

Fitspiration is ruining the way we see ourselves.

The dark secret behind your Instagram feed.

By Julia Deng

HIIT workouts, juice cleanses, and 11 line abs. A good number of us have probably heard one of these buzzwords in the genre of fitspiration.

A combination of “fitness” and “inspiration,” fitspiration has spread across popular social media apps like Insta or Facebook in the past years. Fitspo posts usually feature toned influencers with perfect tans and active lifestyles. Thigh gaps, butt-lift routines, and trendy dieting habits frequent their feed.

On the surface, fitspiration seems innocent if not inspiring. That’s how I’ve seen it for the longest time. After all, what’s wrong with encouraging young women to lose weight and get healthy? But I’ve come to believe that a deeper issue lies beneath each Instagram post or Youtube vlog, and it’s the secret that fitspiration is actually ruining our self-image.

For one, fitspiration makes women into objects.

Fitspo models are often extremely attractive and only that. While obviously being attractive isn’t the actual issue, the issue is that it’s the only thing emphasized. Fitspiration tends to solely focus on sexuality. It turns us into objects valued by our appearance. In fact, [past research](#) suggests that increasing our fitspiration browsing on Instagram, also increases our own self-objectification and comparison.

After looking deeper into fitspiration, I’ve also realized that some of its values are frighteningly similar to thinspiration (online content that fuels pro-anorexics). But at first glance, the two types of media seem completely different. Isn’t thinspiration just about getting thin, whereas fitspiration is about getting healthy? I initially thought.

However, [studies](#) have found that both motivate social media users to lose weight because of appearance. While the two types of media are different in content -- thinspiration romanticizes extremely thin, bony bodies and fitspiration encourages slim, toned ones -- they share the same origin. They repeat that the main reason to go through weight loss is to become more attractive in the eyes of society.

Fitspo also encourages its subscribers to restrict eating, similar to thinspiration. And while influencers may talk mainly about dieting and juice cleanses, it doesn’t change the nature of the behavior. The messaging tells us that we have to diet if we want to attain the “perfect body.”

Fitspiration also keeps us dissatisfied with our own bodies. Fitspo motivation only makes us focus on what we lack. That becomes very dangerous territory when it pushes us towards an unhealthy mindset.

More [research](#) has found that looking at fitspiration posts internalizes the need to be thin. In other words, the more we look at fitspiration, the more we begin to idolize thinness -- neglecting the fact that thinness doesn’t necessarily equate to health. On top of that, browsing fitspiration also makes us more conscious of our body insecurities. The fitspiration culture sells an image of perfection to us. It leads us to overvalue appearance over health and lifestyle.

Some might argue for fitspiration as a solution to the very real issue of obesity in America.

While I would agree that obesity is a problem in our country, I'm certain that the fitspo movement isn't the right answer. At the heart of it, fitspiration rarely encourages weight loss for a genuine healthy lifestyle. It motivates us to lose weight for society's standards. When we fail to meet those impossibly high standards, we turn to self-blame and hatred.

We have to change the culture, even if it's through small steps.

Although social media may never reach a perfect point, I'm sure there's much we could do to improve what the current situation. Individually, we should all be more cautious about the types of content we look at. We have no control over the actions of top influencers, but we can choose who we follow. And we should choose well. Sure, pretty pictures matter, but self-love matters more. It's time to turn culture away from idolizing appearance and impossible perfection. I urge you to cut out the abundance of meaningless body shots on your content feed and subscribe to media that actually fuels your best self.