

How stable does your career feel?
- Are there things that you've done that have made it feel more or less stable?

What advice would you give to someone just starting out as a fitness Influencer?

Rhetorical Strategies

I'm going to shift gears a bit and talk specifically about how your produce posts on Instagram, but before I do I want to take a second to see if there is anything you've thought of so far that you would like to add to what you've already said.

When you are creating a post, do you think about the image or the caption first? What is the relationship between the two?

Does your thought process about posting change if the post will be promoting a product or service? If so, how?

What concerns do you have when you make posts about sponsored content or advertisements?

Are these concerns different if you are selling your own product?

How do you mitigate those concerns?
- Does this affect either the image or the text of the post?

Demographic Questions
- How old are you?
- What is your race and gender identity?
- What is your average annual income?
- What is the highest level of education that you have received?
- Where did you grow up?
    - Where do you live currently?

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

This table reflects the distribution of social characteristics that informed my analysis of social position and occupational trajectory. Although data for other social characteristics asked about in the interview protocol were recorded, they did not play a significant role in answering my research questions.

Table A.2. Descriptive statistics of interview sample

	Part time employment in online fitness (n=25)	Full time employment in online fitness (n=16)
Gender		
Men	12	6
Women	13	10
Annual Income		
Mean *Median*	$83,729 $50,000	$142,636 $75,000
Instagram followers		
Mean *Median*	31,916 10,700	58,430 34,750
Commercial brand partnerships	17 (68%)	9 (56%)

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