#TRANSFORMATIONTUSSDAY: DECONSTRUCTING THE “FEMALE GAZE” ON
FEMALE FITNESS IDEALS

BY

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ABSTRACT

I argue that Kayla’s #BBGprogress Instagram posts, along with the users’ comments on the images, demonstrate an appropriation of the male gaze, what I define as female-on-female gaze that monitors and controls standards of femininity. Female policing results in judgment based on ideas of perfection driven by a male-dominated culture; this gaze in turn creates a capitalization on female insecurities perpetuated by the heterosexual male gaze. I define three categories of perfection: weight loss, physical fitness/strength, and beauty/sexiness, all of which contribute to the de-humanizing of females. With 6.7 million Instagram followers and counting, Kayla’s power to either manipulate female bodies or encourage radical change is astounding. I contribute to the academic conversation surrounding social media, female communication, and body image from a rhetorical perspective.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Six million, seven hundred thousand.

That is the current number of followers that Australian fitness mogul Kayla Itsines has on just one of her social media platforms: Instagram. This number is astoundingly significant. Both Kayla’s fitness brand and the products that come along with it are monetary capitalizations on female bodies. Kayla is a 24 year-old Australian fitness mogul from Adelaide, Australia. In 2014, she created her own fitness business and workout guidebook, called the *Bikini Body Guide*. The name alone reflects oppressive stereotypes and gender roles, so it is not surprising that her Instagram page and #TransformationTuesday posts on that page also engage in stereotypes.

The *Bikini Body Guide* fitness guidebook contains twelve weeks’ worth of thirty-minute workouts and stretching, which are hyped by Kayla on her website with the slogan, “Tired of not seeing the weight-loss results you want? Discover the tricks that target fat loss just for women, how to eat for your body, & completely reinvent your shape. In just 12 weeks or less you can see amazing results and become bikini body ready” (Itsines). The guide is sold in its entirety online, for approximately ninety United States’ dollars. In addition, customers can buy her app titled *Sweat with Kayla*, which contains a timer and the same workout circuits, for twenty dollars a month.

Kayla, her fitness program, and her brand have gained immense traction in the past three years. She was crowned *Cosmopolitan Magazine’s* Fun Fearless Female of the Year in 2015. Her sponsors advertise her fitness regime in numerous
magazines, publications, and television programs such as *Cosmopolitan*, Apple Watch, *The Daily Mail*, *The Today Show*, *Women’s Health*, *The New York Times*, *Popsugar*, *The View*, and others. Her program is highly popular among the female college crowd, and her Instagram follower count steadily rises each day (Itsines).

Recently, Kayla has changed her hashtag on the transformation images from #TransformationTuesday to #BBGprogress. This change in hashtag is rhetorically significant, as Kayla capitalizes on her own product by placing transformative “before-and-after” images side by side. Kayla sends the message that it is only because of her product that these women are able to attain results. For the purpose of this thesis, I analyze both hashtags in images, because both hashtags accompany “before-and-after” images and emphasize the idea of change. The images which complement the hashtags, along with the comments responding to the images, have not changed. Regardless of the change in hashtag, women continue to view these images and critique what they are seeing or applaud certain (what they view as positive) bodily characteristics.

In this thesis, I argue that Kayla’s #BBGprogress Instagram posts, along with the users’ comments on the images, demonstrate an appropriation of the male gaze, what I define as female-on-female gaze that monitors and controls standards of femininity. Thus, encouraging female policing resulting in judgement based on ideas of perfection driven by a male-dominated culture; this gaze in turn creates a capitalization on female insecurities perpetuated by the heterosexual male gaze.

I plan to make a contribution to the academic conversation surrounding social media, female communication, and body image from a rhetorical perspective.
(Harris-Moore; Ibrahim; Pienaar and Bekker). I look at the discourses surrounding female bodies; however, my research is different than other material on similar topics because of my rhetorical perspective. An examination of the #BBGprogress phenomenon has the potential to inform our understanding of social media practices through a feminist perspective. This perspective includes female interactions with social media; specifically, their written thoughts and reactions toward one another. I have observed harmful social media-influenced practices too many times as a former female Division III swimmer. Women gaze upon other women’s bodies and assess themselves and others based on what they deem to be perfect, beautiful, and athletic. It is these environments of female subjectivity that foster unhealthy habits, and lead many down the proverbial rabbit hole to eating disorders, body dismorphia, and body over-consciousness.

As a rhetorical scholar, I believe nothing is more powerful than images combined with words, so powerful, “the image as a form of visual communication is entwined with societies through time, representing cultures and identities and offering different ways to gaze into the near and far, intimate and distant, and public and private” (Ibrahim 42). With the expansion of the digital and social world, magazine covers which once portrayed beauty and body ideals, now employ photoshopping and photograph manipulation schemes to seemingly perfect perfection. These manipulated covers have been replaced with not-so-obviously photoshopped or “filtered” Instagram fitness posts, which now dictate the norms of beauty and body ideals. For example, social media sites such as Instagram contain images of real people losing weight and realizing their ideal body, so the average
viewers of these images may also feel that if someone who seems “just like me”
could achieve their fitness goal, then why cannot I.

Overall, the transformation of what may be unattractive bodies into ideal
female bodies is of great interest. The policing of female bodies by other females is
an interesting phenomenon because it goes against many concepts of feminism.
However, women being each other’s worst enemies has historical backing. The
concept of woman versus woman is often discussed in context within an
organizational setting, as “women and perhaps other traditionally marginalized
groups, may actively participate in their own subordination” (Ashcraft and
Pacanowsky 217). With 6.7 million followers and counting on Instagram, Kayla’s
power to either manipulate female bodies or encourage radical change is
astounding.

In this introduction, I first present a literature review which examines what
the communication discipline has to say about theories of perfection and the male
gaze. I lead with a discussion of perfection as a human motivator and then articulate
how this ultimate motivator links to the male gaze, in which men desire a “perfect”
female body. This process, I argue, may lead females into a dangerous situation of
constant and perpetual desire to be perfect, not just for men, but for each other.
Hence, the appropriation of the male gaze into the female gaze. I then define the
method of image selection and the critical approach of female-to-female
policing/communication, which I define as female gaze. Lastly, I provide a preview
of the chapters for this thesis.
THE PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

Kayla’s Instagram and the comments accompanying the images provide an important opportunity to investigate the oppressive idea of female body perfection through a feminine lens. The female-on-female policing of bodies and the emphasis on the perfect body abides by traditional patriarchal norms. Kenneth Burke discusses perfection in terms of man, and more specifically, “The Definition of Man” in his 1966 work, *Language as Symbolic Action*. Burke’s definition of man discusses man as a “symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative), separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirt of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order),” and the most crucial notion for this paper, “rotten with perfection” (Burke 1966). Burke continues his analysis of “man,” and in doing so expounds upon his idea of man as having an unquenchable desire to be far better than he actually can be. The striving for perfection is a constant motive for human life and symbol use.

Burke asserts that the motive of man is distinct to humans and it is with this motive that man asserts human action which promotes a betterment of oneself (Burke 1969). Burke explains this idea of motive in much more depth in his book *A Grammar of Motives*, but what is crucial to understand for this thesis is the idea of humans having a motive to pursue perfection. Through this struggle to achieve such perfection, there is a dichotomous relationship. Whilst accomplishing goals, man is exposed to a dangerous appeal of more and more perfection. This danger of the
constant desire for more is seen through many situations and instances of female body shaming.

Women can often achieve one physical fitness goal by molding their bodies into ideal specimens, but when these results are shown to those wanting to make progress, the desire for more is frequently present. Women accomplish one of their fitness goals and then look to what their next one can be. Just like the addictiveness of plastic surgery, once you meet one goal for your body, then you are wanting to change something else (Harris-Moore). The process continues and continues because of a desire for perfection, because as Kenneth Burke says humans are “rotten with perfection” (Burke 1966). Kayla’s #BBGprogess Instagram posts, and especially the comments and judgments by women chronicled with them, reflect this idea. In her book, Media and the Rhetoric of Body Perfection: Cosmetic Surgery, Weight Loss and Beauty in Popular Culture, Deborah Harris-Moore discusses this unrealistic quest for bodily perfection. She explains: “media users are interpellated to think weight loss or body modification can give them a false sense of agency, independence or even social mobility, but as they go through the transformation—artificial or not—they are subscribing to conventional beauty standards and white supremacy” (Harris-Moore).

The idea of perfection as seen through the female body or completeness of the ideals of femininity is a lens for this thesis. This idea of perfection as completeness is crucial to this thesis. Michael Hyde discusses perfection in his book, Perfection: Coming to Terms with being Human, as “a metaphysical desire for a state of completeness” (Hyde xii). Although broad, this definition captures what it means
to strive for perfection: the search for completeness. Similar to Burke’s definition of perfection, Hyde discusses perfection as something to strive for or to have a motive toward. It is with the pursuit of perfection that dangers come into play, but according to Hyde, the ultimate goal of perfection is completeness. Hyde takes his argument into the medical realm and questions whether there are or will be consequences of medical sciences constant drive for perfection. It is within these conversations that Hyde really ponders the human philosophical desire to find significance. This philosophical conversation regarding perfection leads to the debating and altering of human understanding of life experiences. It is this sort of questioning that coincides with Burke’s idea of man being “rotten with perfection,” desiring something so far beyond human’s natural understanding that it becomes impossible (Burke 1966).

In his book, *Perfection*, Hyde also leads a conversation on the idea of beauty as being part of our human understanding of the word “perfection.” Beauty and perfection are engrained in our society as synonymous. The categories of perfection that I plan to analyze are specific to the female body, and are representative of the current norms of female physical fitness, one of which is beauty or sexiness. The categories have to do with some sort of transformative experience, which stems from this idea of human desire for completeness. In order to achieve completeness, one must go through a transformation, and in this case, it is in the form of physicality.

The academic conversation of beauty and perfection continues with scholarship concerning cosmetic surgery as a means of achieving perfection (Harris-
Moore; Pienaar and Bekker). This medically-induced transformation seems to be the ultimate form of the human desire to be perfect: a combination of the scientific with social norms. Kayla’s BBG program claims to avoid this desire to be perfect, as the results she provides are natural and self-imposed from working out. Deborah Harris-Moore identifies the media’s “perfect body” representation of women as the main culprit for the desire of women to participate in plastic surgery. She also acknowledges the socially constructed nature of beauty and gender expectations, sometimes constructed even through image manipulation. One of the most common mediums containing image manipulation is magazines (Harris-Moore 109).

Scholars Mandi Brandt and Adelia Carstens use the “beauty of sport” feature in *Sports Illustrated* magazine to analyze this manipulation phenomenon. They discovered trends of manipulated images of female bodies that were being adjusted to fit into pre-existing stereotypes of women. These stereotypes are created by and maintained through “male gatekeepers” (Brandt and Carstens 239). Two of these stereotypes are around sex or women as a consumable product and physical beauty. The stereotypes play right into the idea of the “disciplined female body,” an argument made by scholars Kiran Pienaar and Ian Bekker. They argue that the female body is “tightly controlled and regulated by the rational mind, civilized to guard against ‘irrational’ impulses, such as the desire to eat” (Pienaar and Bekker 540). This “disciplined female body” stems from a Foucauldian analysis of discipline and power, but is developed as a gender-specific version. They use the word “discipline” as “consonant with the original Foucauldian usage of the term to describe the modern body; a body which is controlled not by physical restraint, but
by individual acts of self-regulation” (Pienaar and Bekker 539). So, the individual is responsible for the disciplining of one’s own body. However, this idea of “self-surveillance” does not fully encompass the notion of the popular media’s influence on the body. It is the popular media that “draw on these discourses to promote the contemporary ideal of female beauty, namely the thin, toned female body” (Pienaar and Bekker 540).

Kayla’s Instagram is a breeding ground for patriarchal social norms, but reinforced by other women. I plan to debunk this notion of positivity to illustrate and critique this unhealthy social media environment, as Kayla’s page is nothing but hegemony manipulating and restricting the female body. Kayla and her program are like a prison in which the prisoners of the system and social norms are abusing the other prisoners. Kayla as the expert with credibility is the only one who can provide vast knowledge, as she and her BBG followers have come to a mutual understanding thereby accepting “the principle of gradation itself, and in thus ‘universalizing’ the principle” (Burke 1966). So, in a system that is self-imposed and based in hierarchy, women sign up to be surveyed. Yes, the discipline of one’s own body is a form of surveillance, as stated before, but the members of Kayla’s Instagram following survey and discipline one another. As Foucault says of prisons and power, “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints power . . . he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 4).
Kayla is participating in a consumerist mentality. She performs a selection of women from user-generated content that she receives. Her BBG program users send her “before-and-after” images of themselves, displaying their #BBGprogres, hoping she will select them for her highly followed Instagram page. Through stereotyping and the “male gatekeeper,” female bodies have become “marketable assets in modern consumer culture, objectified in the popular media in order to sell products” (Piennar and Bekker 540). In a very meticulous process, her followers and avid BBG subscribers submit their “before-and-after” photos to Kayla, either via email, or by tagging Kayla on their own Instagram posts, so she recognizes them and hopefully places them on her page. Kayla selects which of these transformation images she deems best, and posts them on her page as representative of the possibilities her program can afford users. For her page, there must be certain bodily transformations occurring from the “before-and-after” photographs in order to warrant and sell the ideal female body and her BBG program. This entire selection process is the start of the male gaze's appropriation and monetization by a female.

TRADITIONAL MALE GAZE TO FEMALE GAZE

Both Kayla’s postings and the ones from other women commenting on her posts are somewhat opposite of the traditional male dominated view of women. Traditional male gaze theorizes that men look at women. On Kayla’s Instagram, women are looking at women, and I argue they judge based on the same traditional male model of what a woman should look like. The traditional lens and primary
theory and resource for interpreting the hegemonic nature of media is Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze. The general idea of the male gaze that Mulvey establishes in her pioneering article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* is, “the image of a woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man” (Mulvey 67). Mainstream Hollywood cinema provides a space for viewers to enter into the male protagonist’s viewpoint. Often, both the plotlines and flowing camera work place the viewer into an active male condition that objectifies and frames women as “passive objects of male desire” (Mulvey 67). She discusses her theory in terms of cinema, but I apply this theory to social media’s photograph headquarters: Instagram posts.

Since Mulvey’s groundbreaking work on the male gaze, many scholars have taken the opportunity to expand upon and provide their own interpretations of the gaze. One such expansion comes from Alyse Keller and Katie Gibson and their discussion of appropriating the male gaze and “challenging patriarchal modes of representation to advance a resistant female vantage point” (Keller and Gibson 28). They use the case study of the *Hunger Games* movies to assert “the film refigures the dominant male gaze of Hollywood cinema to focus on the power and agency of the female protagonist, to legitimate a female perspective, and to encourage a questioning of patriarchal power” (Keller and Gibson 28). This ownership is one way of appropriating the male gaze for positive female resistance, as a sort of taking back what belongs to you, but another form of appropriating the male gaze is what this thesis plans to analyze. Instead of the traditional masculine gaze on females in cinema, Kayla’s Instagram constructs a new modern avenue of gaze that assaults the
female body and maintains hegemonic power. In this case, the patriarchal damage is being done by women.

Despite the vast academic conversations regarding perfection and the male gaze, there are some limitations rhetorically to the current literature base. The primary limitation is the absence of social media scholarship with regard to the viewing of female fitness bodies. However, there is new research on the influence of social media on marketing to millennials. The millennial generation has a profound connection with social media and in turn social media has a drastic effect on it. When companies look to market a product, they are now looking toward social media and those with vast followings, known as “social media influencers.” A recent 60 Minutes episode titled “The Influencers” stated that some of these social media junkies “have larger followings than the most popular movies or TV shows,” and “major companies are paying them millions of dollars to influence their followers and persuade them to buy products” (Whitaker).

According to the book, *Marketing to Millennials: Reach the Largest and Most Influential Generation of Consumers Ever*, “businesses cannot afford to ignore the Millennials, [as] their collective buying power alone—an estimated $200 billion annually—is already noteworthy...” (Fromm and Garton). With this buying power comes the new form of marketing: social media. The informal nature of new media may seem more “real” to users than traditional advertisements because of the familiarity of the “influencers,” but manipulations of bodies, consumerist culture, and the danger of being “rotten with perfection” still remain (Burke 1966).
Kayla is a different breed of “social media influencer.” Kayla and her fitness program have gained credibility through her own display of “success” postings on Instagram. She is on social media selling a product: transformations, but her narrative implies that they happen to be only available through her system. She appears to be presenting women that are “just like you,” but they have gone through a transformation of their bodies, in their perpetual desire to become perfect. The thought process is, “if the women in the ‘before-and-after’ photos can have such a drastic transformation, thanks to the Bikini Body Guide and Kayla . . . then why can’t I?”

METHOD

In order to conduct my analysis of the female gaze on images from Kayla’s Instagram, I have chosen specific images using a meticulous process of elimination. Firstly, I focus on the #TransformationTuesday and #BBGprogress images from the hundreds of images on Kayla’s Instagram, because of the hashtag and the idea of transforming and the necessity of transformation. I have decided to look at these hashtag images from the date range, August 1st, 2016-December 31st 2016, because this period is representative of what a typical college girl would see during her first college semester, if they followed Kayla’s page. There are 250 images that fit both the hashtag and date range. It is important to acknowledge the limited demographics of the 250 images. There are only five women of color out of the 250 images, and of these five, two of the women are African American and the other three are Asian. It is also important to note that there is a scattered few images of
women over the age of 30, in which Kayla overly praises their transformation due to their age. I plan to focus on young females, from around age 18-30, and the ways they connect to one another on Kayla’s Instagram. This lack of diversity in race, age, and class is not forgotten and in fact complicates my analysis further, as a discussion of such must be had. To even participate in the program one must be of a certain class, as the program requires a monthly payment of twenty dollars.

After reviewing my selected demographic of the collection of posts to date, the images seem to fit within what I have defined as three categories of perfection, both in the images themselves and in the women-to-women comments posted. The three categories that these comments and images most reflect are 1) weight loss, 2) physical fitness/strength, and 3) beauty/sexiness. Through all of this selection, and sorting out of categories an interesting subcategory has emerged: pregnancy. Due to the already multilayered nature of this thesis, the pregnancy posts are discussed in my conclusion. All of the categories represent one of the many physical characteristics of the ideal female form, are specific to the female body, and are representative of the current norms of female physical fitness. This thesis continues with an analysis chapter for each of the three categories, and within each chapter I provide nine to ten specific images and their comments that best represent their specific category, because this number allows me to see enough themes emerging.

Even though all three of the categories of perfection still have elements of the other categories, each of the Instagram posts has hundreds of comments, and around half of these comments for each image can be eliminated from an analysis right away as they are advertisements for other weight loss tutorials and health
programs. In order to focus only on comments that deal with what I define as characteristics of perfection, I plan to eliminate comments such as simple congratulations, awesome job, and go girl posts. However, these congratulatory comments should not be overlooked, as they are external validation which acknowledges perfection. After analyzing each of the comments for each image it is clear that there is an expectation for positive comments. Any negativity must also be associated with some sort of reinforcement otherwise the comment is jumped on by the BBG community. For example, if a commenter says they “like the pre-BBG body better than the transformed body,” they must accompany that statement with a “congratulations” or “nice work.” It is these sorts of complex comments that interest me. Therefore, the comments I am left with are female-to-female responses and reactions to the three specific categories of the bodily transformations.

This thesis looks through two different, but interacting, theoretical lenses. The first is the idea of perfection of the female body or completeness of the ideals of femininity, and the second is this same idea of perfection, but as appropriated by females to gaze upon other females. Kayla’s Instagram posts highlighting female bodily transformations, and the comments that come with them, are both essentially a transference of male dominance over a very specific female identity: a strong, powerful, skinny, pretty, and successful woman. She, Kayla, takes on the male identity to control female bodies, but as a woman she maintains the ideal form herself. This manipulation of female bodies through Instagram is clearly exceedingly problematic, and the fact that women are the manipulators and policers of female bodies is even more disturbing. Within Kayla’s Instagram, women are the
oppressors of one another. There are many moments in history in which men have been the oppressors, manipulating slaves, Jews, students, Muslims, immigrants, and any and all minority group(s). A cycle of oppression and domination has been perpetuated in different forms (Freire 17). Now there is new technology and a new consciousness because of the technology, which tap into this memory of a long line of domination. With these new technologies, specifically Instagram, there are new ways to make each other miserable, as the false solidarity it provides has become toxic, and cult-like with Kayla as the queen bee and her followers as both the oppressed and oppressors.

With the separation of the Instagram #TransformationTuesday and #BBGprogress images into three categories of perfection: weight loss, physical fitness/strength, and beauty, I hope to see a clear relationship between perfection and the “female gaze.” This thesis analyzes woman-on-woman policing. I expect to find a relationship between the policing and heterosexual male perceptions, as women are judging based on these three categories of perfection. This thesis wishes to answer the question of how women are communicating with one another on the image-based social media site: Instagram. With the expansion, and growing popularity of sites like Instagram, this environment of body over-consciousness is not healthy. Yes, there are conversations about the media and now social media’s body image pressure on women. However, this thesis seeks a deeper understanding about women-to-women interactions. Possibly, my work may provide suggestions for women to control both the vicious cycle of perfection and the limiting conceptions of beauty, fitness, and weight.
This first chapter has served as an introduction to my topic, my case study, and the academic conversation surrounding my theoretical lens. All three of the forthcoming analysis chapters focus on specific Instagram images and users’ comments. The second chapter is an analysis of images within the first category of perfection: weight loss. The third chapter is an analysis of images within the physical fitness/strength category of perfection, which I have developed. The fourth and final analysis chapter follows suit and contains an analysis of the images I deem to be part of the beauty/sexiness category of perfection. The final chapter of this thesis is the conclusion in which I provide a short summary, review the many implications and consequences resulting from this case study, and lastly encourage hopes for future discussions on body image.

Chapter two begins with a detailed look into weight loss category of perfection, and the tension between the perfect amounts of weight loss prior to the assessment of a woman as too skinny. The conversation continues with ten images that best represent the many layers of perfection as weight loss. In order to maintain the privacy of the women pictured, I have blacked out their faces.¹

¹ Although blacking out the women’s faces is for privacy reasons, it is quite telling because in this world of BBG bodies, the face does not matter. The body is everything.
CHAPTER TWO: PERFECTION AS WEIGHT LOSS

We see female celebrities endorsing and advertising products that “magically” get rid of unwanted pounds all the time. What used to be based in television commercials and magazines, now exists on celebrities’ personal social media pages with an often hidden message that it is in fact an #AD. With 500 million active monthly users on Instagram, it is no surprise as to why advertisers pay for this form of marketing (Instagram Press). However, the guidelines for advertisements on the social media site Instagram are quite obscure. As of August 2016, the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) is cracking down on celebrity-sponsored advertisements where “users need to be clear when they’re getting paid to promote something, and hashtags like #ad. #sp, #sponsored – common forms of identification—are not always enough . . . It’s a move that could make the posts seem less authentic, reducing their impact” (Frier and Townsend 1). Account holders of social pages such as Instagram see these images with hidden advertisements about weight loss and think, “Wow, my favorite celebrity is losing weight with this product, I should try it too.” Celebrities are opinion leaders and, whether it be on Instagram or elsewhere, they have a lot of influential power.

What makes Kayla’s product so different is her use of images that capture the weight loss of what viewers see as regular women, not celebrities, in order to sell her Bikini Body Guide. Since the guide is her own product, she is not required to label the “before-and-after” images as an advertisement. She is self-promoting, as well as profiting from the transformations of female bodies. I argue that Kayla’s Instagram page is a site of post-feminist media, an example of what Jackson and Vares describe
as a space of “intense focus on the female body, both as a site of agency and as an object of a scrutinizing, harsh gaze.” The harsh gaze in this post-feminist media form comes from women who are influenced by the BBG culture to “conform to impossible standards of beauty” (Jackson and Vares 348). The side-by-side transformation images that Kayla posts often highlight the actual pounds a woman has lost, emphasizing the idea of an “improved” female body as one which is skinnier.

As post-feminist media have transitioned into post-feminist romanticism, the relationship between the body and femininity has grown stronger: “not only is the contemporary normative body aesthetic slim, white and young in this post-feminist context but it is also required to be ‘hot’ and ‘sexy’, signified by its curvaceous form,” all of which improvements must be worked toward, to achieve perfection (Jackson and Vares 349). So, when the pounds a woman has lost are emphasized through Instagram posts, this post-feminist romanticism ideology is reinforced, but also complicated. The #BBGArmy Kayla has created desires a woman to lose weight and be on the road to skinniness, but also to maintain her “curvaceous form” because the community polices based in masculine regulations. This female-on-female gaze of perfection as skinny yet curvy seems like an impossibility, as the bounds of what constitutes an acceptable feminine situation are confused.

As a site of post-feminist media, Kayla’s Instagram emphasizes the individual’s transformation to becoming skinny, healthy, and fit for themselves; however, Kayla’s program also provides an example of a flaw in the post-feminist ideology (Itsines). Although the women are transforming themselves for
themselves, and not for men, the resulting weight loss look they morph into is similar to the pre-existing heterosexual male view of a woman. The problem is the internalization of socially constructed, media re-produced notions of the ideal physicality of a woman. Disguised in post-feminist female body positivity, Kayla’s Instagram enhances hegemonic structures.

After analyzing 250 “before-and-after” images on Kayla’s Instagram page, from August 1st through December 31st, 2016, a timeline I chose as a representation of what a typical college girl would see in a fall semester, in this chapter, I look at ten images that represent perfection as weight loss. Drawing from my investigation of images, in this chapter I focus on the search for perfection as weight loss, first using age as a lens. I analyze directly negative comments in response to both full body weight loss and weight loss zoomed into specific body parts. I also discuss what I identify as “false positive” comments, those where users mask their negative judgment through subtle and seemingly supportive feedback. Ultimately, I argue that perfection as weight loss is an unbridled cycle perpetuated through a female-on-female gaze.

The weight loss category of perfection begs the question of how much weight is enough weight to lose without getting to the “too skinny” stage. Based on my analysis of comments and images, there are two distinct types of comments for each weight loss image. The comments are either direct, with a lifted veil that holds nothing back in terms of negative opinions, or they are indirect, with a façade of positivity and motivation. Oftentimes, females judge and accept progress to a “better” body, but when the women gazing think there is too large a difference
between the images or there is too much weight loss, then female policing and skepticism begin.

Both Kayla and the women commenting on her images of weight loss are playing into male dominating structures. I argue that the comments reveal a flipping of the switch, from male-on-female, to female-on-female gaze, along with a deep level of criticism. The female gaze draws upon ideal standards of femininity put in place by male hegemonic structures. The patriarchal assemblies and manipulation of the feminine body seen in film are a reflection of the norms of our society (Mulvey). Feminine bodies are historically linked to their “social value: in bearing children, in satisfying men’s sexual needs, and in the labour of caring for men’s and children’s emotional and physical needs” (Brown and Jasper 18). It is bearing children that is often associated with a male’s perspective on the female body and traditionally in order to bear a child a woman must be somewhat youthful. Thus, youthfulness is a necessity in order to be valued by the structures which made “women’s traditional reproductive and domestic roles . . . linked to their physical selves and their evaluations of their bodies” (Hurd 81).

Figure one displays what I argue is the most dramatic transformation Kayla has ever posted for her #BBGprogress series. The woman on the left in dim lighting
and facing away from the camera is hard to picture as the same woman in the “after”
photograph on the right. The same shirt is pictured in both images; however, many
of the 344 comments made on the image are skeptical. Some commenters have a
hard time believing that the dramatic weight loss pictured is legitimate and
articulate their opinions without hesitation. One commenter made her skepticism
clear with the comment, “what the hell? Girl went from looking like a Bosnian mama
to her 12 year old daughter?!” Not only does the statement reflect skepticism of the
weight loss, but also lays on the negativity with stereotypical language saying the
“before” body looked like a traditionally big-boned older woman. Other commenters
are not quite as harsh, but still remain headstrong in their opinions that “She seems
like two different people,” “Looks like a mother and daughter photograph. Don’t
believe it,” and “Dang! Before looks like a 35 year old mom, after a 14 year old girl.”
Although all of these statements are problematic, the concept of age as an indicator
of imperfection and necessary weight loss is prominent. In order for the female
viewers of Kayla’s Instagram to see the woman in figure one as having a perfect body, she must look “20 years younger,” and lose “40 kilos.”

Despite the skeptical comments and direct negativity, due to the dramatic weight change, figure one also generated comments with what I call a façade of positivity and motivation. Yes, while saying, “The amazing thing is how she looks so much younger after losing weight well done!!” and “OMG! What an amazing lady! I almost can’t believe it’s the same person! You look sooo much younger too! Good Job!” are encouraging comments about the woman’s progress, they also imply that there was a change to be made and a job that needed to be done in the first place.

Commenters look at the “before” picture accompanied by the “after” picture and quickly come to the conclusion that the “before” is negative and not good enough, she looks old and overweight, and had to be changed into a “completely different person.” Again, perfection and age come into play, as there is a stigmatization of younger as more beautiful and therefore more perfect. Women are gazing upon other women and deeming the “before” bodies they witness are not up to the standards of perfection. I also question why weight loss is considered a job, implying that there is something to be fixed. The “before” photograph, it seems, is never good enough. Just as Kenneth Burke discussed in his “Definition of Man,” man is “rotten with perfection” (Burke 1966). Similarly women observers are rotten with perfection, and in particular are obsessed with body image as a means to achieve perfection, because of oppressive societal norms and conversations about the feminine body. However, when one goal of weight loss is reached, and the job has
been done, a new goal must be set, and so on and so forth, until a woman is at the “too skinny” stage or worse: having an eating disorder.

FULL BODY WEIGHT LOSS

There are many other ways in which direct negativity is expressed through the comments on Kayla’s #BBGprogress Instagram posts, besides ageist statements. As stated before, there are judgments made and policing done when a woman seems to have lost what is deemed as “too much weight” or the woman has gotten to the “too skinny stage.” In all these comments about a woman being too thin, the sincerity of the weight loss is again called into question. The comments on figure two are directly negative, as they target her “after” photograph as looking not only too skinny, but also ill. Multiple commenters raise the question, “Am I the only one that thinks that’s toooo thin? Though I appreciate her dedication to get healthy, this in my opinion is too skinny,” and “That girl needs to eat a damn cheeseburger. Some
girls look awesome after BBG, and some look so sickly!! Scary!” The language itself is very policing in both tone and content. Other comments ask whether the woman in figure two is even the same woman. Both criticism and confusion are compounded within the comment section, reinforcing the conclusion that perfection is unattainable. There is always too skinny, too fat, too old, too young, etc., and it is this unattainability which makes Kayla’s business model genius, as there is a perpetual need and desire for improvement. The vicious cycle is self-generated by users, so Kayla sits back and cashes in on fostering female insecurities.

Some comments are directly negative and nasty; however, a woman's need to lose weight in the first place and her feeling ugly and overweight are at the root of the problem. The negative female-on-female gaze emerges in the comments, perpetuating an endless cycle of body consciousness behavior, such as comparing oneself to others and self-deprecation as a result, women acting as their own worst enemies, and lastly, having a constant awareness of one’s body as it is judged and critiqued on a public forum. Comments of encouragement (false positivity) are also harmful because they imply that the woman in the “before” picture does not look good enough. Just as in figure two, the transformation of the woman in figure three is questioned by a commenter asking, “Is it even the same person?!?! Don’t know if it’s the lighting but her skin tone and nose shape have changed drastically!” The picking apart of this woman’s body is discouraging. Instead of focusing on overall weight loss, depicted in the “before-and-after” photographs, the comments on figure three focus on body features that are not directly associated with her weight loss.
Even if the woman had enhanced her weight loss in some way, the focus on her tanned skin and nose are unnecessary, as they have no direct correlation to body weight loss.

The comments on figure three seem to imply that the “after” body is too perfect, therefore there must be some sort of fakery going on. Comments such as those in response to the transformation of this woman question its authenticity, as a challenge to both the user and Kayla’s program. The comments bring another level of complexity to the analysis of the realness of these images on Instagram. As a social media platform started as a way to display images, with the ability to manipulate them with the use of filters and photoshopping apps, the concepts of

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2 When speaking about the idea of fakery in Kayla’s Instagram images it is important to note Instagram is a photoshopp mecca, as it was built as a photograph editing and sharing application. We must also take into consideration the lighting and posing in all of the “before” photographs. Almost all the “before” photographs contain poor lighting that emphasizes problem areas (either too shaded or too harsh), a frown or not so glowing facial expression, and poor posture. The “after” photos are always bright with great lighting (highlighting their new figure), a smile, and great posture.
reality and fantasy are at the core of Instagram. The comingling between reality and fantasy on Instagram is problematic because messages can be misconstrued and manipulated. Just as magazines are known for photoshopping images in order to achieve a version of the ideal female, Instagram, and its off-shoot applications like Facetune\(^3\), can change all images, not just pictures of women, with the swipe of a finger. Even if it is selling weight loss and a workout program that in reality requires additional help, potentially medical, in order to achieve the dream body, Instagram filters can make it happen in under a minute. If a photograph is dark, it can be brightened. If a user wants to enhance the colors of a sunset, they can make the colors more vibrant. What women consider to be bodily flaws can be airbrushed to perfection. The images on Instagram are the same representation of a real moment, but they are sprinkled with fantasy. Perfection is reached, if only through editing.

The comments about a woman being too thin and sickly looking in her “after” BBG photograph exemplify women policing other women by claiming that they looked better in their “before” photograph. Negative commenters are performing the female gaze as a reminder that too much weight loss, and therefore the loss of female curvature, is not perfection. Figure four displays a rare series of three images that represents, from left to right, this woman’s #BBGprogress. The weight in her midsection and legs has gone down, but commenters are quick to step in and

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\(^3\) Facetune is an application which can be purchased on the Apple App Store. Its App Store description states the following: “Professional photographers and graphic designers constantly photoshopp models to perfection, and now so can you! Without the expensive price tag or complicated tools, Facetune gives you the ability to retouch and add artistic flair to selfies and portraits with ease, from the convenience of your iPhone.”
advertise that “The first one is the best,” and “There is nothing wrong with the way you looked in the first picture at all.” Although slightly less directly negative than figures one through three, figure four still contains comments which challenge the woman’s goal, what she displays as her success in the far right image. Describing the first body as better is considered a positive as it advertises a healthy, curvaceous woman, but saying this illustrates the female appropriation of the male gaze as women are pointing to the far left image as the better one, which according to Laura Mulvey’s male gaze is the hourglass figure through which the masculine film camera looks up and down the curves of the female body. However, despite the positivity of the comments saying the “before” photograph is better than the “after,” the comments are also negative because they go against the woman’s goal of weight loss seen in the “after” photograph. The comments are complicated with the tension between claims of the woman’s goal (“after” body) being bad because she should not need to change, and saying the “before” image is best because females have adopted

![Image](image_url)
the male perspective. There is no winner in this situation, and it is difficult to assess which comments are better, because both the comments and the system which fosters the comments are flawed.

WEIGHT LOSS ZOOMED IN

The comments on the previous images within the weight loss category of perfection are those from women who police the entire feminine body. Figures five through seven are examples of images that contain directly negative weight loss comments that target particular areas of the female body: the butt and the breasts. Both areas of the female body are considered to be critical to femininity. Figures five and six contain comments which emerge frequently when the targeted female body part is the butt: cellulite. Figure five contains comments such as, “That’s a lot of cellulite progress,” and “Wow that bum progress.” While one commenter on figure six gets super specific in asking, “How is it possible that this girl doesn’t have excess

Figure 5: Posted September 2nd, 2016
skin, or lingering cellulite? I mean some of them lost a lot of weight.” In both instances commenters make direct statements about the body. Although they all seem to imply now the women look better because of their lack of cellulite and “bum progress,” they are saying that the “before” photographs with cellulite are negative.

The exceedingly detailed comment on figure six has a highly skeptical tone. The commenter points out the lack of excess skin that comes along with an increased weight loss, as in figure six. When looking without bias at the “before-and-after” transformation, the skeptical comments by women gazing upon these images are understood. The “before” image of figure six contains a woman with low rise, bikini style underwear; the same woman wears high rise spandex to mid-thigh in her “after” photograph. Commenters look at these two images and wonder where the inevitable excess skin from weight loss is, as well as the woman’s cellulite. I argue that this combination of “before-and-after” photographs is a deceptive display of BBG progress by the woman pictured, even if it is not intended to be. Both the

Figure 6: Posted November 27th, 2016
lighting and the woman's attire are not equivalent, so it is difficult and deceptive to make an assessment of progress. Commenters believe the woman has lost weight, but through the pursuit for perfection enhancing the appearance of weight loss to seem perfect faster is problematic. This image constitutes “cheating,” further reinforcing women's desire for pride. However, the tension of deception without intent and commenters judging because of perceived deception is complicated. Here, in figure six, and elsewhere in this thesis, the female body is a site of numerous tensions.

The other female body part that is a direct target for negativity are the breasts. Female commenters take on the male persona and articulate their distaste for women who have lost their breast curvature. Figure four and figure seven provide examples of images with comments about weight loss and the resulting loss of voluminous breasts. While almost every image involved in the weight loss category of perfection generated comments about the “loss of boobs,” figures four and seven provide the most shocking and revealing statements. Comments on figure four showed signs of fear for lack of and loss of breasts. One commenter specified that she was even, “Nervous to start this program. Scared my boobs will get smaller.” While commenters on figure seven say, “Not good. Her boobs are getting smaller too,” and “Pray for the boobs lost.” The train of thought of a woman losing
weight and therefore horrifically losing her breasts is a prime example of the female appropriation of the male gaze. The male viewpoint of attractiveness is about the curvature and hourglass figure of the female body. According to the male gaze, female curves act as the focal point of the female body, and as a guide for the male eye to look up and down a woman’s body (Mulvey). When a woman does not have the visible curvature of breasts, she is deemed less attractive according to the theoretical framework of the male gaze. The female-on-female gaze takes on this ideology and assumes the woman in figure seven to be imperfect because she is skinny, but did not maintain her breast size.

Inevitably when a woman loses weight in a transformative way she will lose weight in her breasts, as they are fat-rich deposits on the female body. With this fact in mind, comments for the distaste in the loss of breast size are inconsistent with Kayla’s program’s weight loss as perfection model. In order to lose weight and become skinny enough one has to lose fat, so women accomplish this loss of fat with
a loss of fat all over their body, including in the breast area. The women lose weight and become one step closer to perfection, but will also never achieve complete perfection unless they can defy nature with medical means i.e., Plastic surgery (boob job). Through the female-on-female gaze, women tightly control all standards of femininity as essential to perfection, even the contradictory ones.

FALSE POSITIVITY AND THE FAÇADE OF MOTIVATION

The Bikini Body Guide program is at fault for using female bodies as a site for judgment of the standards of femininity and what perfect weight loss is, not the women participating in it. As discussed in the example of figure one, some comments about the #BBGprogress images are not directly negative in tone. Some comments contain the façade of positivity and motivation, while truly stating that there was something wrong prior to the weight loss. In figure one, the false positivity was all about how there was a job that needed to be done and a change that needed to be made, essentially saying that the woman's “before” body was not good enough. The falsely positive comments have one thing in common: there is always talk about an unsatisfactory body transitioning into a “perfect” BBG body.

Highlighting the risk of becoming “too skinny” because of weight loss, figure eight generates comments as a false positive about health. The commenters are perplexed, but still congratulatory about the transformation, “I dunno I think her body was a better shape before!! More hourglass . . . Just think she is too straight now . . . More boylike . . . But I do appreciate a lot of work has gone into it,” and “I’m trying to understand this . . . is this a weight loss system . . . the picture on the left is a
healthy body girl not fat at all but the picture on the right of her looks sick and horrible. Congratulations though it is her happiness.” The commenters congratulate the women, but they also comment on the “before” picture as better/healthier. They applaud the weight loss, but their “second guessing” and “but she worked hard,” statements function as what I call a false positive. They mask their disapproval in not-so-subtle ways, as commenters question the need for weight loss in the first place.

Similar comments emerge in response to figure nine. Although we only see a leg transformation, the comments are focused on the “before” image as the better of the two, “I liked your body better before you lost your weight beautiful.”
Again, comments articulating their distaste for the “after” image still included an attempt at affirmative reinforcement. In figure ten, comments with overarching positivity are used to mask the underlying negativity attached to them.

Comments like, “Wow, you can even see the weight loss in her hands,” and “She did well but she needs more improvement,” are very judgmental. Disguised in a “good job,” these comments both degrade her feminine body and devalue the weight loss...
she has achieved. The woman’s transformation is trivialized by commenters, as her weight loss is quantified with a comparison in her hands “before-and-after.” By minimizing her transformation to her hands and stating her continued need for improvement, commenters display their highly critical gaze.

CONCLUSION

What complicates the idea of false positivity in weight loss discussions are self-deprecating comments within all of the images about desires of “that could be us but we like ice cream and pizza too much,” and “wow what a weight loss, now I feel guilty for eating that pizza.” Comments such as these are also part of a system with a constant need for its existence. Commenters can make claims of feeling guilty because there is a system in place to eventually stop the guilt. The BBG program and these transformative images validate these sorts of commenters. It is comments such as these that are part of the endless timeline for the *Bikini Body Guide*.

Not only does the BBG program foster unhealthy expectations of weight loss, but it also augments the insecurities of the feminine. In all the images I analyze in this chapter, the comments about weight loss are either directly negative or indirectly mask negativity behind a veil of positivity. In both cases, women pick apart progress in what is an attempt to skewer the transformation and provide their own self-validation. Directly negative and “false positive” motivation comments mirror commenters’ socially engrained patriarchal thoughts. It is this environment of body transformation and selection that is the problem, not the females partaking
in a perpetual system. Chapter three continues the discussion of the cyclical nature of Kayla’s program, but in terms of perfection as physical fitness/strength.
CHAPTER THREE: PERFECTION AS PHYSICAL FITNESS/STRENGTH

According to scholar Yasmin Ibrahim, "the visual turn enabled through mobile telephony and convergence of technologies elongates this trajectory where imaging everyday life becomes an integral part of our identity construction, communication and sustenance of relationships today." The relationship of identity construction based on social media presence is not far-fetched. It would not be surprising if there were identity construction effects related to anxieties about body image, if one placed him/herself in an exposed position on social media. In the case of Kayla’s Instagram, women are placed into the vulnerable position of displaying one’s bodily transformations. All the while, Kayla is capitalizing financially. Women featured on Kayla’s Instagram are inevitably subject to a world of criticism and, as a result, develop an identity that is based on criticism. The repetition of what other people think of them risks becoming engrained in their psyche, and in turn shaping what they believe of themselves. Although the women featured may think they have reached celebrity status, by appearing on Kayla’s Instagram, I argue this so-called “honor” is the beginning of a vicious cycle toward perfection.

Building on what Foucault says about prisoners becoming the “principle of [their] own subjection,” Kayla lures women into her “prison” and traps them in their desire for endless perfection through her public display of bodies. In doing this, she seduces women with the mastery of her Instagram account, creating a literal army of followers called the #BBGarmy who judge and critique each other. Commenters on each of the #BBGprogress images perpetuate the desire for perfection with the female-on-female policing gaze. BBG followers’ desire to be featured by Kayla is
created through her consistent display of bodies and the resulting admiration that comes with being featured. For the women whom Kayla picks to be featured on her account, the immediate and first reaction is the reward of public display, from the guru identifying them, out of millions of followers, specifically for their progress. While this selection may seem like an incredible honor, the new visibility/public display of their transformation quickly becomes public shaming. The comments on figure eleven provide illustrations of the prestige within the #BBGcommunity to be featured on Kayla’s Instagram page. One commenter is broad in her congratulatory tone, “Congratulations for your progress and your feature,” while another commenter is more specific in her admiration of the featured woman, “Ahhhh!!! Love that you got that hard earned booty featured!!!.” Comments for figure eleven, similarly to the almost 250 images I have investigated, contain some sort of “Wow, celebrity status” mention. In achieving their craving for a feature, the women

![Figure 11: Posted August 22nd, 2016](image)

articulate their feeling of honor, as Kayla has now deemed them good enough to be featured on her Instagram and to represent her “successful” Bikini Body Guide.
program. Part of her genius business model is the fact that through these images she is capitalizing while women are always searching for more and want to eventually be considered good enough for her Instagram page. Instagram serves as Kayla’s free marketing strategy, but the BBG trainer also has concert-like events, called World Sweat Tour boot camps, where her “army” gathers to workout with her. Kayla is on a grand stage, with her water bottle and yoga mat, while her followers praise her from the audience. There is also the opportunity to meet-and-greet with the star herself after the thirty-minute workout session. Although the experience is free, and tickets to the coveted events sell out in minutes, the boot camps reinforce the haunting honor of being selected by or in the presence of Kayla.

As I argued in chapter one, Kayla’s “before-and-after” posts are divided into three different categories of perfection: weight loss, physical fitness/strength, and beauty/sexiness. All of the categories emerge in the comments on Kayla’s Instagram; however, in this chapter, I analyze specifically the search for perfection through physical fitness, one category that Kayla seems to articulate as highly valuable. Through both her website and Instagram posts, she has quotes such as “Be in the best shape, ever,” “Fit is the new sexy,” and “Be healthy, be strong, be happy and be confident. Everything else is just a bonus.” Even the captions she writes to tag along with the “before-and-after” images often contain the muscle flexing emoji which represents strength and general fitness. Sometimes, Kayla also states a variation of “look how strong she looks now,” which again emphasizes her pleasure with perfection as physical fitness. However, Kayla’s very selection of the images she chooses to share makes a statement. In her fitness program social media pages she
claims physical fitness is about confidence and feeling good about yourself; however, in the same spaces she subtly tells women once they are involved with her program that they need to ramp up the exercise and move to working out twice a day. Kayla states she wants women to have balanced lives, but working out numerous times a day to achieve a “bikini body” does not seem so balanced.

Within the physical fitness category, I claim there are three ways in which perfection as strength is discussed by the commenters on Kayla’s Instagram photographs: 1) the metaphorical mutilation of the feminine body into separate strong body parts, which if you can achieve all, make one perfect, 2) perfection is achieved when one can maintain their ladylike-ness even with having muscles/strength, and lastly 3) hard work is again required to achieve physical fitness and therefore perfection. In this chapter, I review all three perspectives, and the ways in which they connect to what I define as a guided female gaze.

BODY PARTS TO A PERFECT WHOLE

Transformations are at the heart of the BBG program. Even the app, Sweat with Kayla, encourages users to take a “before” photograph of themselves and then weekly photographs after the initial image in order to track their progress. What is really interesting is the fact that Kayla is encouraging these side-by-side transformation images, which directly articulate the “before” image as a negative, imperfect, and weak body. The duality of weakness and strength is prevalent in all

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4 Just as in chapter two (weight loss as perfection), hard work is required to achieve perfection. Weight loss was seen as a job, just like gaining strength.
figures of this chapter. According to Kayla, “before” BBG bodies are weak, so they need to be made strong. In order to make women stronger, the body must be divided into sections and worked on in order to make specific body parts strong. The division of the female body begins at the start of the BBG program, as the Sweat with Kayla app divides each of the resistance workouts into leg day, ab and arm day, and a full body day.\textsuperscript{5} This separation continues in the comments made within each of Kayla’s #BBGprogress Instagram images. Figures twelve through fifteen are examples of the ongoing predicament of sectioning off a woman’s body that can also be found in the other figures in this chapter.

Figure twelve displays a woman before her fitness journey, after using Kayla’s Bikini Body Guide program, and a sampling of the stream of comments following Kayla’s initial captioning of the image. The “before” picture accentuates her midsection, as her shoulders are rolled back, her arms simply hanging, and her stance seems to make her belly protrude a bit more than it would with a normal stance. The woman is standing with her knees together, making the hips appear wider, and her legs lacking the coveted “thigh-gap” or in other words, the negative space between a woman’s thighs.

\textsuperscript{5} The Sweat with Kayla app contains three different workout types: Resistance, LISS, and Recovery. Resistance workouts are either leg day, ab and arm day, or full body workouts that are twenty-eight minutes long three times a week. The LISS workouts are cardio which means you either walk, run, bike, etc. on a steady pace also three times a week. Recovery is basic stretching which is advertised as necessary after each workout, but then featured on its own day as well one day a week (Kayla Website).
Recognition and acknowledgement of bodily strength are the keys to perfection. The comments on figure twelve primarily focus on her leg transformation, even though there does not appear to be much of a difference in her legs. One commenter gets specific in saying, “So strong! She has more definition, and her hips and thighs are smaller,” while another wants others to “look at that leg definition!” One comment in particular is repeated several times, “Looking so strong!!” It is comments such as these that emphasize the importance of strength to the BBG program and Kayla. However, it is not just generic strength that is emphasized, it is the tone-ness of the woman’s legs that catches commenters’ attention. In emphasizing one body part, women are making it known, through the female-on-female gaze, that this woman’s legs are now strong, as an encouragement to move on to whatever the next body part may be, in her search for perfection.

Just as the male gaze looks to the curvatures of a woman’s body, the appropriated male gaze by females to gaze upon female bodies looks to specific
body parts to have strength. Similar occurrences of the validation of perfection appear in figure thirteen, but the body part of focus are the transformed abdominals. Just as in prior images, the “before” photograph is dimly lit, while the “after” photograph contains lighting which highlights the body’s sculpture. Commenters articulate their congratulations with “Your abs are so perfect! Way to go,” “You have tightened, toned, and firmed those abs,” and “Awesome transformation! You looked great in the first pic and now you have reached machine status.” Again, the female body is picked apart by female commenters. Abdominal muscles are highly associated with physical

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6 The “machine status” quote will be discussed further in the Lady Strength section of this chapter.
priority of the program. In addition to her #BBGprogress Instagram posts, Kayla often posts images of herself, posed with her shirt raised, zoomed in, and showing off her own chiseled abdominals.

Another body part of focus to the female-on-female gaze in regard to strength are the arms and the linked shoulder/back area. Figure fourteen displays the top half of a woman facing away from the camera flexing her arm muscles. In the post-BBG program photograph, the woman’s arms appear to be more muscular, as commenters reflect on the muscle gains that have been made. Comments vary from the short and sweet, “So toned,” “Muscles!!!!,” “Arm goals,” to the slightly lengthier, “Wow, this is back goals lol,” “Ahhh so strong girl! Keep up the great work,” and lastly, “Why do women want to be muscular like this?” Despite the one questioning comment, the tone reflects similar standards seen in both leg strength and

Figure 14: Posted August 10th, 2016
abdominal strength comments and images. Again, the message from Kayla’s Instagram page is that the *Bikini Body Guide’s* ideal strong body is one which has good arms, back, legs, and abdominals.

After thoroughly investigating #BBGprogress images of physical fitness as perfection, there was one image in particular that stuck out as somewhat of an outlier to the repetitive legs, abdominals, arms/back definition of strength. Comments on figure fifteen were overwhelmingly mentioning the woman’s gain in her breasts. Rather than the fear for loss of breasts seen in chapter two, these commenters actually noticed a strengthening of the pectoral muscles and therefore a larger bust appearance. Commenters argued amongst each other about whether the woman had breast implants in her “after” photograph, the majority coming to the program’s defense in saying, “Definitely not fake. You’d be surprised but working out your chest builds muscles behind your breast tissue therefore making your boobs appear fuller” while another commenter provided a similar tone, “She most likely worked out with the program and built up her pectorals . . . It’s not unheard of to grow boobs that way.” The fear of losing breasts
because of weight loss provided a direct link to the appropriated male gaze, which articulates breasts as crucial. Hence, the commenters’ responses to the increase in bust appearance due to strength are overtly positive. However, strength building is an unconventional way to gain boobs, so the skepticism was no surprise. What is also important to take from this discussion of the fear of losing breasts are the many arguments within each of the comments sections of transformation images, not just figure fifteen, as an avenue for women speaking both to and about one another. With the female gaze, women speak for and about other women as if they cannot respond or are not present to respond. The women being judged are tagged in their Instagram feature by Kayla and therefore get a notification of all comments made on their transformation image. However, with the female appropriation of the male gaze, women express their dominance by ignoring this notion and carry on with judgment regardless. Commenters are policing each other as surely as the individual pictured.
Kayla’s #BBGprogress posts contain and breed a policing atmosphere. Not only are there directly negative comments toward the physical fitness transformation subjects, but also expressions of the female-on-female gaze within the comment section that are extremely problematic. It is important to note that other comments on figure fifteen contain a similar character to those which were highlighted in chapter two. One commenter makes her distaste for the program known with her directly negative opinion: “What is wrong with the way she looked before. Seriously skewed sense of fitness here folks.” While another commenter combats this negativity toward the BBG program with a directly negative statement: “Fat insecure girls failing to roast her. She is fitter and healthier now stop trying to justify you own obesity and greed.” The attribution made by the second commenter is pretty harsh.

LADY STRENGTH

The comments within Kayla’s Instagram are by women. They derive from their looking upon, and judging of the individual women in the “before-and-after” photographs. The comments by Kayla’s followers stem from what the BBG women perceive to be a strong, and therefore the ideal, female body set out to be “achievable” by Kayla. However, the gazing upon a female body plays off of the insecurities of women by meticulously deciding which body parts the women needed to change in their “before” pictures, and then how much better they look in their “after” photographs. Again, the female body is broken down into parts of a
whole, but comments also highlight insecurities and imperfections in the gaining of muscle.

The gazing and critiquing process relies heavily on the norms of female beauty based upon old heteronormity and patriarchal standards. In both figures sixteen and seventeen, there is a tension within the comments. A commenter on figure sixteen articulates her distaste for the woman's “after” photograph by saying, “Before pic looks better, most women would love to look that beautiful, too much muscle is not very ladylike.” While in figure seventeen an opposite tone occurs, “Abs on the right, toned but not too bulky! This is what I want.” The tension lies with what the perfect amount of muscle on the female body is. A BBG woman is perfect if she can maintain their “ladyness” even with having muscles. Women’s bodies as in figure sixteen which are said to be too muscular and therefore too strong are seen by Kayla’s #BBGarmy as not as ladylike because of their strength.

Figure 16: Posted August 13th, 2016
The “machine status” comment on figure thirteen provides an example of the delicate balance that is strength and womanhood. Being described by commenters as a machine is not the ideal for a woman, as machines typically have a masculine connotation. Nevertheless, the woman in figure thirteen maintains her ladylike-ness because the machine that is the BBG program and her resulting body provided her with bikini-ready abdominals.

Those who are ultimately able to achieve the delicate balance of strong and womanly are fierce according to numerous commenters. Figure eighteen displays a woman who is described in the comments section as just this. Comments include, “Slaying fierce girl,” “Slay, those back muscles are amazing,” and “She’s healthy looking before but now looks so strong and fierce.” When muscles and strength are contained and abide by the goals of Kayla’s program, a woman’s strength is deemed fierce. What is interesting here is the transformative nature of the word “fierce.” What was once a word referring to aggression and ferociousness is now sometimes
used as a term of endearment and empowerment. Fierce is now a “postfeminist self-brand,” which “is a commodity sign; it is a body that works and, at the same time, points to itself working, striving to embody the values of its corporate working environment” (Murray 235). The “corporate environment” in the context of these transformative images is Kayla’s system. Fierceness, although achievable through narrow means, is simultaneously an escapist and recycling moment. Fierce women “are conceived of as self-governing entrepreneurs who have the freedom to attain ‘empowerment and well-being,’” so as a fresh individual these women have the opportunity to leave the system (Murray 235). Perfection is addicting, and Kayla’s Bikini Body Guide program sells women on the opportunity to become perfect, therefore encouraging bodies recycling through the system over and over again.

Figure 18: Posted August 9th, 2016

MUSCLE WORK

Concepts of gender are put in place at birth with “socially constructed [qualities] according to cultural standards, and stereotypes that lead to the creation
of gender roles and gender typing” (Paloian 1). Female athletes and those who wish to achieve physical fitness are subject to a “female/athlete paradox,” which insists a woman must maintain her femininity in the masculine environment of sport (Clasen 36). If a woman fails to do so she is forced into “the ‘deviant’ label often associated with female athletes who do not conform to traditional Western beliefs” (Paloian 1). This theory of women in sport/fitness is a highly limiting social construct. The Bikini Body Guide program perpetuates the duality in terms of perfection as physical fitness/strength because of the commenters’ masculine labeling of transformative images.

Just as in chapter two’s discussion of weight loss as perfection, the program stresses the need to work to achieve strength. Not only work, but hard work is required by Kayla’s program to achieve physical fitness and muscles. Both strength and work are traditionally associated with the masculine, so women doing work in order to gain strength are appropriating masculine tendencies. Another layer of complexity is added by Kayla’s followers as comments on figure nineteen articulate the nature of the work more clearly, “You look amazing and Those hard earned ab wall lines!!!,”
and “Yes!! I absolutely CAN believe it, because you’ve worked so hard and are absolutely killing it!!! Love you girl.” The women commenting have not only appropriated the male gaze into the female-on-female gaze, but they have placed upon these strength transformations a masculine label. The comments on figure twenty are of an even more masculine tone, “Work Hard. Play Hard. Wow Muscles,” “Ripped great work,” and “Omg you were featured and I didn’t know!!! Congrats dude!! You’re working so hard.” Women have gazed on figure twenty, observed her
now-muscular physique and concluded masculine hard work is what got her, a “dude,” there. These comments are rhetorically important because what is said in the comments versus what is implied by the comments have a different underlying message. What the female commenters articulate without directly stating it is the fact that in the BBG world even muscle cannot be too muscly, or the woman gains a masculine identifier.

CONCLUSION

Once one body part is strong enough and perfect, the women can move on to the next stage of perfection, which in this case is the strengthening of different body parts. Though problematic, Kayla has a brilliant business model. She has the Instagram and workout program following to make known her standards of perfection, a commenter community that polices each other based on those
standards, and a cyclical system that enforces a never-perfect ideology. Women keep with the program and Kayla keeps raking in the cash.

Although an honor to be featured on Kayla’s Instagram page, the accomplishment results in judgment and policing by a guided female gaze. In terms of physical fitness/strength, this gaze monitors separate female body parts which eventually lead to a strong and perfect whole, assesses the ladylike-ness of a strong woman, and lastly acknowledges that hard work is essential to physical fitness, but in moderation of the masculine. Chapter four discusses a new element in the search for perfection, beyond weight loss and strength. With the discussion of perfection as beauty, the transformations are no longer directly linked to an explicitly fitness-related physical change.
CHAPTER FOUR: PERFECTION AS BEAUTY/SEXINESS

In his book, *Coming to Terms with being Human*, Michael Hyde states: “Like both conscience and acknowledgment, the phenomenon of perfection functions to bridge objective and subjective levels of experience. Moreover, like both conscience and acknowledgment, perfection admits a certain ontological significance: perfection is essential to our well-being” (Hyde xii). As Hyde suggests, perfection and our well-being as humans are synonymous; therefore, perfection, which is often associated with physical attractiveness, can also be equated with well-being. Acknowledgement is at the base of perfection as beauty. Humans are aware of beauty and maintain a perpetual desire for the unattainable. Enduring still, “the passion for perfection persists. Its impulse permeates the very fabric of language that allows us to think and talk about whatever this passion (or anything else) may truly be” (Hyde 2).

In terms of Kayla’s Instagram images, this passion for perfection is prevalent with weight loss, physical fitness/strength, and beauty, even though they all require different methods of attaining that perfection. Still, I argue, the BBG women’s goal is to achieve perfection in all three traits in order to imitate their fitness guru. However, this type of perfection remains unattainable, as Kayla’s cycle of fitness, social media, and money does not leave room for that type of success.

With this in mind, weight loss and physical fitness/strength are not the only categories of perfection for the women who follow Kayla’s Instagram. Females gaze upon each other and look for both beauty and sexiness in their search for the perfect transformation. The unattainable desire for perfection can be quite harmful.
psychologically. Beauty is subjective and individualized, not just what Kayla considers to be and selects as beautiful.

In terms of perfection as beauty/sexiness, I argue Kayla’s Instagram posts and the female-on-female comments incite an environment of judgment toward other women. Whether the judgment is positive or negative, when talking about beauty, commenters no longer discuss the physicality of the transformation due to workouts, but instead focus on unrelated body attributes such as smiles, hair, and tanned skin. Simultaneously, comments create a moment of jealousy where women desire something they could have, and develop a harmful path to self-deprecation.

In this chapter, I discuss positive and negative comments, which both compound the problematic tension of Kayla’s Bikini Body Guide program, as a way to examine the traits of transformed women who are considered beautiful and sexy. Positive comments, although appearing complimentary on the surface, still insinuate the need for a transformation. Negative comments target the feminine body through close and specific examination. The chapter addresses jealousy within the beauty/sexiness category of perfection, in which the female-on-female gaze is no longer looking outside, but is now gazing in. Just as in prior chapters, this chapter uses images as evidence to understand commenters’ perspectives on attributes of beauty.

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7 As articulated in earlier chapters, these complimentary comments about the transformations are just as problematic as the negative policing ones.
THE MINGLING OF BEAUTY AND FITNESS

Beauty “cannot be quantified or objectively measured; it is the result of the judgement of others” (Saltzberg 135). With this judgment, comments that I argue are falsely positive remain constant. Just as in the prior chapters on weight loss and physical fitness, comments on beauty reveal the persistent female gaze on the transformation from unattractive to attractive. The women’s transformations and newly-attained beauty had to begin in the opposite state of not feeling attractive. The transformation Instagram posts again display a woman before her use of the BBG program, and after her completion of the program. The contrasts between the two images within figure twenty-one are astounding. The “before” contains poor posture, and the typical harsh lighting emphasizing every ripple of skin; while in her “after” image, the woman appears to be sucking in her stomach, with shoulders lifted in good posture, and gentle lighting that smooths out her skin.

Figure 21: Posted August 28th, 2016
Both the image itself and the comments by females looking at and judging this woman’s body communicate the idea that this woman is now achieving beauty because of her transformation. Whereas some commenters simply say, “Stunning,” “Beautiful,” and “You look awesome now,” others more directly articulate their interest in her newfound beauty in saying, “Beautiful in both pictures but you’re glowing in the second! Keep it up girl you’re awesome,” “Absolutely stunning now, keep up the hard work,” and “Look at that transformed skin! Amazing job girl!” Figure twenty-two contains similar comments of amazement. From “You look amazing! Glowing with health,” to “She looks so gorgeous now,” and finally “Dude her face glo’ed up in the process there’s hope.” Many of the comments draw focus to the transformation timeline. Sometimes commenters will say the women look good in the “before” photograph, but they always emphasize the “now” aspect of the transformation. It is “now” that the women are most beautiful and changed. There is no mention of a traditionally physical fitness or weight loss transformation. Instead, the focus is on her glowing aura and skin now that she has transformed. Once the
woman is perceived by her many policers to be glowing, she is considered beautiful. In figure twenty-three a commenter exclaims, “What a makeover!!!” A makeover, as the Merriam Webster definition states, is “an act of making over, especially a changing of a person’s appearance (as by the use of cosmetics or a different hairdo).” The very definition of the word deals with beauty and the act of changing or doing over to create something better. Both the simple congratulatory comments and the more direct comments emphasize that the transformation did produce a “more beautiful body,” thus stressing the fact that there was something wrong with or missing in the woman’s “before” photograph. It is because of their transformations that the women are now “glowing” and “radiantly beautiful.”

Comments on figure twenty-four ring of a similar tone, as the “before” is good looking, but the “after” is so much more beautiful. More specifically, commenters state that she “looks beautiful in both, but so much happier in the after photo,” and she was “beautiful before, but amazingly non-stoppable now. Well done beautiful!”
Commenters take their unwavering gaze a step further and say the reason the woman is more beautiful is because of her smile. Beauty and self-confidence should go hand in hand to create a smile and therefore confidence in oneself, but it is the sheer lack of smile in the “before” photograph which should give pause. The commenters on Kayla’s Instagram posts have assigned a smile to the adjective “beautiful.” In other words, the #BBGarmy equates smiles with beauty in some settings. It is this assignment of a beauty characteristic which exemplifies Kayla’s cultural construction of beauty ideals. The BBG culture is that of attractiveness. So, commenters’ personal judgments of women are important in that scholars “have found that attractive individuals are evaluated more favorably by others” (Bissell 387). In this case, a smiling woman in her “after” transformation picture is considered beautiful and more favorable by the BBG culture, but why is not smiling a sign of ugliness in the “before” photographs? Commenters not only gaze upon the woman in figure twenty-four, but they assign happiness to her without knowing her.
So, the BBG followers enacting the female gaze critique, judge, police, and assign labels and characteristics to women without regard for their self-agency.

The BBG traits of beauty are further established by Kayla’s followers in the comment section of figure twenty-five. Sexiness, or in the commenters’ terms “hotness,” is a crucial aspect of the *Bikini Body Guide* culture. Comments include, “She is smoking hot!!!! Can I be you???,“ and the very simply put, “HOTTIEEEEE.” Both comments make clear that these woman-to-woman commenters believe the body transformation of the female in figure twenty-five is sexy. Now that the woman has changed, she is sexy, but again there is no mention of fitness by the commenters, instead the focus is on overall hotness. The main goal of Kayla’s fitness program is creating the perfect bikini body or as she says on her website, “Get Bikini Body confident today.” A bikini, which displays a lot of skin, is a traditionally sexy notion. The bikini directly sexualizes the feminine body through appeals to the male gaze, as “women are socially pressured to radiate sexuality” (Lewis). However, the notion of such sexualization is problematic because it assumes “unveiled women’s bodies as a pure reflection of male desire. The woman is erased by . . . nudity, [and] replaced by the male gaze itself” (Lewis). So, Kayla’s workout program inspires female subjection and suppression through its encouragement of becoming in “bikini-shape.” Although disguised as empowering, the *Bikini Body Guide* removes individualism from its participants. The idea of perfection is not individual; perfection is based in the ideal cultural form. Bikini clad, newly transformed feminine bodies again become objects for the male authority (Kayla) to sell.
The comments on figure twenty-five also reveal the ideal cultural form, which just like Kayla is a skinny, strong, tanned, smiling/smizing\(^8\) woman with good hair. Both figures twenty-two and twenty-five articulate this idea of sexiness with comments of “I think you’re hot either way, but now Hubba Hubba” and “Yessss. And her hair in the after looks gorgeous.” These comments suggest a hot feminine body was achieved which, despite being a workout program, also led to good hair post-program. Again, a woman’s beauty is not connected to her successful competition of the workout program, but is associated with her flowing blonde locks. Another comment states, “This girl is a BBG poster girl if there ever was one,” which again is a positive comment communicating that this woman’s body is ideal, perfect, and now beautiful because of her transformation. According to this individual commenter, figure twenty-five represents the most ideal form of the Kayla BBG body that is attainable.

\(\text{Figure 25: Posted October 31st, 2016}\)

\(^8\) Smizing, made popular by model Tyra Banks on her hit reality show *America’s Next Top Model*, is the art of smiling with your eyes for a photograph.
There are not only positive comments regarding perfection as beauty, but accompanying the positive, “Beautiful” and “Gorgeous girl,” comments are the negative ones. These negative, often aggressive, comments provide yet another layer of the female-on-female gaze. Women not only judge and compliment the “after” photographs of these transformations if they fit the mold of the BBG ideal woman, but they also police women if their transformation to become “BBG beautiful” has raised skepticism. Both figures twenty-six and twenty-seven contain examples of this skepticism with comments of “This is so fake,” “I'm sorry but this is not the same girl,” and “Is it just me or is there barely any difference.” Some commenters are skeptical of these women’s newly transformed bodies, as they do not appear to be to the standard they understand as part of the BBG culture. Since the status quo for Kayla’s #BBGprogress posts is noticeable transformations, commenters shout “fakery” when they do not see what they are used to or if what they usually see is exaggerated by a “wannabe” perfect BBG girl.

Figure 26: Posted September 3rd, 2016
Just like a woman’s smile, hair, and general sexiness, a tan is also a beauty requirement for the “after” BBG program makeover. After reviewing the selection of 250 images, almost all of the women appear darker or tanned in their “after” photographs. Some commenters on figure twenty-six are aware of this trend in the cultivated culture and one in particular makes her distaste known . . .

I just do not understand why you are all sunbrown in the after pics? Is sunbathing or solarium part of the BBG program? Seriously if it’s just about confidence, I hope you are just sunbrown because you are not afraid anymore to show your body in public and not because you have to overpaint your body to achieve beauty or become solarium addicted to reach happiness or perfection. Nevermind. I really like your effort and I would appreciate it if I’m wrong.

In one of the most detailed comments found in my investigation of 250 images, a single commenter reprimands both the woman pictured and the BBG program ideals. The woman pictured may not be to blame for this change. It is the BBG culture, that not-so-subtly polices every image with the taken-for-granted assumptions of what is right and wrong. However, despite
causing a stir with her comment, the woman takes the opportunity to say what she wants and then hides behind a “never mind.” This commenter retracting her statement is a sign of awareness of the harsh nature of the BBG community. Arguments ensue all the time throughout the comment sections, as faithful BBG followers attack anyone who seemingly disrespects the reliability of the program. In this particular situation, the woman’s retraction is problematic because it reinforces the cult-like nature of BBG the system. Instead of standing strong by her statement of tan as a problematic requirement for beauty that the BBG program encourages, the commenter validates the program’s culture and ideals by applauding the woman’s effort. The woman raises the issue, only to dismiss it.

JEALOUSY AND SELF-JUDGMENT

In addition to looking at the women and judging them, the commenters also look upon themselves and judge. The self-deprecating female gaze is quite harmful, as there is a desire to achieve a manufactured version of perfection. This manufactured version of perfection is unattainable in a healthy way for most “just like me” women, so participating in an environment of judgment could reflect on oneself and initiate thoughts of what might be wrong with one’s own body. A comment from figure twenty-eight of “Hmmm feeling sad about my eating choices now,” and from figure twenty-nine of “That’s me right now in the yellow bikini” and “Anorexia starts now,” are all troubling and problematic.
These sorts of comments contain intimations of the harmful “pro-ana” movement, which encourages anorexic behaviors online through a variety of different social platforms. In recent years, many pro-eating disorder websites have popped up, and “there is evidence that searching for pro-eating disorder content is a popular phenomenon, with over 100,000 monthly searches on Google.com for each of the search terms ‘pro-ana,’ ‘thinspo,’ and ‘thinspiration’” (Johnson 71). On social
media platforms such as Instagram, it is easy for these sorts of online behaviors to
go uninhibited; however, they are so prevalent that Instagram has an eating
disorder disclosure and awareness section in the hidden depths of its online help
center (Instagram).

With Kayla’s platform as Instagram and her use of transformation
photographs as advertisements, her program is perpetuating the “pro-ana” fear of
overweight bodies. In using the combination of “before-and-after” photographs on a
public site a message of transformation is evident: “in contrast to triggering images
that celebrate a thin figure, images of overweight women are often presented as
thinspiration content in order to serve as a reverse trigger” (Johnson 72). Although
Kayla’s fitness program shows consistent messages of health, an emphasis on the
“before-and-after” detracts from such messages and instead curates an unhealthy
idea of perfection as beauty. These comments of self-degradation are intermixed
with comments, as in figure thirty: “Beautiful transformation, this could be us if we
stopped eating crap and worked out.” Both an alarming and powerful aspect of
these images that best represents perfection as beauty is the fact that jealousy and
sadness are often hidden within the veil and conversation of beauty. If Kayla’s motto
is all about empowering women, why is there a subsection of the population who
judge themselves? The combination of images, the female-on-female gaze, hierarchy,
and BBG cultural ideals provides for a perfect storm of self-critique. The images
display what Kayla, the leader, chooses as perfectly beautiful, and the female-on-
female gaze assigns unauthorized labels of beauty and sexiness. In order to make it
through the BBG program to the perfect bikini body, a woman has to adopt for
herself the fitness guru’s ideals as well as personally deal with the enforcement of those ideals.

CONCLUSION

With regard to Kayla’s selection process for her #BBGprogress Instagram posts, the best of the best, hottest of the hot, and most beautiful of the beautiful are placed on her page in order to endorse her product to the best of her ability. Kayla’s BBG program is a distinctly cultivated culture that uses the transformations of what it deems beautiful to sell more products and make Kayla more money. Kayla’s selection of transformed bodies is synonymous to advertisers picking the models which best represent their individualized brand. Kayla is the one selecting the beautiful “models” that she displays on her form of business advertisement: Instagram.

As the face of her brand, Kayla’s body is the ultimate and most perfect one, by virtue of her independently developed program, workouts, and standards. Kayla, this woman who advertises for her product through both social media and live workout performances, has a tightly controlled image. Although she prides her transformative program on being for “every woman” and “regular people,” she has never released her own “before” photograph. How can a program which is based in transformations, not have the leader of its army’s transformation as part of its core? Kayla, as a white hierarchical male implant, is not required to prove authority, just as in the typical patriarchy dominated world. As social dominance theory suggests, there are three …
distinctly different stratification systems: (1) an age system, in which adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and younger adults; (2) a gender or patriarchal system in which men have disproportionate social and political power compared to women; and (3) an arbitrary-set system in which socially constructed categories are hierarchically arranged. (Sidanius and Pratto 418)

In the case of Kayla’s *Bikini Body Guide* program, she is the leader of her own “arbitrary-set system” of “socially constructed” ideals. Therefore, what is established by her and her hierarchical minions of commenters as perfect and a bikini body are perpetuated notions. Kayla, a woman who appropriates the male gaze to police other women, is a personified male who has “disproportionate” power to her female followers.

In all prior chapters, this thesis uncovered numerous ways in which Kayla’s *Bikini Body Guide* program is a capitalization on the feminine body. What makes this chapter about beauty unique is the fact that the transformations are no longer directly linked with fitness, as a workout program is expected to be, but with attributes like smiles, hair, and skin color. Simultaneously, images that best represent perfection as beauty contain comments of “thinspiration” and “pro-ana” which are not present in prior categories of perfection within this thesis. What is both genius and harmful about Kayla’s program is the fact that all forms of perfection are enhanced through a reproducing system where there is a constant need for that program. No one can ever have it all, except Kayla. Now in the concluding chapter, I discuss the many implications of this study; as well as, the importance and necessity for the study.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The *Bikini Body Guide* and accompanying app, *Sweat with Kayla*, by Australian fitness star Kayla Itsines reinforce body image issues despite appearing motivational to the women who participate. In this thesis, I have argued that the manipulation of female bodies by other females is problematic, and Kayla Itsines’ Instagram is a breeding ground for such manipulations. With the expansion, and growing popularity of sites like Instagram, the environment of body consciousness that Kayla’s page fosters is unhealthy. As discussed in all three analysis chapters, Kayla’s program provides a vicious cycle in which perfection is defined by Kayla and her BBG culture, but can never be achieved, resulting in a consistent cash-flow for the #BBGarmy leader herself. It is important to note that this thesis is in no way implying that Kayla is intentionally manipulative and dishonest. She may have the most genuine intentions, but the BBG program, community, and Instagram she has created are in tension with her genuine social appearance. It is important to acknowledge this tension and unveil it as an avenue for discussion. No matter what her intentions may be, based on my analysis, the mass reinforcement of images generated by the program and the reproduction of female-on-female judgment have consequences.

From the beginnings of Kayla’s BBG program, and specifically her *Sweat with Kayla* app, she invented a problem for women that needed a solution of “join[ing] the world’s biggest female fitness community and fast track[ing] your journey to Bikini Body Confidence today” (*Sweat with Kayla*). With the language of joining a “journey,” Kayla presents a path to “bikini body confidence,” hardly a feminist
image, which only she can lead. A convergence of time and perfection exists along this journey as well. The language within both Kayla’s captions and the comments section of the “before-and-after” images provides an emphasis on the “now.” There is always an element of time associated with the transformative images. Whether it be perfection as weight loss, perfection as physical fitness/strength, or perfection as beauty/sexiness, a change by way of the BBG program is always discussed as a way to achieve perfection.

In all prior chapters of this thesis, I have uncovered the ways in which Kayla’s #BBGprogress Instagram posts, and the comments which accompany them, appropriate the male gaze into the female-on-female gaze that monitors and controls standards of femininity. In chapter two, Perfection as Weight Loss, I argued that both Kayla and those commenting on her images are playing into male-dominated structures through both directly negative comments and comments of the indirect type, under the façade of motivation. Both types of comments and discussion of the female body curate unhealthy expectations of weight loss and accelerate feminine insecurities. Chapter three, Perfection as Physical Fitness/Strength, also examined the manipulation of female insecurities, but through a discussion of general body muscles and tone-ness. Women are able to achieve BBG perfection when they can create separate strong body parts, while maintaining a ladylike body. Lastly, chapter four, Perfection as Beauty/Sexiness, continued with the conversation of the impossibility of achieving perfection, but also argued that beauty, especially as defined in the female-on-female gaze, incites
an environment of judgment of others, but more disturbingly incites jealousy and self-deprecation.

By making the conscious choice of having those three categories of perfection, I have explored the three topics which occur most frequently within the Instagram posts’ comments. The categories are also representative of the three ideals Kayla markets as part of the goals of her workout program. From these categories and the images I have analyzed, four conclusions arise: 1) Kayla has to pay little with everything to gain, 2) There is never a lack of users because of a reproducing cycle of criticism, 3) Women feel themselves to be in constant need of a leader like Kayla, and 4) Natural processes and the natural feminine body are trivialized by the BBG program.

From the mottos, blog posts, BBG website, and my analysis of Kayla’s Instagram, I have argued that the ideal/perfect BBG body demonstrates progress in weight loss, strength, and beauty; all of which can be/are consumed by the BBG community. In today’s world of instant delivery, like Amazon Prime, and instant messaging, like snapchat and text messaging, the cultural context is at a time of urgency where the desire for newer and better and instant is ever-present. It is this idea of progress/transformation which is used as a selling point for Kayla’s product: a BBG body. Since the value of women has always been indivisibly linked to their bodies, programs like the Bikini Body Guide perpetuate a toxic logic. Kayla and her BBG program are curating women as objects and selling that notion to them via their “before-and-after” photographs, through no cost of her own.
Kayla’s methodology is a genius business model. There is no need to pay for advertising when the consumers will do it for free. As stated in chapter three, being featured by Kayla on her Instagram is an honor to her following. Therefore, Kayla valuing these women as transformed bodies to spur on future product sales, is not considered problematic to those who submit their photographs. However, the implications of this consumerist model are negative. In order to be successful in sales, “consumers must be exposed to a particular advertisement a number of times before it is believed that the message will not only make an impression in the consumer's mind, but also that the consumer will retain and act on the message” (Morris and Nichols 51). Kayla fits this mold as there is a constant barrage of images on her Instagram because she posts numerous times a day. This repetition of an advertorial message is called cultivation theory because “the perception of reality is cultivated through heavy media exposure and it has a mainstreaming or homogenizing effect on culture as a whole (Morris and Nichols 52). With Kayla cultivating and managing the creation of the BBG culture, she is able to mainstream her view of perfection into a money making business model. Forty-six million dollars later, Kayla's empire is still growing (Kimmorley 1). Nevertheless, while creating a profitable empire guised in empowerment, the continuous revenue mentality takes advantage of women's societally trained desire to be perfect.

Another implication of the continuous cultivation of the BBG program and its perpetual revenue stream is that it will never have a lack of users because there is a constant reproduction of new material and criticism. There will always be women wanting to comment on one another. The judgment of women by other women is
never going to expire. This cycle is especially true because the platform for this criticism, Kayla’s Instagram, is expanding at an exponential rate. As I have written this thesis, in four months Kayla’s page has gained four-hundred thousand new followers, going from 6.3 million to 6.7 million, an amount of growth rate of about 20%. With her continued expansion of followers, there will be more BBG users sending in their images to Kayla, and therefore a continuous supply of women to show off and criticize.

Not only will there be a new supply of women desiring a Bikini Body Guide transformation, but the existing followers will also be in constant need for more perfection. As Burke says in his 1966 book Language as Symbolic Action, “humans are rotten with perfection.” I cannot help but to understand this concept in relation to Kayla’s followers’ endless desire for a more perfect, and once again acknowledged, transformation. One “honor” of being placed on Kayla’s Instagram is just a taste of celebrity, it is the second and third acknowledgement which users compete for, further establishing Ashcraft and Pacanowsky’s theory of women as each other’s own worst enemies.

This project has also brought to the forefront questions of the necessity for women to have leadership. Kayla, as the leader of the program and therefore the authority figure, has reached celebrity status and a cult-like following. In doing so, she is able to cultivate the BBG culture she desires. Whether it be weight loss, strength, or beauty, Kayla leads women into a certain experience only she can provide. In order to make the workout program of value, Kayla, the leader, is needed in order to sanctify the experience. Historically, women have always had this
constant need for a leader, usually a male, to provide value to their experiences. This process of the necessity for leadership is reinvented on Instagram, and creates a tension between group empowerment and individuality. One of the many problems with Kayla’s method of group empowerment is that as much as she says the Bikini Body Guide is a program for everyone, Kayla runs an exclusionary model. The sheer cost of the program eliminates women as it cannot be afforded by a large demographic. Twenty dollars a month for one year of the program adds up to two-hundred and forty dollars. Also, there is a vastly skewed and un-diverse representation of BBG women that Kayla selects to post on her Instagram. The implications of such exclusions are profound, only a certain type of woman, not every woman, can experience a valuable Kayla experience.

When speaking of Kayla as a leader and the problematic need for women to have a leader, it is also important to understand what the project’s consequences for credibility and expertise may be. Kayla, a girl from Adelaide, Australia, has created a cash-cow out of transformation images. Although Kayla graduated from personal training school at the Australian Institute of Fitness, is this all that was necessary to garner the tremendous credibility she has to the women participating in her fitness program (Itsines)? By simply having an online presence, marketers like Kayla who say they are “just like you” or that they “appeal to everyone,” can gain credibility. Although it may sound pessimistic to some, it is important to acknowledge the ease of gaining followers on social sites like Instagram, and the potential financial capitalization that can occur, through a “just like you” expert scenario. By Kayla
starting out as a non-celebrity on Instagram, she was able to gain her cult following quickly and establish credibility without question.

The last major implication of this rhetorical analysis is the trivializing of natural bodily processes. At the basis of Kayla’s BBG program is the fact that in twelve weeks you are expected to have had a transformation toward a bikini body. The promises of the program are so high, that the natural is denied and it is in no way acknowledged that everyone’s body is different and should be praised as different, not used to make money. However, a denial of nature again allows Kayla’s program to become timeless because women’s natural body types are ignored and the desire for perfection continues. At its core nature is organic, so it defies logic to attempt to fit an organic structure into a rigid mold of perfection.

The denial of nature within the images I examined becomes even more complicated with the many before-and-after images of pregnancy transformations that Kayla posts. These images display women in their ninth month of pregnancy along with their postpartum body. This sort of image does not seem to fit into any one category, but instead could be considered a subsection of all three. The posts are concerned with general weight loss, physical features such as abs post baby, and how “hot” a mom the women are now that their baby has been born. The focus of the pregnancy posts on “bouncing back” to a great body in such a short amount of time is a denial of nature and, in fact, trivializes natural processes. There is a very interesting dynamic going on with these pregnancy posts, and the consequences for posts such as these and their accompanying comments are complicated.
A literal natural process of carrying and birthing a child is under scrutiny with comments such as “third photo is the best,” from figure thirty-one. When displaying time’s passing through the baby’s age, and having comments like “I am due with my baby in 2 months and cannot wait to do my transformation,” the program and Kayla are at risk of vanity encouragement. Preferring quick six-pack abdominals over the natural feminine process of birthing child is problematic. By having the BBG pregnancy transformation photographs in consecutive order with the other transformation images Kayla has posted, it demeans and devalues pregnancy. The focus instead is on the quickness of the transformation post-baby. It does not matter if a woman has just given birth to a human life, the *Bikini Body Guide* emphasizes body-consciousness to the point of perfection. This seeking of perfection does not come without its risks, and consequences.

*Figure 30: Posted August 20th, 2016*

The female-on-female gaze exposes the reality of female policing as unending manipulation of the female body. Kayla Itsines’ #BBGprogress Instagram posts are
the match which has lit the fire of consequences and implications discovered in this thesis. Kayla is able to gain a following, money, and fame, without inhibiting herself in any way. All the while, Kayla maintains a following, whose members need her as a leader, because of a continuous rotation of criticism. And lastly, Kayla’s program is a harm to natural processes like pregnancy and childbirth because of its belittled depiction of these activities on her Instagram.

With an unrelenting number of users, women will continue to be recycled through the BBG system. It is important to note that both competitiveness and defensiveness in progress are also among the many consequences of the female gaze within the BBG program. Communal language or faux solidarity reinforces the original standards of what a woman should look like, while language of women as competitive machines also remains harmful. Neither forms of language within the comment sections build community. Kayla and commenters have the power, while the women pictured do not have a voice once on Kayla’s site. Formerly accompanied by a caption telling their own fitness story on their own personal Instagram accounts, once the images are selected and therefore appropriated by Kayla, the women are objectified, they lose their voice, and their stories are reduced to a picture. These comments and the BBG program are dehumanizing, unhealthy, and create an opportunity for advantage taking or enslavement to the female appropriated male gaze.

It is important to bring awareness to the systematic nature of the program, but also important to understand the perpetuity of the female-on-female gaze and the pursuit of perfection as phenomena beyond the scope of this case study. I ask
women to acknowledge their participation in this cycle of body consciousness. Whether on Instagram, or in interactions of daily life, I hope to take a step back and applaud women for their un-transformed, just as they are, bodies. Looking back to my immense research of Kayla’s Instagram, I am now relieved that I can unfollow her page. This relief is a display of why this thesis matters, as the relationship I developed with Kayla’s product through close analysis was a discovery of the harsh realities of unhealthy relationships women have with their bodies and others. I am relieved to quit her Instagram and to not be bombarded every day with dehumanizing photographs. I argue it is crucial to cultivate a simple, individualistic language of one’s own body, as this perspective is true empowerment. A bikini body should be simply wearing a bikini on your body.
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