CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Although the body positivity movement has emerged in the last decade, weight stigma is still present in our society. Overweight people are still associated with negative perceptions such as laziness, stupidity, and greed. A content analysis of the representation of "obesity" on YouTube (Yoo and Kim, 2011) found that depictions of fat people in a stigmatizing way were common such as showing fat people eating unhealthy food and having a sedentary lifestyle. A recent study by Pearl (2020) also found that many recent coronavirus-related posts in social media have included text and visual contents that feature blatantly weight-stigmatizing content as a result of quarantine. These posts display split-screen "before-and-after quarantine" memes that show people in the "after" screen with an exaggerated amount of weight gain, wearing ill-fitting clothing in an unflattering manner, and eating excessive amounts of food.

Considered as one of the most powerful and pervasive sources of ideology (Conradie, 2012), mass media plays an important role in shaping weight stigma in society. The media is known to be unfriendly to overweight people whether it be situation comedies, cartoons, movies, advertisements, or news reports (Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Fitness advertisements are no exception. Fitness advertisements also contribute to the spread of weight stigma by over

presenting "very slim or cut models, and similarly computer-altered, air brushed, and trimmed photos of models" (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009). As when taken together, they gave the impression that the ideal body is necessarily fat-free which has proven to be wrong as evidence suggests that a totally fat-free form can be unrealistic and unhealthy (Campos, 2004). On the other hand, overweight bodies appear only as "before" photos in "success" stories. The lack of range of healthy fit images literally denies their existences, and disproves the possibility that a person can be larger and still be healthy.

However, the thin ideal body is much more emphasized to women than to men as being thin is one of the femininity traits. As feminist researchers in the 1980s already pointed out that the representation of idealized women's bodies (thin, toned, and youthful) was reproduced by the media as a body "feminized" according to masculine, patriarchal representational logic (Kennedy and Markula, 2010). This body was appraised to play a role in women's oppression because of its singularity: "if only thin, toned and young women are considered attractive in a society where women come in a variety of different shapes, then most women are considered unattractive but nevertheless work continually to obtain the desired but unattainable body shape"(Kennedy and Markula, 2010). It was reflected in how fitness magazines and fitness advertisements often represented overweight women as a bad example, while thin women are represented as a good example. It is because such discourses internalise the 'thin is good fat is bad' ideology (McGannon and Spence 2010, McGannon et al. 2011). This is quite problematic as this kind

of weight stigmatisation advertisements may reduce an individual's willingness to enter a situation where they fear further discrimination (Vartanian and Novak, 2011), including exercise settings, such as gyms, and healthcare and medical settings (Schwartz et al., 2003; Vartanian and Novak, 2011) instead of increasing an individual's willingness to exercise. Puhl et al. (2016) further note that being the receiver of weight stigma increases the likelihood of engaging in binge-eating behaviours, disordered eating patterns, increased calorie intake, avoidance of exercise, and lower motivation for physical activity. This highlights the need to reduce the depiction of overweight women in a stigmatizing way in health and fitness-related media.

Given the important role of fitness media in marginalizing overweight women, there is a lack of research on the representation of overweight women's bodies in fitness and health-related media. This is due to overweight women being made invisible to such media and in mass media in general (Fikkan and Rothblum, 2011). One of them is a study done by Zuraidah, M. D., & Kui Ling, E. L. (2016) which examines the media representation of the overweight female body in Malaysian slimming advertisements. This article concentrated on how Malaysian slimming advertisements that show the image of overweight female bodies could exploit women's fear of being overweight to the extent that they feel obliged to do something about their bodies. Therefore, in this current study, the writer is going to analyse the representation of overweight women in fitness advertisements. In this study, the writer uses the term "overweight" instead of "obese" as it is a medical term that has so many negative connotations (Yale

School of Medicine, 2018). This is in consistent with the findings of two qualitative studies that have found that both obese Australian women and English adolescent girls regarded obesity as representing a very extreme weight status that even prevented walking (Warin et al., 2008 & Rich et al., 2011).

Nine fitness advertisements containing images and texts were collected from three of Gold's Gym's campaigns. The writer chooses advertisements from Gold's Gym particularly because it is one of the biggest gym chains in the world with nearly 3 million members at over 750 locations in 35 countries around the world (Health Club Management, 2017). However, out of nine advertisements, only four advertisements are going to be analyzed in this study as the other five advertisements are not depicting overweight women's bodies. The advertisements are published between August 2016 and April 2019. The first two advertisements are from Gold's Gym's 2016 campaign 'Challenge Yourself'. The third advertisement is from Gold's Gym's 2016 campaign 'Messenger'. The fourth advertisement is from their 2019 campaign 'Just a Slice'. This study will problematize the way Gold's Gym represent overweight women in their advertisement, the written data will be analyzed by deploying Michael Halliday's Transitivity System of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to find out how Gold's Gym's advertisements representing overweight women through their choice of words and language structures in advertisements. For the visual data, Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics framework will be employed to examine how the visual features in Gold's Gym's advertisements are used to represent overweight women.

1.2 Research Questions

How are overweight women represented in Gold's Gym's advertisements?

1.3 Research Objective

Based on the research questions above, this study aims to analyze four of *Gold's Gym*'s advertisements in order to investigate the representation of overweight women in Gym advertisements.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study hopefully can give a better understanding of visual social semiotics, especially in the scope of media, and also can give input and be used as one of the sources for further research.

1.5. Scope of the Study

Four Fitness advertisements containing images and texts collected by purposive sampling from Gold's Gym social media sites are going to be analyzed in this study. The writer chooses Gold's Gym particularly as it is one of the biggest gym chains in the world with nearly 3 million members at over 750 locations in 35 countries around the world. Besides being one of the biggest gym chains in the world (Health Club Management, 2017), four advertisements from gold's gym were also chosen as they are depicting overweight women's bodies. The four advertisements were chosen from each campaign in 2016 and 2019. The first two advertisements are from Gold's Gym's 2016 campaign *Challenge Yourself.* The third advertising is from Gold's Gym's 2016 campaign *Messenger.* The fourth advertising is from their 2019 campaign *Lose*

to Win. The data will be analyzed by deploying Michael Halliday's Transitivity System of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to examine the ideational metafunction and Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics framework to examine the representational, interactive, and compositional metafunction, specifically to find out how Gold's Gym represent overweight women in their advertisements.