

**From the Faculty of Education and Society, Malmö University,  
Malmö**

# Conspicuous Fitness

Social Media, Fitspiration, and the Rise of the  
Exhibitionistic Self

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<b>Abstract</b> <p>This dissertation deals with the emergence, attraction, and normalization of a widespread, digital exhibitionism, and its implications. In this age of imagery, the compulsive sharing of personal photographs on social media has become pervasive. Unabashedly narcissistic displays are all but encouraged. This transformation of social norms is particularly evident within the social media fitness culture, known as "fitspiration."</p> <p>A portmanteau of "fitness" and "inspiration," fitspiration ostensibly promotes health through visual content on social media but is often characterized by visual displays of the body, even overt nudity, framed within fitness contexts. Amid a pervasive youth mental health crisis, this study posits this novel phenomenon as more than a digital trend; it reflects deeper socio-cultural shifts, ideological currents, going so far as encompassing existential dilemmas. Crucially, it also represents a manifestation of the intrinsic biases of the medium. As such, it affords insights into how the dominance of social media impacts human communication and societal values.</p> <p>Drawing on Nietzschean philosophy and core principles of media ecology, this study presents a piercing analysis of fitspiration and its facilitating medium. It argues that fitspiration exemplifies novel self-representational practices aimed at maximizing attention and validation, now saturating social media. Examining these aesthetic practices, their widespread appeal, and the implications of a culture increasingly oriented around such self-expressions, it argues that photo-based social media exploits unreflective, desirous, and narcissistic impulses, fostering an unhealthy cultural trajectory.</p> <p>Through this critical examination of fitspiration, the study illuminates the profound impact of social media, challenging conventional wisdom and offering insights into the relationship between technology, culture, and human behavior. It also outlines necessary philosophical and ethical perspectives for navigating the challenges imposed by the age of imagery.</p>			
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