

Gendered Experiences in the Gym

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	5
Chapter One: Introduction	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review	14
Chapter Three: The Research Process – Methods and Methodologies	49
Chapter Four: Descriptive Statistics	69
Chapter Five: Bivariate Analysis and Discussion	96
Chapter Six: Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusions	133
References	139
Appendices	148

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Abstract

Since the 1970s, women's memberships in gyms have been on the rise, and co-ed gyms have become increasingly popular. However, much of the existing research on co-ed gyms suggests that traditional gender divisions – who does what and where in the gym – remain entrenched, as women still report discomfort in central areas of the gym, particularly in relation to activities such as weightlifting. My research utilizes a quantitative approach, and assesses the impact of gender, along with other independent variables (age, body image, and prior fitness experience), on the experience of member comfort at the gym. An online survey was distributed to the members of a co-ed gym, asking about their level of comfort with a number of different exercises and activities. While most respondents reported a high level of overall comfort at the gym, the levels reported in relation to specific activities/equipment were more varied. For example, a high variance of comfort was reported in traditionally gender-exclusive exercises such as weight-training, and aerobic activities like Zumba. More gender-neutral activities such as cardio machines, like overall comfort at the gym, did not show much variance in relation to gender. While gender was the main variable of interest, factors such as body image, age, and prior fitness experience were also found to be significant predictors of comfort at the gym. These findings add to the literature on gender and comfort in gyms, and provide information that can be used to increase member comfort, thereby improving the social environment of the gym.

Key words: Gender relations; gender norms; comfort; gym; sport

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My lifelong engagement in sport has greatly influenced this research project. Prior to my enrolment in the gym, I was very passionate about team sports. My attempt to stay healthy and fit led me to the gym. I engaged in all different styles of workout regimes from weight training and boxing, to Zumba and Pilates. Due to many factors, I felt extremely uncomfortable at the gym. When I realized that this lack of comfort began to disrupt my attendance, I began to question the underlying reasoning of this discomfort. Over the course of my gym experience, I then met others who shared similar experiences with me. At that time, my experience was validated, and given traction. I wanted to learn more about other's experiences at the gym.

Prior to the 1980's, gym participants were primarily male and their motivation for attending the gym was to build muscle. Post 'bodybuilding era,' several different types of gyms have surfaced (Chaline 2015), with each gym varying in what services they offer their clientele. For example, some gyms focus on high intensity interval training and are labeled as "boot camps," while others focus on powerlifting. There are also gyms that provide a more holistic approach to fitness by emphasizing yoga and body-weight movements. Although most of these gyms are co-ed, the fact that gyms continue to maintain masculine stereotypes (Craig and Liberti 2007; Chaline 2015) is a result of a history of gyms serving primarily male clientele. Despite the number of women who now attend the gym, these stereotypes are deeply embedded within the gym culture and may limit both women and men from fully participating. Existing literature on women's and men's comfort and engagement in gendered athletic activities is limited,¹ which

¹ When discussing gendered activities (in the gym), in order to stay consistent with the literature I review, I often use pronouns or adverbs that imply I am speaking to *only two* genders. While this may be the case within the literature, this certainly does not situate my understanding of gender. Therefore, when I am discussing masculinities and femininities I am referring to the literature. As a result, the literature does not and cannot speak to people's experiences for those people who do not identify as female or male. When I speak about male/female experiences in

begs the question, how do men and women experience comfort, a sense of *fitting in* at the gym without feeling negatively judged?¹

Research shows that the gym culture is a gendered space (Johnsson 1996; Hall 1996; Craig and Liberti 2007). Machine-focused gyms, which offer equipment for a variety of fitness uses, are male-centric, historically serving primarily male clientele. Some evidence surrounding the modern gym suggests that women generally face more discomfort than men when attending and engaging in gym activities (Craig and Liberti 2007:681). Due to the discomfort that some women face in co-ed gyms, there has been an increase in women-only gyms and women-only areas within gyms. While these women-only gyms have undoubtedly enabled women to engage in physical activity in a safe sphere, I believe they promote segregation as a solution, encourage avoidance of discussions surrounding the gendered experience in the gym, and reinforce that traditional gyms are male-exclusive environments. While women-only gyms should be available for women who prefer this gym structure, the segregation of genders in the gym is not a practical solution to the issue of discomfort, in part because such gyms are not universally available. If co-ed gyms remain overtly masculine spaces, in which both women and men may feel uncomfortable because of the gendered stereotypes that modern gyms preserve, participation will not be maximized.

Based on the questions raised in the literature, I seek to answer the question of whether co-ed gyms are gendered spaces in terms of the activities individuals perform. In my research, I include all activities in which both women and men might be engaged, or from which they might

the analysis it is because all of the participants identified as either/or. Similarly, I do not intend to generalize this discussion to people who do not identify as exclusively male/female – these experiences may be very different, and I think that more research should be conducted to include these experiences.

¹ The following sentence was taken from the survey instrument that I created. “Comfort can be taken to mean something different to everyone. For the purpose of this study, comfort will refer to “fitting in” without being negatively judged by others.”

be actively disengaged. I include weight training (including, but not limited to dumbbells, barbells, and machines), cardiovascular equipment¹ (e.g., treadmills, ellipticals, and bikes), calisthenics (i.e., using your body as the main force of equipment), Pilates, Yoga, and Zumba (a form of working out that involves dance). I also included an alternative option - Aerobics/Strength training classes. By doing this, participants who attend any other classes that had not been specifically mentioned were still able to provide answers.

Despite the modern gym catering primarily to men, spaces within the gym are not necessarily inclusive to *all* men. Research conducted by Mary Louise Adams (2005:65; 82) on men's dancing tells us, "Hard bodies are meant to do hard things. They hit other hard bodies. They move heavy objects," and they refrain from acquiring feminine characteristics like physical flexibility. Physical flexibility is the key component of gym exercises and classes related to yoga, Pilates, and aerobics in general; the lack of research on men's engagement in these activities indicates that there are either very few men who participate in these activities or it is not an area of large interest for them. My survey instrument also reflects my attempt to understand the gendered nature of these activities, to determine if men are engaged in them, and to what extent.

Facility

I use the pseudonym *Power First Fitness* for the gym at which I carried out my research. The anonymity of the gym was important for the gym itself, and for this research. It is important that this research does not reflect negatively on this specific gym, but instead criticizes an overarching gendered theme within the traditional gym; while the results can only depict the

¹ I use the terms cardiovascular equipment to discuss machines such as treadmills and ellipticals, which are forms of aerobic exercise. In my survey, I asked participants about their experience using cardiovascular machines and in classes such as Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates. Additionally, I include a separate question about other aerobic classes that I did not include specifically, for example, "BOSU" classes. It is important to note that each of these activities and machines enable aerobic exercise.

uniquely subjective experiences of the participating clients at Power First Fitness, this research is applicable to other gyms. In addition, the information gathered may be useful to gym management.

HYPOTHESES

- 1) Due to the patriarchal nature of gender relations in the gym historically, I hypothesize that overall women will feel lower levels of comfort than men at the gym.
- 2) Due to the gender-specific nature of some gym activities, I hypothesize that women will feel relatively lower levels of comfort in performing traditionally male activities, and men will feel relatively lower levels of comfort in performing traditionally female activities.
- 3) Related to my second hypothesis, I hypothesize that one's individual experiences will be enjoyable or not depending on:
 - a. The activity being performed and their knowledge of it;
 - b. One's experience in the gym;
 - c. One's comfort with their own body type outside the gym;
 - d. One's comfort with their own body type inside the gym; and
 - e. One's age.
- 4) The gym culture can be a threatening atmosphere for bodies that do not adhere to the norm. I hypothesize that all individuals who attend the gym are subject to the male, or female, gaze. Here, the gaze that I am referring to is "the act of looking is 'a means of transfixing, possessing, taking control,' and it is men who are able to exert this power" (Mascon 2008:268). The gaze is dependent on certain bodily/gendered expectations and thus I hypothesize that all individuals in the gym are subject to the gaze, to some degree.
 - a. Further, I hypothesize the atmosphere of the gym cultivates the gaze as normal, specifically within the gym setting, thus individuals adopt this behavior and begin to gaze upon themselves.
- 5) Due to the patriarchal nature of gender-relations in the gym, I hypothesize that:

- a. Men feel more comfortable than women when working out *alone*;
- b. Women find *working out with others/friends* more beneficial to their level of comfort than do men; and
- c. Men feel more comfortable than women while working out with others (either friends or not) present.

AIM OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

What do I hope to learn from this research?

I hope to learn more about the many experiences that can take place within the gym. While I do not believe the getting-comfortable process in the gym atmosphere is simple (this was certainly not the case for me), I hope that participants will feel comfortable sharing their experiences with me so that I may help others and attempt to change the current gym culture for the better. In addition, I hope to learn more about myself as a person, researcher, and gym-goer in the process.

What will this teach others?

The findings of this project will help address the disparity between women's and men's levels of comfort in gyms, and more broadly, this research will discuss problems that are associated with gender norms. Further, this project will provide information that may be useful to help some individuals move forward in their health, allowing them to feel more comfortable participating in a wide range of activities. It is my hope that this project will address the complexities of gender norms and relations. The gym has been identified as a subculture (Johansson 1996) that both women and men utilize and engage in to form their identities. I believe that it is only by dismantling these problematic behaviors and stereotypes that we are able to provide an environment in which men and women can participate to the best of their abilities, while feeling comfortable in doing so. I hope that this research allows me to pinpoint and help diminish

negative stereotypes within the gym, and that it will add to the literature on gender and the body in sport. Additionally, the results of this research may be useful for the employers at Power First Fitness to implement positive changes at their facility.

Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I discuss the existing literature on gender, sport, and the gym. I begin by discussing the gendered nature of comfort within the gym, and the differences that are imposed on men and women by the gendered nature of the gym. The research conveys that sport is a contested terrain, historically reserved for elite men; I assert that the gym is a sub-culture of sport, and that those who participate in the gym are subject to the same gendered stereotypes that are carried out within sport more generally. As a result, I draw connections from sport to the gym. I discuss how literature has broadly defined masculinity as a hegemonic aspect of sport, and how this has impacted who is welcome to participate in sport and at the gym. In addition, I discuss female physicality, women's perceived biological abnormalities, and the impact that these factors had on women's involvement in sport.

I introduce the creation of the gym, not only as a physical establishment but also as a cultural environment that produces and reproduces many stereotypes of both women and men. First, I discuss the history of physical education for women as a marker for their later involvement in other fitness terrains. The inclusion of women in the gym places female participants in a vulnerable position – one in which they have the power and resources to feel strong, but only within the appropriate feminine guidelines of the time. The literature reflects the drastic changes to gendered body norms since the inclusion of women in gyms, and yet there remain confining stereotypes for both women and men. I discuss how these stereotypes are

present in a gym setting, and how they impact the ways in which people train and perform in the gym. In addition to this, I discuss the gaze, and how this phenomenon may impede or strengthen levels of comfort within the gym. To conclude the chapter, I discuss comfort within the specific gym activities of focus in my field research, including the way the literature has defined these activities.

In **Chapter Three**, I discuss the significance of utilizing a feminist framework throughout my research. I explain the research process, the preliminary questions and concerns I had regarding the sample population, and the ethical implications that framed this process. I explain my decision to use a survey method and analyze some of the issues I overcame in doing so. Finally, to conclude this chapter, I explore discourse analysis and the many benefits it can bring to feminist research on the body.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth discussion of the primary dependent and independent variables used to test for comfort within the gym. This descriptive chapter provides a foundation for each of the variables that were tested through the survey instrument. I explain the demographics of the sample size as they were portrayed throughout the survey results. I supplement each variable with the frequencies found in the survey analysis. I also include my own explanation of specific terms, and the way in which they were presented to participants in the survey. This chapter is the basis for the following chapter, which discusses bivariate and multivariate analyses.

In **Chapter Five** I review the results of the survey. This bivariate and multivariate analysis discusses the hypothesized correlations and also introduces many new correlations that I had not anticipated. I discuss the relations as they pertain to three different territories in the gym setting; the physical space of the gym, gym classes, and gym activities. While I introduce the

majority of the statistical relationships, I do not discuss them in full detail until the latter half of the chapter where I discuss the quantitative and qualitative results. I return to some of the literature to strengthen my arguments and further discuss some of the main problems that remain apparent within the gym setting.

In closing, **Chapter Six** discusses limitations, final thoughts, and future research. I consider some of the limitations that I faced while collecting and analyzing the data, and how these limitations could hinder the results of this research. I also go into some detail about the importance of future research on this topic which could expand on the theories and hypotheses tested in this project. Lastly, I include some of the participants' ideas about how to make new members comfortable in the gym, and reflect on what I have learned throughout this process.

Significance of this Research Study

This study adds to the growing body of literature on gendered experiences in the gym. This research provided an opportunity for both women and men to share their experiences and ideas, and therefore gain a better understanding of their bodies/identities, and to allow the gym owner to do the same. Most importantly, this study presents an opportunity to broaden one's understanding of the consequences that stereotypes have on sub-cultures, and how individual experiences of comfort can be impacted by societal expectations. The results of this research have the potential to offer gym owners new ways of providing a comfortable atmosphere for all their clientele.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Sport is, by and large, a highly unequal terrain, especially when regarding gender.

While there has been great progress in the past 60 years, there are still many areas for improvement such as increasing women's participation in organized sport (Hall 2002). Much of the way (feminist) sociologists think about sport today is based on the creation of sport – why was it created, by whom and for whom? Many individuals still think about certain sports in a very narrow-minded way, despite the advancements of the sport world (Hall 2002). Daniels (2009:41) says, “most people would struggle with an attempt to remove gender from their understanding of people,” and the activities people do; if this is true, the influence gender has on sport is inevitable. While many sports remain primarily associated with men (e.g., football) or women (e.g., figure skating), I am interested in the construction of gender in spaces where men and women intermingle. The co-ed gym is one such area.

Prior to the 1980's, the gym was primarily male-centered and a highly masculinized place. As a result, the nature of the gym may continue to be (hyper) masculine, thereby (re)producing gendered expectations within the gym. When gendered expectations are prevalent within a co-ed gym, such stereotypes can create uncomfortable feelings among those who do not act within traditional gendered parameters. Further, these preconceived expectations within the gym may force some individuals away from the activities they actually prefer.

Within this chapter, I discuss the complex and problematic relationships between gender binaries, the body, masculinities, femininities, and sport, all of which impact how individuals may experience comfort in the gym. Further, I elaborate on the history and nature of the gym, and the creation of the gaze within the gym as a consequence of societal expectations of masculinity and femininity. Finally, I discuss comfort levels with gendered activities, and review

the literature on specific activities that take place within the gym. For consistency throughout my research, I have decided that what constitutes ‘gendered activities’ is based primarily on the current literature that surrounds the activity itself. For example, if there is an abundance of literature on one specific gender and the activity, I assume the activity is gendered. If there is literature on one activity about both women and men (e.g., weightlifting) but the majority of the literature has normalized one gender’s participation in it (e.g., men weightlifting), then I conclude that the specific activity is gendered based on which gender has a *normalized* relationship with the activity. The relationships that individuals have with one another, their own bodies, and activities in the gym are based on social constructions of gender. Gender binaries permeate day-to-day activities, and this extends to specific activities and therefore people’s comfort within the gym.

COMFORT AND GENDERED SPHERES

While it is indisputable that physical activity and fitness are good for one’s health, there are underlying concerns regarding why people work out. These concerns are primarily related to societal pressures around being fit; however, individuals are often not consciously aware of these pressures. Critiques regarding women’s participation in fitness identify a few main problems. For example, some women’s participation in fitness reinforces body dissatisfaction (MacNevein 2003; Markula 1995; Prichard and Tiggerman 2005) and can disempower women by presenting them as sexual objects. As a result, this promotes unrealistic body standards that maintain feminine bodies as slim, hard, and white (Greenleaf, McGreer and Parham 2005; Kagan and Morse 1988; Lloyd 1995; Maguire and Mansfield 1998). All of these problems are centered on the prospect of women’s bodies being a product of society and subjects of the male gaze (mainly,

that women have no autonomy when complying to societal standards of ‘beautiful’ and ‘women’).

Other theorists note that strength and participation in sport can be simultaneously empowering for women as well. Some women note, “the ability to participate and the socially acceptable endeavor [of participating in sport] represents a recent victory in women’s struggle for equality with men” (Hall 1996:56). This has proven to be empowering for some women, along with the fact that working out grants women the potential of self-action, and control over one’s body. That being said, Nieri and Hughes find most women discussed group fitness as having other benefits, such as a culture of sociability that they did not encounter during individual fitness routines. The structure and etiquette of these group classes seems to be contradictory to the atmosphere and expectations of the gym.

Some theorists, such as Ann Hall, believe that the conflict between gender and culture is more pertinent to women. This belief is due to cultural practices, like sport and leisure, being defined by masculine criterion. Evidence shows that the relationship between femininity and sport does generate some conflict, such as women maintaining their feminine physiques but also requiring strength and muscle to excel in their sport (Krane et al. 2004); however, it is very important to consider that this is not the case for all women, and certainly *is* the case for some men. Research indicates a common theme that female involvement in some sports (those for which women must transgress socially desirable bodies) result in a loss of perceived femininity; however, I believe that masculinity and expectations regarding sport may preclude some men’s involvement as well. Ann Hall (1996) goes on to say that femininity presumes heterosexuality; I add that masculinity, too, means heterosexuality and this is increasingly apparent in the realm of sport and gendered activities. Pronger (1990:154) says, “Muscles have great power, a power that

consists not only in their ability to move heavy objects but also as puissant symbols of masculinity.” While the phallus is considered the greatest sign of masculinity, muscularity is also important. In an interview led by Pronger, participants indicated muscles as a sign of heterosexual masculinity. Pronger suggests that bodily beauty is dependent on gender in western culture (156). Therefore, if muscles are considered beautiful, they are not synonymous with a woman’s body. Instead, “when we say that a men’s muscles are beautiful, we are saying they resonate with our concept of masculinity” (156), which is synonymous with athletics and is contradictory to homosexuality (Pronger 1990). I draw correlations between men’s participation in figure skating and dance with their involvement in yoga, Pilates, and Zumba, as skating and dance are the sports for which there is the most literature. Despite the fact that they do not take place in the gym, “Men who play within feminized terrains, like cheerleading, gymnastics, or ice skating, are generally subordinated by those who play within masculinized terrains, like football and basketball, a status that makes them the targets of homophobic and misogynistic discourse” (Anderson 2008:261). The results of this research can be extended to other activities that are embedded with feminine stereotypes, such as yoga, Pilates and Zumba, which potentially negatively impact men’s willingness to participate for fear of the repercussions.

GENDER

Gender is a socially constructed category; our understandings of what it means to be male or female vary across time and place. Gender is a powerful force as it is a constant reminder of which roles an individual can play within society; how one chooses to identify and respond to the assumptions about their gender governs their behavior. M. Ann Hall (1996) says that our culture is embedded with pervasive gender ideologies, in that they are entrenched in our society and

influence all individuals. However, without performing gender, gender would not exist (Minha-ha 1999:258). Gender, then, is created only when acting or “doing it: the way we dress, use our bodies, talk, behave, etc” (Lorber 2012:285). To most people, these acts are subconscious – our repeated daily routines that get us out of bed and into society are not actions that we consciously think about. For many cisgender¹ individuals, there is rarely any scrutiny based on their behavior as they are obeying the gender order. While gender is constructed, it has significance in the world and real consequences follow from rejecting (or being unable to perform) the requirements of one’s perceived gender.

“Gender is about limits, about not having a free range to act or look or behave in any manner whatsoever” (Adams 2005:77). In my opinion, gender works as a mechanism of surveillance that is so instilled into society that those who do not conform to gender norms and are defiant face consequences. Johansson (1996:32) states, “there are still rather strict if informal rules governing the construction of gender.” Masculinity is constructed based on a particular understanding of what it means to be male (Messner and Sabo 1990). Femininity, on the other hand, is often explained as everything masculinity is not; the definition itself is created in opposition to masculinity (Messner 2005). Masculinity, in most societies, is deemed superior to femininity, and there are particular practices of being a man that account for a higher social value (Craig 2014). This superiority complex has been produced subconsciously by self-preservation of daily habits of masculinity and femininity (Bordo 1999). One method of self-surveilling one’s gender is through the body as “the body is just one more feature in a person’s ‘identity project’” (Giddens 1991; Davis 1997). One’s body plays an important role in the formation of gender identity and our understanding of different bodies is largely based on our own biases about gender.

¹ Cisgender: when one’s gender is in accordance with their sex.

The Body, Masculinities, and Femininities.

Biological and social influences affect the way in which the body is produced, maintained, and altered. Giddens (1991) says that our bodies are instruments of self-expression; our bodies reveal much about ourselves. Our constant assessment of our own bodies, paired with others' judgment of our bodies, results in a collectively gendered identity (Gershick 2001:369). Many theorists agree with Giddens, claiming the body as a vehicle or machine "for the modern individual to achieve a glamorous lifestyle" (Davis 1997:2; Adams 2005; Messner and Sabo 1990; Johansson 1996; Minh-ha 1999; Bordo 1999; Craigs 2014). What we expect our body, or gendered bodies, to look like, runs in accordance with gendered behaviors.

The body, like gender, is socially constructed as it is shaped by race, gender, and ability and varies over time, space, and culture (Gershick 2001; Adams 2005; Minh-ha 1999). In modern western societies, the male body is usually thought to be strong, large, and powerful; it is a body that is able to demonstrate the ability to provide for oneself and a partner. Gershick (2001) says that in contemporary western societies, men's gender performance tends to be judged using the standard of hegemonic masculinity. "Hegemonic masculinity, the currently dominant and ascendant form of masculinity," represents the optical attributes, activities, behaviors, and values expected of men in a culture (Messner 2005; Connell, 1983, 1990). Masculinity is defined by what it is not; it is not feminine, gay, black, working class, immigrant, and, what Messner fails to add, not overweight (2005:314). Contemporary hegemonic masculinity in Western Cultures includes a high degree of ruthless competition, an inability to express emotions other than anger, an unwillingness to admit weakness or dependency,

devaluation of women and all feminine attributes in men, homophobia, and so forth (Kupers 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity represents the male body in many ways that are not only physical but also psychological and behavioral. The gym is a site that may be used to achieve hegemonic masculinity; however, it may simultaneously be a site of self-doubt for those who struggle with this embodiment. Those who do not embody this type of masculinity may find that they have more in common with some women at the gym, as opposed to other men. Men, like women, face scrutiny about what their bodies should (not) do. For example, one ideology that prevails is that male bodies should not be put into tights and showcased as objects. King's research (2000) discusses the literature surrounding men in skating and their secrets and the fact that a large proportion of male figure skaters are gay and many men who were involved with figure skating have died due to AIDS –related illnesses. King says there is an idea that male skaters are thought to be “trapped in a woman's sport”; however, this idea is perhaps better understood as straight men “trapped in a gay sport” (King 2000:148). King believes that the language itself that surrounds figure skating is based upon rigid categories that perpetuate stereotypes and, further, that male figure skaters showcase cultural anxieties about sexuality and masculinity. Thus, male figure skaters who cannot fulfill cultural expectations of athletic (or hegemonic) masculinity are promoted less than their macho male skater peers.

This image is contradictory to how society has taught us to react to men, as men are predominately the ones doing the looking. Adams (2005) says that dancers believe this problem is commonly understood to be specific to male dancers only. While the problem itself seems to have multiple names – namely whether or not the sport or the dancer are effeminate – “there has been strong agreement about its consequences. The feminization of dance results in a tremendous

gender imbalance among both dancers and spectators and, following from this, limited public support for the art” (Adams 2005:64). Consequently, dance is not seen as a true expression of masculinity as it is not considered to be an aggressive physical activity like other male sports. Even Adams does not describe dance as a sport, but rather as an art.

While the part of male dancers in dance requires athletic bodies, heavy lifting, and tight musculature, somehow there remain concerns with the supposed effeminate aspect of these dancers. Adams (2005) discusses how the comparison of the sporting body and the dancer’s body has served as evidence of the manliness of male dancers. If the dancers look like athletes, and an athletic body preserves aspects of masculinity, then the dancer is also manly. “In this equation, effeminacy and strength are mutually exclusive, and the shape and feel and look of bodies are seen to be key to gender identity and gender status” (64). If this is true, it is aligned with Connell’s understanding that ‘true masculinity’ must be either an organic bodily representation or something that is expressed through one’s body. Therefore, while the bodies may appear to be ‘masculine’, the expression of said bodies is not. Research conducted on men in dance is only one example of how hegemonic masculinity can be debilitating and shameful to many men. Comparatively, research indicates that women lifting weights is also paradoxical, as this activity does not fit into modern ideologies of femininity.

The female body is also produced socially. Connell (1983, 1995) says that femininity, in opposition to masculinity, is portrayed as soft, gentle, and non-competitive. Femininity, according to Craig and Liberti (2007) involves displaying sociability, and is dependent on one’s age, sexual receptivity, or motherhood. Bartky (2002:242) defines femininity as “a set of qualities of character and behavioral dispositions as well as a compelling aesthetic of embodiment.” Traditionally, women were expected to be nurturing and docile, and their bodies

were expected to act accordingly. Zeigler (1975:145) discusses the historical views of women's bodies and the limitations imposed on them because of their anatomical structure and their expected role in the family. Women were expected to be frail, have small waists, and weak backs. Bartky (1999) asserts that beauty is a social construct, therefore as societal expectations of women change, so do ideologies of beauty and the body. The emancipation of women allowed for more variability of bodies and self-presentation. Previously, due to the limitations placed on women's social lives, a bigger build was idealized, as it showcased one's capability to bear children. Bodily ideals began to change as women began to enter spheres that they were previously discouraged from participating in. Although the expectations of the 'perfect' female body changed, there are still limitations. While there are a myriad of socially-accepted femininities in different cultures, in Western societies the ideal feminine body is lean (or 'toned,' but curvaceous, where allowed), healthy, and youthful (Daniels 2009; Hall 1996).

Daniels writes, "this pervasive and exclusive display is presented as the only acceptable or desirable feminine presentation...thus becoming hegemonic – the only acceptable way for women to present themselves" (2009:15). For example, muscle is not seen as undesirable on women, but there are restrictions on the amount of muscle women can have. Hargreaves (2002:275) discusses these parameters of musculature in relation to female bodybuilding, as the Women's World Professional Bodybuilding Competition's 1984 definition states "too big is a term that applies only to whether or not a competitor has developed too much muscle mass for her skeletal structure and proportions."¹ Although bodybuilding is an extreme example of the

¹ This definition has changed. In 1993, "women should be encouraged to develop as much muscle mass as possible as long as this development conforms to the accepted standards of bodybuilding aesthetics – symmetry, shape, proportion, definition etc" (Hargreaves 2002: 275).

development of muscle for women, it demonstrates that overly muscular physiques are considered anti-feminine even in an arena that emphasizes muscularity.

Feminist scholars have drawn correlations between women's bodies and sport, to Michel Foucault's work on docile citizens. Foucault asserts that control is self-regulating, and Bartky (1999) says that those women who do not conform to these standards of the female body participate in regulating practices. The pursuit of thinness may lead to many unhealthy practices (e.g., fad-dieting), and one such practice may be an excessive amount of physical activity and exercise specifically that which takes place in the gym atmosphere. Bartky asserts that the transformation of oneself into a properly feminine body may be socially constructed for many reasons, but at its base, it is discipline too. Ann Hall (2002:207) states, "even though images of today's healthy, beautiful women allow for more muscularity and vigour, young women and girls are still bombarded through fashion magazines, advertisements, and television programs with models and bodies they simply cannot emulate." Women punish themselves for the failure to conform to the unrealistic expectations that are set out for them (Bartky 1999:128). This shame is a measure of the extent to which all women have internalized patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability. This internalization may be better understood through the concept of the gaze, and the way that it has a lasting impact on women and their sense of self-worth, even though it does not actually make women less valuable.

Daniels (2009) references Helgeson's (1994) work on femininity and masculinity to help address some of the foundational issues related to femininity, women, and sport. She found that appearance was a contributing factor in working out at a gym for both 'hegemonic' males and 'hegemonic' females; however, these considerations were more heavily weighed by women. Further, "the major identifying factor of the masculine female was 'likes sports,' as 'likes sports'

and ‘muscular’ were the top two stereotypical indicators of the masculine female” (Daniels, 2009:78). While this work is dated, we see the same underpinnings in stereotypical assumptions and expectations of women and men’s bodies today. These ‘prototypical features’ (as Helgeson labels them), and societal pressures that hold women and men to these unrealistic presentations of the body have resulted in self-surveillance and punishment of the body. The gym can simultaneously be a site of such punishment and regulation, as well as empowerment and strength.

SPORT, FEMALE PHYSICALITY, AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Traditionally, sport was identified as a male institution (Hall 1996; Adams 2005; Dworkin 2008; Spaaij 2015). “Sport in our culture is still viewed by many as ‘masculinizing project,’ a cultural practice in which boys learn to be men and male solidarity is forged” (Hall 2002:1). The values and norms that sport promotes and naturalizes, in both the field and in organizational hierarchies, is in part why sport is considered a male establishment (Dworkin 2008). Eric Anderson’s work tells us that male team sports often promote an orthodox form of masculinity that produces and reproduces *socionegative* (sexist, misogynistic, and anti-feminine) attitudes toward women (2008). Despite the negative ideas about women that can be promoted in sport, sport can still be empowering for some women and men. Some men have been taught sport in such a way that allows their identities to flourish, and more specifically, their masculinity. At times, sports and sport culture can promote negative masculinities (e.g., macho masculinities) that place value on pain as a measure of masculinity. For example, the “no pain, no gain” mantra is often utilized in sport, suggesting that without physical (and mental) exhaustion in the activity or sport, one cannot succeed. However, sports can also help men unlearn these biases. Unfortunately, this is

not the case for all men, similarly as it is not the case for many women. While some women do find that sport is an area of contention, it can also simultaneously provide women autonomy, empowerment, and positive self-consciousness.

FEMALE PHYSICALITY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Women historically were not encouraged to participate in sports and physical activity because of the concern that it would damage their reproductive capabilities. Biology has always been central to the debate around women's involvement in exercise and sport (Vertinsky 1990). Medical practitioners preserved pseudo-scientific theories regarding the reproductive cycle as a disability due to its effects on physical capabilities. As a result, in an attempt to save the future of the White, Anglo-Saxon race, there were limits placed on the life-choices of middle-class women. "The widespread notion that women were chronically weak and had only finite mental and physical energy because of menstruation had a strong effect upon the medical profession's and consequently the public's attitudes towards female exercise and sport" (Vertinsky 1990:39). Westernized positions of menstrual disability preserved stereotypes of women as the weaker sex. Vertinsky (1990:40) says that menstruation was "looked upon as an 'eternal wound', an illness and a shortcoming... requiring certain kinds of moderate physical activity, suitable open-air exercises, and sports appropriate for physical renewal." However, women were then excluded from vigorous sport, and were expected to refrain from physical exertion deemed too demanding. When physical education did allow females to participate, they were still regarded as fragile and weak. This stereotypical notion of women's bodies created exclusive, separate practices within sport, despite the step towards inclusivity.

Organized sport and physical education for women were established in the late nineteenth century (Hargreaves 2002). This education became an important aspect of the curriculum in girls' schools, and although each headmistress's opinion differed, they were all influenced by the report of the government-sponsored Schools' Inquiry Commission on the Education of Girls in 1868. This act required education in secondary schools to be all-encompassing, training all aspects of the mind and body, and that the education of girls be equal to that of boys. McCrone (1988) discusses the integration of sports in colleges based on the same ideal, that in addition to exercising the mind, women would have the ability to develop their bodies. Physical training and education were conducive to learning, and while it improved individual fitness, it also aided in areas such as citizenship, physical fitness, and vocational training. Becoming as fit as possible helped to prepare women for their domestic and professional responsibilities. Hargreaves discusses the separatist nature of women's sport as a defining feature; "it was easy to define them as qualitatively different, in turn with conventional ideas about 'femininity' and 'masculinity'" (30). Thus, despite the inclusion of women in sports, stereotypes and gendered divides within sport persist. This history of separate sports for the sexes has created space for many of these same practices to continue.

These extend to sporting bodies and the nature of sports. While men's participation in sport allows, and arguably encourages, the production of muscular bodies, women's participation in sport does not promote this same type of body or the competitive behavior that is inherent within some sport (and if it does, certainly not outside of the sport) (Krane et al. 2006). Sports and activities for women were expected to be more cooperative, less aggressive and less competitive, and these expectations have implications for the gym. Additionally, many people in positions of power were opposed to including women in physical activity. For example, the

founder of the Olympic Games was in strong opposition to the involvement of women in sports (Daniels 2009); however, women became especially interested in track and field. “The number of events for women in track and field gradually increased over the first century of the modern Olympic Games, although it took until 1960 for the 800-metre race to be reinstated and until 1984 for the women’s marathon to be added to the program” (Daniels 2009:30). Women’s increased interest in sport has progressed to all types of sport, including sport-like environments. Of particular interest to me is women’s engagement in hyper-masculinized settings such as weight-lifting at the gym.

While gym culture is only one realm of fitness, and differs from a sport, some practices remain the same as those seen in sports settings. The gym is inherently masculine and promotes macho masculinities, yet for women, it encourages the production of muscles that must adhere to a feminine physique. “Increasingly, research highlights the more subjective aspects of women’s sport and fitness participation such as women’s physicality and bodily empowerment” (Dworkin 2003:133). Sport has been recognized as an opportunity for women to experience the creativity and energy of their bodily power (Hall 1996). Hall notes that some women have pointed to aerobics – exercise meant to strengthen one’s cardiovascular abilities – as empowering, where other women who body-build feel as though they reach their full potential through heavy lifting. Further, to discuss women’s body-building as both a site of compliance and resistance towards societal standards of femininity, Hall cites Grosz (1994): “[Women’s body-building] can be a form of narcissistic investment in maintaining her [heterosexual] attractiveness to others and herself...or as an attempt to take on for herself many of the attributes usually granted only to men –strength, stamina, muscularity – in a mode of defiance of patriarchal attempts to render women physically weak and incapable” (Hall 1996:59). These examples of women’s experiences

in individual sports display physical fitness as a source of empowerment to which women may not have access in other areas of their lives.

Hall (1996) refers to sport as a system that contributes to individual personal growth and the maintenance of the social order. However, for certain individuals, criticism of participation in sport still endures. Some women and marginalized men continue to be at a disadvantage. *Living the Paradox: Female Athletes Negotiate Femininity and Muscularity* by Krane et al. (2006) illustrates the aforementioned conflict faced by female athletes. The women who were interviewed for the research shared that they felt compelled to work through the paradox of being an athlete (competitive behavior, increased appetites, being lean, etc.) in their sport, versus being feminine (gentle, soft, passive) in society (Krane et al. 2006). This is especially difficult for women in sports that require larger or more muscular bodies and aggressive behavior; the female athletes in this study believed these aspects were necessary for success in sport, even though such attributes are contradictory to what is expected of women in their daily lives. While these results are reflective of the female experience in organized sport, which differs from the gym in structure, competition, and prescribed rules, they demonstrate that women in masculinized environments are confined by gendered limits. Gyms are historically male-dominated environments and some women who turn to fitness clubs and/or commercial gyms and participate in 'masculinized' activities may also find that their preferred way of exercising is contradictory to how women are expected to act, move, and behave.

THE GYM

Thomas Johansson (1996) identifies the gym as a place that helps to create, form, maintain and emphasize identities. Individuals may choose to attend gyms for various reasons (e.g., mental

health, physical health, as a past time, etc.); however, there are subconscious beliefs that may inadvertently affect gym users (and may also extend to those who do not attend). The notion that gyms are male institutions gained prominence through historical and cultural systems that have persisted in our society. Salvatore and Marecek (2010) address this issue in depth in their research *Gender in the Gym*. It is believed that there is a cultural dissociation between women and strength related exercise goals, particularly because of the evaluation from other individuals when participating in anaerobic exercise. Due to the creation of the gym being primarily for men and the development of male identities, women have restrictions placed on the identities they can create there. While the gym may supplement women's lifestyles, the space is not made for women to *create* identities.

Origin of The Gym

The gym, historically called *gymnasia*, originated for the convenience of Greek men to have a designated space to train for war (Cartwright 2016). "The name gymnasium (gymnasion) derives from the Greek word for nudity (gymnos) as all exercise and sport were done by the male only members in the nude" (Cartwright 2016). Chaline (2015) says that the gym is one of the oldest social institutions, dating back 2,800-years.¹ While the main purpose of these male arenas was for physical benefits, its benefits were two-fold; the arena also became a center of "intellectual endeavors" – where men would come to socialize at their leisure (Cartwright 2016). Zeigler (1975) discusses the origin of *gymnasia* as related to Athenian education in ancient Greece. This education system was to teach boys about gymnastics and music, thereby training the mind and

¹ There is scant literature on the origin of the gym. Chaline's book, *The Temple of Perfection: A History of the Gym*, was the only accessible source that included such an in-depth history of the gym. However, I felt it was neither sufficient in quantity, nor quality, and thus I relied on other non-academic sources (e.g., magazine articles) to fill in gaps in the literature.

body together to reach a form of harmonious completion. “Grown men met for exercise and conversation in the various gymnasia, state institutions maintained at public expense and administered by public functionaries” (Zeigler 1975:1). The nature of the gyms changed over centuries, however the primary purpose – where men go to train – remained the same. Those who were allowed to attend the gym varied over time. In the second-century BCE, only men under the age of 30 could attend, while “slaves, freedmen, tradesmen, male prostitutes, drunkards, madmen, and the physically unfit” were not admitted (Cartwright 2016). Cartwright goes on to say that women were never specifically included in this list as their exclusion was just assumed and hence did not need to be mentioned.

The rise of the modern fitness industry “marked the rise of specialized, competitive sports, as well as the emergence of a well-organized and thriving ‘fitness’ market and industry” (Le Corre 2014). The commercial gym, Chaline says, symbolized individual freedom. “As the citizen became more autonomous as a political entity, every aspect of the individual became more important, including his body” (Chaline 2015). Chaline highlights that there were two types of gyms that surfaced based on two different types of exercisers. “Fantasy gyms” were those gyms populated by hyper-muscular men, and the “real gym” served all men who were not bodybuilders, and women (Chaline 2015).

A good representation of a fantasy gym is Gold’s Gym (opened in the 1960’s in Venice, California), which was frequented by Arnold Schwarzenegger and other professional bodybuilders looking to compete in bodybuilding shows. The real gyms are the gyms that are most common today and can be found in most countries globally. “While women were never excluded from the 19th and early 20th century gymnasia, they weren’t specifically catered for either, and basically did a cut-down version of what the men did” (Chaline 2015). While the

gymnasia were created as an outlet of physical and mental training for young boys, physical training for girls as beneficial to mental stimulation/learning was not considered until much later. “Women’s physical education and sport has been hampered not only by the place of physical education in a particular society, but also by the place that women held in any society under consideration – and to a considerable extent by the ideas that men and women had about the limitations of women because of their anatomical structure” (Zeigler 1974:145). The rise of nationalism in education encouraged state-controlled and state-supported public school systems.

Smith (2015) points out that in the 1970’s women were more accustomed to the ideal female body of the time, and did not desire muscular (male-like) bodies. “[Women] wanted to get fit and possibly lose weight, so what brought them into the gym in large numbers was not weight training, but the aerobics dance revolution popularized by Jane Fonda in the early 1980’s” (Chaline 2015). This revolution inspired gyms to include cardiovascular equipment (e.g., treadmills, bikes, etc.), aerobics classes, and yoga in order to attract women. Today, this multi-purpose, co-ed gym is the most popular type of facility to workout in and can be found in most northern western countries.

Gendered territories

Perhaps, due to the origin of the gym, there remains a widespread understanding that particular areas of the gym (and therefore, particular exercises) are designated primarily for men, and other areas for women. Johansson’s work discusses the way in which the gym is divided into distinct gendered spaces, which creates very isolated social enclaves within the gym (1996). Johansson re-appropriates Erving Goffman’s (1959) terminology to contend that most gyms can be separated to “front” and “back” regions, where the front region is typically ‘male activities’ (men

trying to develop more muscles or ‘bulk’) and the back region tends to be occupied primarily with aerobics classes and cardiovascular machinery. While it is important to recognize that Johnsson’s work is dated, these claims can still speak to the organization of some gyms today. These regions are not exclusively male or female domains; however, the primary clientele of the former is male and the latter female. “There are, of course, many women using weights and training machines, but they tend to use weights in a much more restricted way than men do” (Johansson 1996:35). Many scholars (Mealey 1997; Dworkin 2003; Johansson 1996; Haelvona and Levy 2012) recognize this as well and add that women choose to engage in activities in which they will be enhancing their feminine qualities, and vice versa for men. For the purposes of my research project, I postulate that men also do not perform Pilates, yoga, and other stereotypically feminine activities without feeling various levels of anxiety or self-consciousness. The demand by women for aerobics in gyms led to the emergence of the highly populated co-ed gyms. However, due to the development of aerobics in gyms for women, there remains a stereotype that cardiovascular machines (e.g., treadmills and ellipticals) and classes are feminized territories, despite the promotion and accessibility of all the activities to both women and men.

While cardiovascular machines are easy to use and do not require much experience, they are also presented as allowing women to maintain their feminine physical appearance by not gaining “too much” strength (Haelvona and Levy 2012; Dworkin 2003). Specifically, Dworkin found that there are fewer women than men in weight rooms and more women than men on cardiovascular equipment, which clearly portrayed the emphasis on size reduction and (re)shaping of the body for women. As a result, these practices have become feminized within gyms and have perpetuated the gym etiquette of gender. Dworkin’s study of one gym is a

noteworthy contribution to research on women's experience in the gym and initiates the conversation regarding women's involvement in the gym, and fitness in general. "These questions point to issues of individual and structural agency and constraint such as: Is fitness truly empowering for women on site, providing an arena for strength and resistance against narrow constructions of femininity, or is it highly constraining? Is it both? How do beauty, the body, and hegemonic masculinity and femininity play a role in explaining why?" (Dworkin 2003:132).

Craig and Liberti (2007), Johansson (1996), and O'Dougherty et al. (2008) chose to approach questions about physical activity and gender segregation through in-group and individual interviews. A large proportion of the female participants in these studies commented on the fact that if one were to go into the male area of the gym, they would feel judged and unwelcome (Brace-Govan 2004:503). Craig and Liberti found that the term 'comfort' appeared repeatedly across many different interviews, and although the participants or the researchers did not directly define this word, participants disclosed that what makes them more comfortable was the attendance of other women and the lack of men. These participants were speaking to their experience in women-only gyms, and thus the researchers conclude that comfort was provided by "the organizational culture of nonjudgmental and noncompetitive sociability" (Craig and Liberti, 2007:679).

My research serves as a platform to discuss many of Dworkin's questions with the consideration and inclusion of men's involvement in the gym as well – are the activities that take place within the gym inclusive of both women and men? Research indicates that women-only gyms prove to be less hostile for women, creating a more comfortable environment in which to workout. Comfort is undeniably essential when working out, and so I commend women-only

gyms for creating an environment that makes women feel at ease. In the long term however, I do not believe that segregation of genders helps to resolve the problem of discomfort when working out, but rather actively helps to create a larger barrier between individuals. Nor is it likely to challenge the activities to which women gravitate or the bodily standards they seek to attain.

Theories that suggest most women do not attend co-ed gyms because of low levels of comfort are grounded in some empirical evidence (Craig et al., 2007:676). One might agree that this is a result of cultural practices that implicitly suggest who is dominant within a gym. Sonthaya Sriramatr (2012:1655) discusses segregation within the gym and investigates the stereotypes and assumptions individuals consider when imagining an exerciser. Sriramatr finds that after reviewing the questionnaires, weightlifters or athletes are assumed to be muscular men whereas women are expected to be more interested in aerobic exercises. I argue that the men and women who do not meet the criteria of this ‘imagined exerciser’ feel uncomfortable in an area of the gym that demands this specific look. At the very least, it may lead to an uncomfortable feeling while performing activities that are not prescribed for their gender. For my research, I look at a co-ed gym, which raises new and interesting questions about who chooses a gym and why.

The gaze

The *gaze* is a term that is borrowed from Michel Foucault’s work on the *Disciplinary Society*, which led him to create the concept of the Panopticon – Jeremy Bentham’s efficient model of a prison where the panoptic principle of being under constant supervision was important in instilling internalized norms of behavior (Wilchins 2004) and defining new power relations in everyday life (Adams and Sydie 2001:581). The panopticon is designed in such a way that the

prisoners are continuously in the field of vision of the guard stand but do not know whether or not the guard is actually present and watching. Through continued individual surveillance and rigid schedules, the Panopticon would “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 1977:201). This prison system promotes the idea that individuals are deviant, need to obey the law, but also most importantly, need to change everything about themselves (Wilchins 2004). These techniques were eventually adopted in other realms of society (e.g., school systems) due to their efficient ability to “instill norms of conduct, accountability, and self-consciousness in a large group” (Wilchins 2004:67). Foucault titles this new structure of power *discipline*, thus resulting in the disciplinary society. The production of socially created “docile bodies” – or the perfect citizen – has been re-appropriated by many other feminist theorists to explain gender conformity (Wilchins 2004; Mann and Patterson 2016). Wilchins says, “we do this in public, where – conscious of others watching us and our continuous visibility – we join them in watching and judging ourselves” (2004:69). In other words, in our highly gendered world, the greatest fear is to seem abnormal or deviant from one’s expected role. Conforming to one’s gender is a result of permanent visibility, transparency, and a strong sense of shame when you are disobeying the gender order.

Haelvona and Levy (2012) examine how gendered forces are applicable to “spheres of athletics and aerobic sports in the Israeli context” (p 1196). This article looked at the way in which mirrors in fitness clubs are a reflection of the gaze for women, which inevitably shapes women’s experiences and feelings about their own bodies. These authors, like many others who conduct research in gyms, focus on how aerobics are primarily dominated by women as they promote strength that adheres to a feminine physique. Additionally, it appears that it is a

common belief that women are not comfortable in the gym, and men are. However, Messner points out that “sport is a terrain that has been contested continually by women and by marginalized men” (2005:315). While Messner’s work speaks to the broader sphere of sport, the same debates are applicable to a gym setting, which was traditionally created for men and idealizes the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. While some individuals feel empowered by going to the gym, the nature of the gym creates a particular phenomenon that can simultaneously make anyone feel marginalized despite whether or not they embody the hegemonic male or female image. Within a co-ed gym, this type of marginalization may be felt at an increased rate as being surrounded by the opposite gender when working out (i.e., as it may be a time of vulnerability for some, or increased self-consciousness) can create a tense environment. As a result, literature indicates that this creates a particularly surveyed, and self-surveilled atmosphere, thus perhaps decreasing levels of comfort.

Foucault says, “the imposition of discipline upon the body with the operation of specific institutions creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural” (1999:128). In society, and I argue even more so in gyms – a traditionally masculinized space - women are subject to the male gaze so much that they begin to internalize this gaze, which results in docile bodies; docile bodies are ones that are subjugated, used, transformed, and improved (Foucault 1995).

In regard to gendered tensions related to bodybuilding, Mason (2008) says, “the gaze is a means of expressing gendered power relations, where typically men observe, and women act as passive objects. Male bodybuilding presents contradictions to this use of the gaze, since the muscled male body is highly scrutinized and gazed upon” (269).

The gaze may have other repercussions for women. I question whether or not the male gaze is present in the gym, and if so, whether it has (explicit or implicit) effects on women (and men) as they strength train and engage in other gendered activities. If this gaze does exist, it is likely that it occurs when performing a gendered activity that does not align with one's (perceived) gender. I will discuss these activities as they pertain to the location that I studied, but further, the way in which current literature examines the gendered nature of each activity.

Weightlifting

Johansson's research (1996) discusses the way in which gym culture is gendered from the onset, and how this can be problematic for women attending these "typically male spaces" (35).

Weightlifting, Johansson states, is the origin of what later became the modern gym, and thus the connection between weightlifting, muscle building, and men is manifested throughout perceptions of the gym. Despite gyms being predominantly co-ed, there are still stereotypical themes throughout. While some women do use weights, most women are more inclined to use the machines (Johansson 1996).

Johansson adopts Arnold Schwarzenegger's distinction between 'bodybuilding' and 'bodyshaping.' Men participate in the former while women participate in the latter – "[women] use [machines that target specific parts of the body] in order to *shape* their bodies in certain ways, whereas men use them in order to build muscles and to achieve volume" (1996:35). Mealey (1997) argues that both men and women use athletic training for the purposes of emphasizing their bodies to appeal to potential partners, a connection that is related to reproduction.

The *building* versus *shaping* distinction is often called upon in research regarding women and weightlifting. Women either use a bodybuilding type of workout regime and thus are considered by some as 'hypermasculine,' or they use certain machines to emphasize certain body parts, to ideally, *shape*¹ their bodies differently (Ian 2001; Mealey 1997, Craig and Liberti 2007). Ian (2001) and Krane et al. (2004) discuss the struggle faced by women who participate in weightlifting, or any athletic training; "her psychological idealism – her desire to embody or at

¹ Another common word for this among women is "toning," which is used to describe the reduction of body fat while gaining *lean* muscle (e.g., "I want to get toned"). Ironically, losing fat and gaining muscle is too, muscle building, however women (and perhaps even some men) do not think about "toning" the body in the same way as they do "body-building."

least resemble her own ‘body image’ – to that of the culture, with its normative gender ideals” (Ian 2001:70).

So, while two different types of bodies, and different gender orders, according to Johansson, warrant different ways of working out, the weight area of the gym presupposes experience, knowledge, and overall, comfort. The necessary experience, or lack thereof, may be one possible reason that limits individuals from frequenting this area. Johansson’s study finds that women who do not use the weight room and must walk through the front region (weightlifting area) to get to the back region (cardiovascular equipment) are inundated by the gaze of men, which results in varying responses from women. “This means that women feel like aliens when stepping into the male space, but it does not prevent them from entering the gym” (Johansson 1996:34). In addition, Dworkin’s research (2003) finds fewer women than men populate the weightlifting area, as cardiovascular exercises do not compromise women’s femininity. While women have challenged normative femininity by entering into competitive sports, Dworkin argues that women continue to face barriers in highly stereotyped arenas like strength training and bodybuilding. Dworkin further goes on to say that [some] women who do partake in athletic training utilize strategies that will limit their strength and therefore their size or mass. This theory is quite ironic in itself; while lifting weights allows women to feel powerful and strong, “women’s gendered socialization causes them to create their own limits,” which, in my opinion, restrain one’s ability to achieve not only personal strength, but also confidence.

“In the worlds of both sport and fitness, muscular ideals have pushed the previous cultural ideals of the tiny, slim body to include “allowances for substantial weight and bulk” (Bordo 1993:191). Changes to societal perceptions of women’s bodies have made more room for the fit woman’s body, especially with regard to power and agency (Dworkin 2008). Dworkin’s

research displays interest in non- and moderate lifters. Through her research, Dworkin finds that an underlying theme among all those who lift weights is the glass ceiling on muscular strength. While some women say they refuse to go up in weight when lifting, others admit to ‘backing off’ or ‘holding back’ from weights - all in the name of fostering femininity. Dworkin (2008) says, “The glass ceiling on muscular size is not simply imposed on women. Rather, they actively define it, wrestle with it, nudge it up and down, and shape its current and future placement...despite the fact that women should ‘just do it [Nike’s mantra],’ ideals of emphasized femininity lead many women in the weight room to ‘just hold back’” (262). In addition to this, there is some debate regarding whether or not one’s bodily agency threatens the gender order. In this case, as Dworkin asks, “Is the more muscular bodily ideal merely the most recent form of docile bodily self-surveillance?” (262). If so, what is the relationship between surveillance and patriarchal capitalism? Is complete agency of one’s body attainable?

Engaging in certain athletic training impacts women’s experiences of their bodies, although there is a lack of research that discusses the actual repercussions of these restrictions. Based on studies that have discussed women and weightlifting, one can conclude that women are uncomfortable with the notion of transgressing ‘femininity’ when working out. Mason says that “...men look at women and women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relationship of women to themselves” (cited in Malacrida and Low 2008:268). If the looker is a woman, then she is watching herself, and thus becomes an object.

Ideologies of men and masculinity are oppositional to their female counterparts, and thus the relationship between men, lifting weights, and societal acceptance of doing so is quite favorable. That being said, there are inevitable limitations that men do face regarding their

bodies in the gym. Mason says, “some critics argue that the sporting discourse provides a prime site for the construction of ‘maleness,’ offering as it does the learning of a specific combination of force and skill” (Malacrida and Low 2008:267). Further, Mason discusses that size and the occupation of space are vital components that make up what it means to be male, thereby asserting that taking space is a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. However, what is accepted or worthy to inhabit that space are only *specific* bodies; “so long as there is very little fat, tensed muscle and tight sinew” (Leeds Craig 2014:53), the masculine body is welcomed to occupy as much space as is desired. In doing so, these muscular, hard bodies are there to be looked at as a symbol of masculinity, representing a particular type of image (Easthope 1990). The desire to resemble this ideal image is in part due to the promotion of sport as a measure to prevent effeminacy in the late 1980’s (Adams 2005). Garry Whannel says, “the ‘muscular invulnerability’ that many male athletes aspire to is, at least in part, a way to ‘preserve fragile [sexual] barriers and to police heterosexual masculinity’” (Adams 2005:69).

Aerobics

There is ample research regarding women’s participation in aerobics classes and/or use of equipment in a gym setting. There may be a number of contributing factors that explain the abundance of research in this particular area: it is the most straightforward type of training, it is the least complex type of workout regime and, research suggests that women actually do participate in aerobics more than any other type of training (Johansson 1996; Dworkin 2003; Leeds Craig and Liberti 2007; Haelyona and Levy 2012). The latter fact may be related to a number of circumstances. I believe that its use by some women is, in part, related to the mythical assumption that this specific type of training does not question the gender order but rather

promotes femininity. Further, when new to the gym, aerobics equipment is as easy as getting on and pressing start. Its easy-to-use component allows many women to feel comfortable when participating, which may allow individuals to feel stress-free or unthreatened. I argue that user's ease and the activity's accessibility are essential in feeling confident and comfortable during the workout.

Some research has shown that women understand their participation in aerobics as a method of autonomy, of "taking personal responsibility for holistic health rather than pursuing patriarchal beauty standards" (MacNevin 2003), and thus experience greater feelings of self-worth through participation (Nieri and Hughes 2016). Further, Haravon's (2002) research suggests that group fitness allows for control in aerobics, which most women found to be rewarding. However, men who participate in aerobics do not always have the same experience.

Evidence has shown that women, disproportionately, face multiple barriers in predominantly masculine areas in the gym; however, some literature has suggested that the opposite is true for men. "Although there is a great acceptance towards different kinds of bodies and different ways of expressing one's gender identity, there are also certain boundaries and limits of the range of expressions that can be used to construct a specific identity" (Johansson 1996:39). While women mostly populate the "back" region, "a few brave men" have frequented this space as well (Johansson 1996:39). Johansson found that the few men who entered the female territory were openly welcomed and shown signs of approval for their courageous behavior (for dedicating oneself to the arenas of aerobics). However, those who did step outside of the gender boundaries were often regarded as controversial or their sexuality was put into question. For example, one participant said that because he was the only male in the aerobics class, he was concerned he would be labeled as gay (Johansson 1996). This assumption further

perpetuates the notion that men only go to the gym to build muscle and get ‘bigger,’ thus labeling those who do not comply with hegemonic masculine ideals as gay.

When questioned about their attendance in aerobics classes, the male participants felt that they had to defend themselves (Johansson 1996). Negative assumptions about aerobics were based on one’s inability to understand aerobics itself, as opposed to stereotypes associated with who engages in aerobics. One participant, who was an aerobics instructor, said frequently people correlate his job to his sexuality responding to him with, “yes, of course (you teach aerobics classes), there are lots of beautiful women there” (Johansson 1996:40). Consequently, these types of ideologies further perpetuate stereotypes related to what bodies, genders, and sexualities can, and cannot, do in the gym. Currently, the literature that is accessible speaks to societal perceptions of the body that have been indoctrinated in most individuals from a young age. Perhaps this is even more prevalent for activities like Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates, all of which have been linked to women.

Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates

Gendered activity (fitness) “reproduces structural gendered inequalities that contradict the ideology supporting the gender structure (e.g., women are weak)” (Nieri and Hughes 2016:136). This gendered participation becomes far more apparent in Yoga, Pilates, and Zumba – activities that seem to be directed mostly towards women based on the physical benefits of the class (e.g., maintaining tight, lean bodies). These programs are also marketed to women as a means to engage in fitness levels while also maintaining a level of sociability, while remaining slender and lean.

While research in sociological databases regarding Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates, and other predominately feminized fitness regimes is limited, there is an extensive amount of research in other health related fields. Hall (2002:211) states, “yoga classes are especially popular with women and attract a huge variety of individuals... [Similarly] women’s fitness classes, especially if they are inexpensive, easy to get to, and have built-in childcare, are popular and well-attended.” The existing literature suggests that women certainly do dominate these fields, and that their self-confidence and feelings of self-concept have increased tremendously due to their participation in these activities. Nieri and Hughes’ (2016) exploration of women’s subjective experiences in Zumba help to identify the fun of participation in group classes and predominately women-only spaces.

A Latin-inspired group dance-fitness class, Zumba has been serving millions of individuals since 2001, when it first came to be (Nieri and Hughes 2016). The emphasis in Zumba is placed on having fun and enjoying the class, letting go and being free throughout the workout– quite different from other methods of working out that follow the mantra “no pain, no gain, a method that sport practices use in producing a particular type of masculinity.” Through a qualitative interview process, the authors discussed Zumba with forty-one participants in order to understand Zumba as a social field and a system of social positions.

“Zumba fits in the category of group fitness, and like other group fitness classes, Zumba serves a predominately female clientele” (Nieri and Hughes 2016:136). Participants often follow the lead of the instructor, as with most group classes, and admittedly, Zumba instructors add elements of sexuality (e.g., hair flipping). However, participants in this study said that their participation in the sexualized activity was for their own enjoyment, as opposed to the pleasure of others, or for the male gaze (Nieri and Hughes 2016). Participants said that the women-only

space focused on enhancing one's femininity and allowed women to feel beautiful and free through their movement.

Among other benefits, Zumba was not stressful, not boring, and not a lonely activity like other forms of fitness. Further, while some women say they have fun regardless of the participation of men, others admit they would be intimidated by the inclusion of (heterosexual) men (Nieri and Hughes 2016). The participants believe that a women-only atmosphere is more freeing and allows them to feel sexy without judgment. Other women have invited male friends, do not mind the presence of men, and think that men's participation, albeit uncommon, shows their genuine interest in the class (Nieri and Hughes 2016).

The lack of research surrounding men in any of these forms of activities is perhaps not surprising to some individuals, given what we now know of Zumba. I believe that men's (lack of) involvement is correlated to stereotypes surrounding certain activities, which in turn work to preserve and reproduce notions of gendered activities. For example, the perceived effeminacy of male figure skaters leads them to be highly scrutinized within a "masculinity crisis" (King 2000:153), which is similar to the dilemma that male dancers face. Stereotypes associated with dance regarding the feminization of the sport are similar in Zumba, and could be a large contributing factor as to why this activity is lacking in male participation. It is not enough for men's bodies to look masculine, but they must also perform this way too. Perhaps these ideals create a level of anxiety for some men who do not, and cannot, conform to this image of masculinity. This is likened to bodies that participate in female dominated activities while the body itself may appear to be 'masculine,' men need to actively work towards expressing that masculinity, particularly in feminized activities. This reinforces stereotypes about certain

activities, which leads to the gendering of not only the activity, but also, as a result, of the individual who participates.

Adams (2005) says ideologies about men's bodies and what they should or should not do force them to create a specific image – similarly to women's bodies. "Men's bodies then become promotional devices, reinforcing those same ideas. For instance, the notion that physical flexibility is a feminine characteristic has contributed to many men living with hamstrings tighter than they would be if flexibility were considered a desirable measure of manliness" (Adams 2005:65). While Yoga and Pilates have proven to result in an increase in mobility, flexibility and other health benefits (i.e., spiritual benefits, decrease of injury, etc.) the gendering of these activities may create barriers for men.

While academic research on this topic is lacking, there has been some pop culture journalism coverage on the benefits of Yoga and Pilates for both women and men. It is no secret that Yoga and Pilates help to promote well-being and healing, and it is the latter that has drawn some attention from men, namely athletes (Simcik 2010; Jackson 2011; Ahmed 2016). The articles discuss the incorporation of Yoga and Pilates into athlete's weekly regimes, so they can stay limber and limit pain. Many athletes began these activities post injury/operation and found that their recovery left them feeling better than new. Jessica Loncar, a physical therapist and Pilates instructor, said that most men do not stretch properly and, as a result, have a lot of tension and many tight muscles (Simcik 2010). A survey conducted in 2016 said that 10 million men in the United States practice Yoga, as opposed to 4 million in 2012. Thus, while the uptake may be slow, it is nevertheless increasing.

"The notion that Yoga, Pilates, barre and pole classes are feminine styles of physical fitness is much like the age-old misconception that women who lift weights develop a masculine

physique” (Ahmed 2016:1). Ironically, Yoga (and Pilates) were created by men for men, despite the fact that most men now tend to only join post-injury. Sundara Beam Rao Kasinath, a Yoga instructor in Dubai, tells Ahmed, “Men want a more active sequence and aren’t interested too much in relaxation [...] men are realizing yoga is more practical and necessary and contributed to their overall performance in professional sports” (2016:2). Apparently, due to the increase of participation of men in Yoga and Pilates, and the outstanding benefits it has on their performance in their home sport, many professional teams hire their own instructors for pre- and post- game time.

Reliance on non-academic literature for my research cannot offset the gap of literature regarding men’s participation in Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates. I believe that this gap is a result of a lack of interest in men who participate in these primarily female-dominated activities. Evidently, there are similarities that can be drawn between these activities to better understand the consequences of gendering within Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates for men. At the risk of pushing these comparisons too far, it is important to consider what we know of each of these activities: they are predominately populated by women, their benefits are largely associated with women, and there is a lack of research on men’s participation in these activities. The research that does exist is related to how male engagement with effeminate activities displays concerns for men’s masculinity, and sexuality, thus damaging their overall identity. In the same way, Hall (2002:211) says, “women’s participation in activity goes unrecorded because it is private, sometimes hidden, and certainly not organized.” These issues must be discussed and critiqued in order to be addressed appropriately so all individuals feel comfortable in the gym.

CONCLUSION

While there is much research conducted on women in female dominated activities and environments, and men in male sports, there is a gap in literature that discusses women and men's involvement in co-ed gyms. How women and men engage in a co-ed gym, both with regard to the activities in which they participate and the way that they conduct themselves within the space, needs further attention. The lack of literature on men's participation and comfort in Yoga, Zumba, and Pilates is telling of societal stereotypes on this topic, and therefore demands research. In addition, how women and men experience comfort in these environments is important for understanding whether change within the gym is necessary.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH PROCESS – METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

This chapter discusses the importance of a feminist framework for developing my research questions, the decision to employ quantitative research, the production of my survey instrument, and the framing of the coding and analysis of my data. I discuss how the paucity of research that discusses women's and men's levels of comfort within gyms informed my choice of method, and the survey questions that I ask. The decision I made regarding the use of quantitative methods impacted my ethics as a researcher. For this reason, I have included a discussion of the feminist debate about the merits of quantitative and qualitative methods as relevant background information. I discuss the challenges I faced using a quantitative instrument, and how I managed to compensate for these challenges through the inclusion of open-ended, long response answers.

My experience in gyms greatly influenced the questions I asked the participants. Additionally, allowing participants the option to respond to survey questions, and to provide extensive responses when necessary, are all mechanisms that adhere to my ontological and epistemological position. Lastly, considering participants' social location is crucial to feminist research, and so it was pertinent to my feminist praxis that I include sufficient space for participants to identify themselves. All of these techniques, with the addition of constant reflexivity, aid in the production of a quantitative instrument that is informed by a feminist philosophy and practice.

While mixed methods are often advocated in feminist research, I do not think they are always necessary; quantitative or qualitative methods can often be sufficient in themselves. I argue that my research method allows for both numerical analysis and discourse analysis (through open-ended questions). I did choose to make use of mixed methods in my research design, but not out of some notion that this must be done to qualify as feminist research. Instead,

this choice simply reflects the nature of my research questions and my ethics as a researcher. Scott (2010:226) argues, “there is no such thing as a best method for researching gender inequalities; the appropriate method is the one that is most likely to produce credible evidence that bears directly on the questions being asked, so as to achieve the research objective.” It is the use of standpoint theory and reflexivity in my research practice, not the application of quantitative or qualitative methods per se, which defines the work as feminist. It has been argued by Bromley (2012), Jayaratne and Stewart (2008), Westermorland (2001) and other feminists that what makes research feminist is not the method that is applied, but rather the conceptual framework – the research questions asked, the goal of the research, the importance of the research for the participants/community, the focus on different forms of oppression, etc. – of the research.

Miner and Jayaratne (2014) suggest that research of a high caliber follows a *general* principle of survey research where the middle phase (e.g., survey distribution, collection, and coding of the data) is the least influenced by feminist (or any other) theory. Therefore, despite the fact that my research consistently upholds a feminist framework, the latter section of this chapter discusses survey methods in an independent way. Finally, the ethical procedure that set the foundation for this research and the challenges that presented themselves throughout the research process are discussed.

METHOD

Feminist Standpoint

The feminist standpoint theories focus on gender differences, on differences between women’s and men’s situations which give a scientific advantage to those who can make use of the differences (Harding 2003:145).

Standpoint theory begins with research questions that are rooted in women's lives (Hesse-Biber 2011). Certainly, there has been some resistance against standpoint theory as it has been criticized as "too essentialist and Eurocentric in that it distills all women's experience into a single version – western, white woman" (Hesse-Biber 2011). Standpoint and perspective have been mistakenly used interchangeably; however, they are not the same. "For a position to count as standpoint, rather than as a claim – equally valuable but for different reasons – for the importance of listening to women tell us about their lives and experiences, we must insist on an objective location – women's lives – as the place from which feminist research should begin" (Harding 2003:147). Therefore, contrary to the argument against standpoint theory, beginning from a standpoint perspective does not reduce all women's experiences to a homogenous account, but rather recognizes that women's lives and experiences are the foundation for the methodology (Hesse-Biber 2011).

"Women (and other marginalized groups) have struggled to have their experiences included in the study of social life, for 'experiential accounts are too readily equated with anecdotal evidence' (Code 1995:18), and thus devalued in positivist epistemology" (Day 2012:63). A situated view emphasizes the social construction of knowledge; all social scientists produce knowledge that is influenced by their social location, experiences, values, etc. (Lawson 1995:451-452). Utilizing standpoint theory for this research has allowed inquiry regarding gender specific questions for both women and marginalized men. The use of standpoint also highlights the importance of theorizing individual experiences as a part of public discourses of gender norms and relations. It has enabled me to transform personal interests and experiences into testable research questions; conversations with advisors/friends allowed me to reflect on, discover, and overcome some of my own biases and assumptions (e.g., including men in the

research design; transforming assumptions of surveillance practices into measurable hypotheses, etc.). The survey questions I have created (Appendix D) have been based on my own understandings, as I can only create questions that have been relevant to my own experience. Day (2012) believes that the person asking the questions has based their questions on prejudices (subconsciously or not); however, one of the ways that I chose to offset this was to include open-ended questions that would allow the participants to discuss their answers at length. The questions posed aim to acknowledge and understand differences between and within gendered subjects in sport, and more specifically, how these differences play out within the gym – a traditionally masculine realm (Johansson 1996).

Reflexivity, a key component of feminist research, is an important aspect of standpoint theory. Standpoint theory enables researchers to analyze social conditions as they take root from their own social experiences, while reflexivity allows them to consider the implications of these positional viewpoints in their practices and assumptions. “Standpoint theory opens the way to stronger standards of both objectivity and reflexivity. These standards require that research projects use their historical location as a resource for obtaining greater objectivity” (Harding 2003:165). As a result, reflexivity has the ability to inform and guide one’s method, including survey work, and this has had a large influence on my own research framework.

Reflexivity

Pierre Bourdieu (2004:89) believes that reflexivity allows for critical scrutiny in research, thus strengthening one’s argument while “increasing the chances of attaining truth.” Bourdieu uses reflexivity as a means to an end; it is a tool or stance to achieve objectivity. Strong objectivity, coined by Harding, recognizes that situated knowledge results in maximized objectivity, as

“objectivity is increased by thinking out of the gap between the lives of ‘outsiders’ and the lives of ‘insiders’ and their favored conceptual schemes” (Harding 2003:152). Strong objectivity necessitates the investigation of the subject and object relationship, as opposed to denying the existence of, or seeking control over, this relationship (Harding 2003). Hesse-Biber, Leavy, and Yaiser (2004) explain feminist objectivity as “knowledge and truth that is partial, situated, power imbued, and relational” (Miner and Jayaratne 2014:301).

In other words, conventional objectivity (alleged value-free research) presents knowledge as universally valid, while in reality, “objectivity can only operate within the limitations of the scientists’ personal beliefs and experiences” (301). As Haraway (1991) would argue, researchers can only ever achieve a partial, situated knowledge of the world; to pretend otherwise is to animate the “god trick” of a view from everywhere and nowhere. Further, Jayartne and Stewart (2008:52) believe that although absolute objectivity is impossible, the pursuit of objectivity as a goal allows us to reduce our biases and reflexivity allows us to consider this bias; stating our position allows others to understand the biases we bring to our work. Ultimately, if everyone were to state their biases, we could have more open dialogue, creating better, more inclusive, solutions to problems.

“‘Strong Reflexivity’ requires the development of oppositional theory from the perspective of the lives of those Others” (Harding 2003:165). Feminist researchers use reflexivity to be goal-oriented in an anti-oppressive framework; reflexivity is both for praxis and for being self-critical. In this way, it is critical to examine how my own views have guided many of the decisions I have made for this research, and how they guide my interpretations of the responses that I receive. My interest in gender and sport has evolved from various circumstances in my life. First and foremost, being raised in a traditional Italian household with five older

brothers had a large influence on the way in which I saw my body, specifically in sport. While I was not consciously aware of my body and the way it moved until I was a teenager struggling with body image issues, the way in which sport was encouraged for my brothers, but not for me, was difficult to ignore. My family supported my participation in sport as a hobby, and a means to lose weight, while my brothers' interest in sport was competitive. After deciding to step away from team sports for numerous reasons, I became aware of how many other girls my age had consciously moved away from sports when they began secondary school. The pay-to-use gyms in the city became my outlet to continue to stay active and it was here that the problem intensified. Over many years of my experience in different gyms, I have had multiple conversations with both women and men who have expressed discomfort with their bodies at the gym. At first, the issue of bodily discomfort or consciousness seemed one-sided (female); however, through more experience, I learned that this is certainly not the case. For these reasons, I was, and continue to be, passionate about filling the gaps in knowledge about how gender operates in sport and in the gym for both women and men.

Quantitative Methods

Originally, my vision was to utilize qualitative methods for a research project that included women participants only. I intended to conduct semi-structured, focus group interviews with women and managerial staff at a local co-ed gym. Graduate students, according to Lawson (1995), are educated primarily on the approaches that are dominant in a particular department. I believe that the inclusion of one's voice in research that is about them is essential to produce meaningful, productive work. What one says, or does not say, speaks more to cultural discourses than one may suspect. However, after much consideration and debate, I opted for quantitative

methods and decided to include men's experiences as well; learning about men's experiences teaches us more about women's experiences through comparison, and allows for connections to be made between genders. Qualitative methods are more difficult to generalize, and more prone to researcher bias, in terms of manipulating the selection and interpretation of data. Quantitative methods add a wealth of knowledge to the literature on gender inequalities, and they still have the ability to capture voice – in surveys, this is through the incorporation of open-ended and long answer questions.

The range of objectives that the research will address should be considered before researchers decide on their research questions and the most suitable method to address these questions. My decision to use quantitative data was to transform what may be in danger of being “grand universal assumptions” into measurable and testable hypotheses, and to see how things are distributed differentially among populations (as opposed to universally assumed to apply equally everywhere). Reinharz (1992), Jayaratne and Stewart (2008), and Scott (2010) believe that statistical methods can identify greater cultural patterns and/or discourses. Further, Lawson (1995) argues that the use of one method does not eliminate partial understandings, and thus scholars should consider how advantageous quantitative techniques are in “demonstrating the operation of processes of oppression and of difference” (452). In other words, quantitative methods are good at measuring the *degree to which* situations exist and are experienced in different segments of the population. Utilizing quantitative methods allows me explore gender inequalities further, and to decipher whether these inequalities have an impact on individuals in a gym setting. As Miner and Jayaratne say, “research is a search for answers to questions, and feminist research is a search for answers to questions that affect women's lives and promote social change for women” (Hesse-Biber 2014:298). Although quantitative research may be

regarded as a traditional method, it may be used in conjunction with feminist reflexivity to seek an end goal that benefits women.

Numbers have a compelling ability to tell stories about women, and about other marginalized groups (Miner and Jayaratne 2014). The strengths of quantitative research include, but are not limited to: “the potential to provide a vehicle for feminists to introduce sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and other social justice issues into mainstream discussions”; “the concision of statistics, which is both memorable and easily communicated to others”; and finally “the ability for quantitative methods to assist in determining the best course of action in implementing social change for women” (Miner and Jayaratne 2014:304-305). In other words, if the ultimate goal of research is making a change for women or other marginalized groups, first one must be able to prove that social change is needed. One way of achieving this is through quantification; “numbers and statistics talk, and they talk loudly and persuasively [and they cannot be ignored by non-feminists and the lay public]” (Miner and Jayaratne 2014:304). This speaks to another advantage of quantitative work; one’s hypotheses must be tested to transform grand claims into quantifiable measures. Through this procedure, more precise forms of evidence arise. Finally, quantitative and qualitative research frequently depend on one another to “understand the macro-context in which the micro level processes are placed” (Scott 2010:233). The survey I have created follows a mixed methods format; the questions I asked allow both numerical analysis and discourse analysis through open-ended questions. I do not claim that the survey I have produced is value-free; however, I assert that the use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as the way I have implemented both methodologies in my research, results in a unique research design that broadly follows the feminist ethics and principles previously outlined, and allows the participants to share their voices. Prior to discussing the

survey instrument, I will introduce Power First Fitness, as it was the perfect location to carry out my research and conduct this survey.

The Location

Power First Fitness is one of the most popular co-ed gyms in Thunder Bay. With over 30 group classes a week and two floors with multiple rooms and equipment to serve all individuals' needs, it has proven to be one of the most competitive gyms in the city. While not the most expensive gym, it certainly is one of the more upscale facilities. A regular one-year membership for adults at Power First Fitness costs just under \$1000.

It was not merely the size and popularity that attracted me to consider the facility for my research - although certainly that had a significant influence on my final decision - but also, the structure of the gym itself. In correspondence with Johansson's "front" and "back" region theory about the gym, Power First Fitness certainly displays separate regions but in quite a unique way. The "front region," the part that one sees, and must walk through first, is filled with traditionally male activities. The unique layout of Power First Fitness sets them apart from other gyms - the second level borders on and looks over the bottom floor. The second floor serves as the "back region," in that it is less on display, and is comprised of aerobics equipment, lighter weights and accessories, and circuit machines. Additionally, the second level has smaller rooms for classes, weight training, or other activities. Due to the nature of the structural layout/arrangement of the gym, one might conclude that the front region, or where the majority of the "body-building"/male activities takes place, is in an easily observed area.

Generally, front regions are more visible, whether that be in relation to personal performances, like Goffman suggested, or structurally. Adams (2005) says that while it is

feminine to be on display, ironically the hard muscles that bodybuilders have are for display purposes only. This multi-faceted idea of men's (muscular) bodies further speaks to hegemonic masculinity; one may look a certain way only if they act in a certain way and these presentations must work interchangeably.

With the inclusion of the second floor bordering the first floor, one would think that this display and performance aspect of the front region becomes heightened. Individuals using the cardiovascular equipment on the second level have minimal places to look, and as a result may default to looking down at the first level. Specifically, in regard to women, Adams (2005) says that when displayed, women's bodies are more likely to be presented explicitly as objects of the gaze, maintaining the stereotypical active/passive and masculine/feminine binaries of heterosexuality. The survey instrument was an excellent method for learning that many individuals refrain from being in the front region, although the reasoning for doing so varies between different respondents. The survey allowed me to easily address a large audience in a way that would not have been possible had I utilized qualitative methods.

The Survey Instrument

“Conducting large-scale surveys,” Bromley says, “allows masses of information to be sorted and coded for analysis which can offer researchers knowledge about trends in the data and insights into their research questions” (2012:119). Further, Reinharz (1992) recognizes how survey research can specify how important an issue is by highlighting its pervasiveness. By gathering and analyzing quantitative data, I set out to understand if, and how, gender inequalities are distributed among individuals who attend the gym in question (Reinharz 1992). Also, depending on the sample size, survey results may be generalized to a wider population (Westermorland

2001). Due to limited access to email lists, my research works with a non-random sample, and therefore is not technically generalizable (Below, I discuss my sample further). However, I believe the data is indicative of trends that occur in similar, broader contexts – follow-up studies that use random samples would be beneficial in the future to assure better representativeness.

Certain critics of survey data have argued that such instruments are too simplistic to investigate specific social issues (Westermorland 2001). Thus, it is important to consider the questions being asked. Open-ended questions in the survey can allow individuals to speak openly and freely (as opposed to speaking with a stranger), especially if discussion is about a sensitive topic. It is also necessary to consider the importance of the questions that have *not been asked*, and the influence they have on the research findings (Westermorland 2001). As previously mentioned, feminist methods prioritize the need to respect, validate, and preserve the voices of our respondents. As such, letting the participants speak for themselves – through open-ended, long answer questions – was pertinent to the ethics of my research and helped to shape the survey design.

I did not begin the research process until I gained ethical clearance from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. I chose to conduct my research at Power First Fitness for a number of reasons. A few reasons were that it has a very unique structure and offers a variety of activities and equipment. Another reason, and likely the most influential, was based on my previous membership at Power First, which had placed me in a very unusual position; I had formed a relationship with Power First staff and clientele that positioned me as an *insider*. It would be naïve if I did not recognize that perhaps the warm and enthusiastic welcome given to my research at Power First could have something to do with my previous history with the gym. Once I had chosen Power First as the location in which to conduct my study, I withdrew my

membership for ethical purposes. I felt that my attendance at a pay-to-use gym would be a conflict of interest and was in opposition to my ethical responsibility as a researcher. I then proposed my research to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Lakehead University, and after multiple resubmissions, I received approval to conduct my research (see appendices for all ethics documents).

The survey instrument was first developed as part of the course work for a Women's Studies Methods and Theory graduate course. This early effort acted as a pre-test of the method; students were to conduct a small research assignment by utilizing a method of their choice to apply to their thesis in hopes that it would grant some experiential knowledge of the particular method. I conducted a survey at Power First Fitness with the women clientele. It was the perfect opportunity to work through some of the questions and concerns that I hoped to raise in my thesis research. One hundred surveys were left in the women's change room at Power First Fitness, along with an information letter and consent form. Respondents were made aware of the research via a poster on the wall in the change room. The response rate for this small course project was roughly 15%, and while I did include this research in my results section, I was fortunate enough to receive plenty of feedback that would be applicable to my thesis survey for construction and testing purposes.

After the analysis of these surveys, many revisions were made, the largest being the inclusion of men. This addition was primarily due to the fact that only studying half the population of the gym would not explain the full story. Further, studying both women and men would allow for a comparison component that would be advantageous to studying comfort in the gym. The survey was created using *Qualtrics*, a Canadian-based software program. Although this program was not my first choice, the REB informed me that using an online survey tool that

was American-based meant that the data was not housed in Canada. Thus, my decision was to choose a Canadian-based program. The survey was composed of both open-ended and close-ended questions. Multiple questions were in two, three, or four parts, and none of questions forced a response from the participant, and therefore, participants were able to skip any question if they did not feel comfortable answering it.

Creating survey questions that properly conveyed the questions I wanted to explore was the most challenging component of the procedure. Descarries (2013:566) writes, “Language is much more than a code. It is at once a reference system and a cultural vehicle that represents reality and what we have to say in a singular and symbolic way.” At first, it was extremely difficult to avoid the use of sociological jargon in the survey questions. However, it was also difficult to use lay language without misrepresenting the importance of the concepts in which I was interested.

One example of this was *the gaze*; I needed to utilize the term in a manner that did not require a lengthy definition. However, words such as “stare” or “glance” did not encompass the entirety of *gaze*. I changed words so the participants would understand the language enough that they would be comfortable using the terms. In this case, I used *looking* or *gazing* that was prefaced with a brief description of these terms. I was careful to define difficult terminology, to ensure participants would understand the meaning I was trying to convey. In this way, participants would have a better chance of understanding what was expected of them. If each participant could understand a specific term in a similar way, there would be some consistency amongst the responses.

Working with specific words was very tricky; it was a challenging element of the research process that I had not anticipated. Authors such as Fuss (1989), Irigaray (1996), and

Descarries (2013) stress the importance of the power of language; it is imperative to recognize this power as a researcher. My position of power as the researcher allowed me to have control over the language being used; however, in certain ways I was also vulnerable to language. I needed to convey terms in an accessible manner, but I also needed to be sure that certain words that might appear to be negative or unfavorable were, at least, common. In other words (no pun intended), I wanted participants to recognize that engaging in a socially unacceptable practice (e.g., gazing), is very common in certain settings, such as a gym, and thus admitting to doing so is not shameful. I also hoped that if the participants understood what was being asked of them, and felt comfortable and safe, they would feel empowered to answer honestly.

The language utilized for the survey was the key tool that accounted for validity within this research. While the inclusion of key word definitions does certainly increase consistency amongst participants' responses, it does not eliminate preconceived notions or individual experience of a particular definition, activity, or phenomenon. For example, my definition of comfort may not resemble participants' experiences of comfort, or may not include all emotions that others associate with comfort, and therefore may not be a valid measurement of comfort.

It was necessary to include the definition of each key concept, as individuals understand terms differently. The inclusion of the definition does allow the participants to respond based on how I understand comfort, but it does not indicate whether or not participants are considering other definitions or experiences when responding to the questions. Therefore, while I took all the precautions necessary to measure for consistency, validity, like reliability, is a hard measure to test for in quantitative research with a small sample size.

Sampling Procedure

A non-random sample was utilized to collect data for this research, based on an incomplete membership list of emails provided to me by management. Although a random sample was preferred, it was not possible, as I could not obtain a list of the entire population of members. After receiving permission from the gym manager (the gatekeeper for this research) to conduct my research, the manager sent out an email to 327 gym members whose names were on the list. This list was created based on individuals who have chosen to have their email on file at Power First – these members were told the emails would be used for any urgent notifications about the class schedule, or the gym in general. To date, Power First has 1116 members at the gym; however, due to the year Power First opened (2003), the email list is not an accurate portrayal of the number of clientele at Power First. The email included a brief overview of the research, the consent form (Appendix C), an attached information letter (Appendix B) and a link to where the survey could be found (via Qualtrics). Participants were made aware that by clicking on the link to the survey, they understood the nature of the study and consented to participate. Participants were also made aware that the survey information was anonymous and that they were only to respond to questions they felt comfortable answering. Participants could withdraw their consent up until the point at which they submitted the survey, after which time they were no longer able to do so, due to the fact that the surveys were submitted anonymously. To be sure that the survey response rate was high, I offered three incentives: a chance to win (1) a FitBit Charge2 Watch; (2) a 1-year membership at Power First Fitness; (3) a 3-month membership at Power First Fitness; and finally, (4) 10 smoothie coupons (retrievable at Power First Fitness). Participants had the option of including their email at the end of the survey should they choose to be entered in the draw to win one of the prizes. It was important to make the participants aware that choosing to include their email for the draw would not allow their email to be connected to their

responses, and thus their responses would still remain anonymous. Roughly 85% of the participants (88/103) chose to include their email to be entered to win a prize.

The gatekeeper initially distributed the survey via email on October 20th, 2016, and redistributed the survey every 20 days for 60 days. The final day for the survey to be submitted was December 18th, 2016. The manager of the gym and I had planned that I would email her the day before the survey was to be redistributed, as a reminder, and then the following day she would resend the email. Prior to distributing the survey for the final time, I was approved by the REB to include snowball sampling in the research to increase the number of participants. Thus, in the last round of distribution, participants were informed that if they were aware of other members at Power First Fitness who had not received the email, but would have liked to have received it, they could forward the email to them. I believed that the informal networks that took place within the gym would increase my response rate. After this request, my response rate increased by 21%. Of the 1116 members at the gym, 327 people received the email and 104 members participated. Therefore, while only 3.4% of the gym members received the email, there was a total response rate of 31% from those who had received the email.

Part 1: Quantitative Analysis

Primarily three methods of analysis were used with my research data. First and foremost, I conducted my survey through Qualtrics, a software package used to administer online surveys. The program itself was very accessible and user-friendly; Qualtrics pre-organized the data for me through the manipulation of the data on an SPSS database, with the addition of supplemental graphs and values. However, there was some difficulty that I had accessing the data once the closing date for the surveys had passed. Qualtrics customer service informed me that a

congestion issue was not allowing the data to be accessible by anyone (myself or the service providers), and so I had to wait seven weeks to proceed with the analysis. Once accessible, Qualtrics automatically generated organized charts/graphs and statistical summaries for each question. Additionally, they provided me with a data set that was transferable to SPSS, the software package I would use for my own independent statistical analysis of the data.

The initial phases of SPSS analysis included getting familiar with my demographics and data set. First, I conducted frequency tests of each variable to better understand my participants and their experiences. This portion of analysis allowed me to develop the descriptive statistics for the raw variables of interest. Following this process, I created dummy variables where appropriate, to condense the data as necessary to make it usable. All of this univariate analysis is reported in chapter 4: Descriptive statistics. I began to run multiple tests (primarily bi-variate cross tabulations) in an attempt to find statistically significant relationships with the key dependent variables – mainly those associated with comfort. It was at this time that I started to reduce the amount of data that I would analyze and remove variables that were redundant or irrelevant. During this time, I became informed of many significant and noteworthy independent variables. As a result, I ran many of these same tests with each new independent variable, finding many pertinent relationships.

Finally, I applied a discourse analysis when analyzing the open-ended survey questions. Specifically, discourse analysis helped to examine the responses methodologically and then code them accordingly in order to produce workable, focused, and organized data.

Part 2: Qualitative Discourse Analysis

“Discourse is about looking at and deconstructing texts and illustrations with the lens of critical discourse analysis” (Ullah and Skelton 2016:5). Wylene Rholetter (2013) defines discourse analysis as “...the study of language beyond the sentence. It is a way of methodically examining the details of an oral or written statement longer than a single sentence, considering the creator of the utterance, the recipient, and its linguistic and social contexts.” This type of analysis is useful for both qualitative and quantitative methods; it allows the researcher to make connections from what is being said or written by the participant, to “larger works of language and on what is achieved through them” (Rholetter 2013). The researcher, or discourse analyst, becomes less concerned with literal meanings or language, and more attentive to how meaning is made and altered by certain situations. All research involves reading the texts between the lines and looking for a larger discourse analysis (the socio-political context of the words, who is saying them, what context they exist in). In particular, this becomes very useful when analyzing open-ended or long answer questions on a survey. Dominant discourses will occur in everything we read. Thus, narratives and stories shape how people understand life (Luki and Espinosa 2011:109). These stories are embedded in so many different cultures and sub-cultures that they become naturalized as “truisms.”

“Critical discourse analysis examines social power as it is executed, replicated, and opposed in text and talk, with the goal of resisting social inequality” (Rholetter 2013:n.p). Although there are many differences and schools of discourse analysis, they all share an interest in the way meaning starts with “the big picture” and is shaped by “speech acts” (Gee 2011; Rholetter 2013). “Discourses (which appear as speech, text, discussion, visual image, use of symbols, etc.) are simultaneously both an expression and a constitutional prerequisite of the social; they become real through the actions of social actors” (Keller 2011:48; 49; 52). In this

way, discourse analysis benefits my research as it allows me to make connections between what people say, and how they say it, and their understandings about the gym culture and their own bodies, and how this is connected to wider discourses. Our bodies are products of discourse and these discourses structure the way people view themselves, especially within the gym environment where all elements of different social discourses are at play.

There is a large body of research that focuses on differences in discourse between men and women (Ullah and Skelton 2016). Ullah and Skelton (2016) believe that the purpose of these studies is to uncover the implicit beliefs regarding gender relations and the fundamental power structures that these representations reveal. Similarly, Meredith Nash (2016:220) states, “neoliberal rationality has shaped contemporary health and fitness discourses.” Neoliberalism is associated with free-market policies, privatization, competition, efficiency, and growth (Rose, 2002). Whereas exercise was once seen as a means to fitness, fitness is now seen as part of a holistic ‘healthy’ ‘lifestyle.’” As James Paul Gee (2011) suggests, when conducting discourse analysis, “mapping” topics is a great strategy for the writer to use to create perspective. While reviewing the survey data there were similarities to Nash’s (2016) research; discourses were analyzed while considering mainstream meanings and values associated with “health” and “fitness.” It was also pertinent to my research to consider meanings and values associated with “gender norms,” “comfort,” “muscle,” “weightlifting,” etc. By considering the details of linguistic structure and applying the analysis to related sorts of data, the discourse analysis becomes more valid (Gee 2011).

CONCLUSION

Utilizing a feminist framework to guide this research project strengthened my own feminist epistemological approach. As a result, applying quantitative research methods from a feminist standpoint allowed for further understanding of women's and men's levels of comfort within the gym. As a result, surveys were deemed to be the most suitable method to carry out this research project.

Once the data was accessible, I worked to become familiar with the demographics of my sample population, and the many dependent and independent variables that allowed me to test for comfort within the gym. The next chapter works as an introduction to the data as it describes these variables, the frequencies with which they occur at Power First Fitness, and the way the activities are understood at the gym.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

This chapter presents a univariate descriptive analysis of the dependent and independent variables that helped to test for comfort within the gym. One method to accomplish this task is through descriptive statistics. I will discuss and summarize the distribution of variables within my research. I simplify the data collected from the survey tool, which included both qualitative and quantitative type questions, prior to discussing the relationships and correlations between these variables. Providing descriptive statistics introduces the variables in a more accessible manner.

First, I describe the sample population that participated in my research. Next, I explore comfort, the primary dependent variable. While overall comfort was the initial question of interest, comfort was further tested within more specific activities/areas within the gym. Finally, I discuss the independent variables – the variables that were tested for how they related to comfort within the gym setting. For example, gender and age are the two primary independent variables, followed by experience and attendance, body image, how one interprets their gender in comparison to others, and feeling on display. While most of these variables are solely independent, others appear to work in a more mutually dependent manner. This will be explained and discussed later in this chapter. Where relevant, I present tables and charts to organize the frequency distributions presented.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 104 participants, 77% identified as female and 22% identified as male, 96% identified as heterosexual, and the majority identified as white/Caucasian (97.06%). It is important to consider how this demographic is, in itself, privileged, and the fact that their level of comfort within the

gym may represent, and be based upon, this experience of privilege. The majority of the sample identified as white, cisgender ¹ individuals, and as a result, these people may not experience the same type of daily scrutiny as those who do not identify as non-white or non-cis-gender.

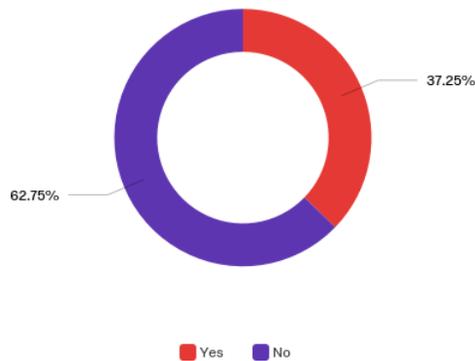
Therefore, experiences within the gym for this demographic may not be particularly challenging, However, that is not to say that the gym environment does not create a unique set of tensions and/or an uncomfortable atmosphere at certain times and places for certain people.

Consequently, while individuals may not experience scrutiny in their day-to-day experiences, they may still feel vulnerable within the gym.

The majority of the participants at Power First Fitness have completed an undergraduate degree (46%), while 27% have completed (some) high school, or a college program, and the remainder (26%) have advanced university degrees. 67% of the population identified as working, and 32% identified as being unemployed. 43% of the sample identified as having a household income over \$100,000 per year. The second largest majority (35%) has a household annual income between \$75,000 and \$99,999 per year. Only 17% identified as making less than \$49,999 per year, with only 6% making less than \$34,999 per year. As per table 1a shown below, 63% of the population reports that they do not have financial dependents ($M=1.63$, $SD= 0.48$). Power First Fitness is one of the more expensive gyms in Thunder Bay. Inevitably then, the individuals who attend Power First Fitness are more likely to be financially stable to afford a membership. Finally, whether or not one has financial dependents may signify a different level of stress. This may grant these individuals without financial dependents the extra time to attend the gym more often.

Table 1a Financial Dependents

¹ Cisgender means that one's gender aligns with the sex they were given at birth

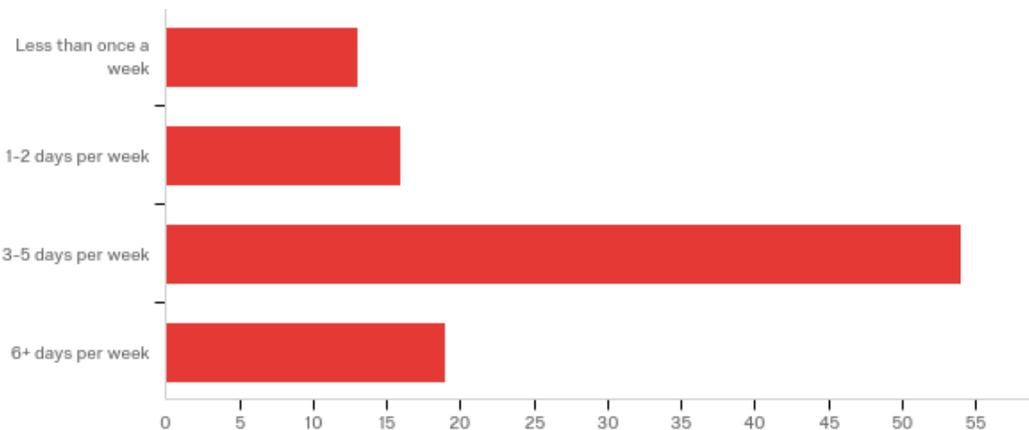


The largest group of individuals identified as being between 46-65 years of age, while the second largest group of individuals is between the ages of 25-35 (Table 1b). The results indicate that there are fewer participants in the 36-45 years old age group; this may be related to time/constraints of caring for others, spending extra money on activities for kids, etc. When questioned about one's experience in the gym, 77% identified as having 4 or more years of experience in a pay-to-use gym, and 58% as having 4 or more years of experience at Power First Fitness. Comparably, when asked how often one worked out in the past two weeks, 70% of the sample reported more than 3 days a week (Table 1c). The majority of the age group was between 46 to 65 years of age, so it is likely that these individuals do not have financial dependents and therefore can attend the gym more often. This may be an indication as to why the rate of individuals who workout more than three days a week is so high. Furthermore, it is likely that the greater the financial investment in the membership at the gym, the greater the physical investment as well.

Table 1b Age of Participants

		What age group do you fall under?		
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	18-25 years	15	14.4	14.7
	26-35 years	27	26.0	26.5
	36-45 years	20	19.2	19.6
	46-65 years	34	32.7	33.3
	66+ years	6	5.8	5.9
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

Table 1c How often participants worked out in the last two weeks



The majority of those from Power First Fitness who participated in this research are white/Caucasian, heterosexual, of a higher socio-economic status, without financial dependents, and primarily between the ages of 45 and 65; each one of these factors greatly affects one's experience of comfort within the gym. These individuals may feel that they deserve to be at the gym, and more specifically Power First Fitness, because they have the means to attend and the experience, which may put them at a certain advantage among those individuals who do not

attend (or attend rarely). Additionally, these factors may influence one's comfort level during certain activities within the gym, or certain spaces, both of which are subjective experiences. Also, I did not ask participants about their comfort levels in the past, and it is possible that they may have come to their current place of comfort through extensive experience over time at the gym.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Comfort

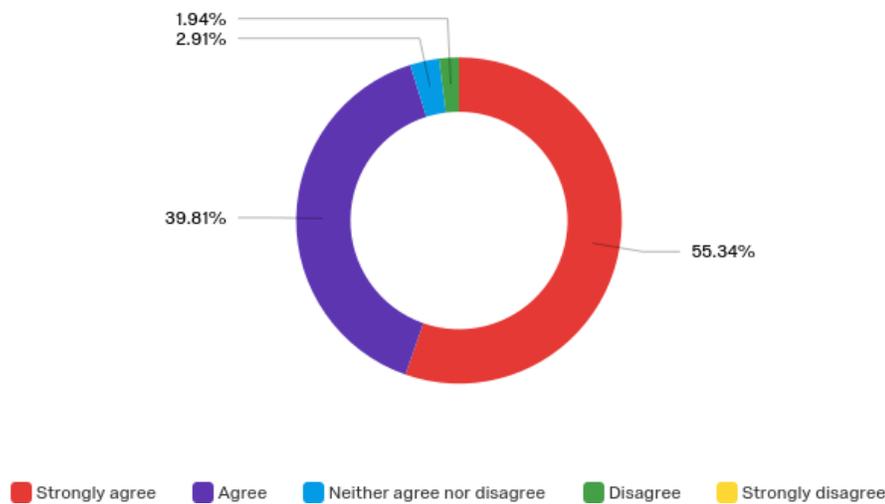
One's interpretation of comfort within the gym is subjective and therefore may be vastly different from others' experiences. I perceive comfort as a physical and mental body consciousness. While some may interpret comfort to be related to anxiousness or self-consciousness, I deemed "comfort" to be the appropriate terminology for this study. It was nearly impossible to adequately define comfort, as other researchers had not portrayed their understanding of comfort in the same way that pertained to my research, especially within a gym setting. While many studies of the gym used the term comfort in their analysis and discussion of clients, it was never explicitly defined. Therefore, in an attempt to minimize ambiguity and maintain consistency within my research participants' responses, I included my definition of comfort – *fitting in* without being negatively judged by others – above questions that pertained to comfort levels.

I asked a series of questions addressing levels of comfort within the gym. These questions were divided based on certain regions, and activities, in the gym. All of these questions utilized a likert-type scale where participants could indicate their level of comfort on a scale between one (1) and five (5). Other questions that addressed comfort used scales with three (3)

or four (4) possible responses. The difference in the response options was based on the type of question being asked. Questions considered the occurrence of a scenario, the frequency of an occurrence, or the level of agreement participants identified. I wanted participants to be able to think about not only if they are being watched, but how often it happens.

The average score of overall comfort for the total population ($N=103$) was 1.51¹. Table 2a displays the overall level of comfort between participants within the gym, followed by the frequency chart.

Table 2a Overall Comfort level



Frequency Chart on Overall Comfort Level

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Strongly agree	57	54.8	55.3
Agree	41	39.4	39.8
Neither agree nor disagree	3	2.9	2.9

¹ 1= Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4= Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree. On average, people scored between 1 and 2.

	Disagree	2	1.9	1.9
	Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		104	100.0	

The data shows that those who are comfortable attend more, have a greater willingness to participate in new activities, experience more positive body consciousness and appreciation of one's body image. Initially, comfort presented itself as only a dependent variable. During the descriptive analysis I found that comfort might also be an independent variable for other dependent variables. I question whether or not comfort within the gym originated before gym membership. For example, if individuals feel strong or like their body as a result of the work they do in the gym, or, if individuals liked their body prior to attending the gym, they may already feel comfortable before attending the gym. Again, it is hard to determine for certain when individuals became comfortable in the gym as I did not ask questions about previous experiences of comfort (i.e., or prior to gym attendance). In any case, it is likely comfort can be interpreted as a mutually dependent variable with each relationship, and it is important to consider how this impacts the results.

While one may feel that their overall level of comfort within the gym is high, their level of comfort may change significantly when performing particular activities. One's level of comfort within the gym may be solely based on how regularly they perform certain activities. Therefore, performing other activities they do not engage in routinely might create some discomfort, despite whether or not they feel comfortable overall. In an attempt to understand this more complex analysis of comfort within the gym, I asked participants how often they perform activities within the gym (i.e., I included all the possible activities that can be performed at

Power First Fitness), and followed each question with how comfortable they would be if they had to perform the activity tomorrow. I will now describe comfort in each of the activities assessed.

Yoga

Power First Fitness offers a plethora of yoga classes. Whether warm, hot, flow, or gentle, there are a wide range of classes that are suitable for any fitness level. The range varies from slower, gentler yoga (e.g., Warm Yin Yoga) to a fast paced, powerful class (e.g., Power or Vinyasa Yoga). The former is explained on the gym website as a restorative class; “Yin offers a deep stretch as postures are held anywhere from 3 to 9 minutes. Relaxing the muscles and working into connective tissue, yin provides a balance to busy lifestyles that leave us feeling tense.” The latter, (Hot) Power Yoga, is explained as “a powerful practice that will improve muscle tone, balance, and core strength with the detoxifying benefits of practicing in the heat.”¹

While more than half of the participants (56%) said that they do not ever participate in yoga², 63% said they would feel comfortable, to some degree, should they participate in yoga tomorrow (Table 2b). Based on these statistics, yoga at Power First Fitness seems to be of very little threat to the majority of the participants in this study, although there still is a large portion of participants who are uncomfortable to some degree.

¹ Each activity description is taken from Power First Fitness website. Due to the anonymous nature of the data, I have not included the website link. However, I had cleared the use of the website and the descriptions of the activities with management of the gym.

² I did not specify in the survey between types of yoga, as participation of any form would have been suitable for participants to be able to speak to their comfort, or lack thereof, in yoga classes.

Table 2b Participating in Yoga tomorrow

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid			
Very comfortable	29	27.9	28.2
Somewhat comfortable	36	34.6	35.0
Somewhat uncomfortable	28	26.9	27.2
Very uncomfortable	10	9.6	9.7
Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing			
System	1	1.0	
Total	104	100.0	

Pilates

The Pilates class that is offered at Power First Fitness is described as: “improve posture and core strength; feel stronger, leaner, and longer while developing musculoskeletal balance. Learn proper principles of breathing, shoulder and pelvic placement, and activation of deep abdominal muscles. Apply these principles to challenge abdominal strength, endurance, stability, coordination, and balance.” The majority of the participants who responded to this question said they never participate in Pilates at Power First Fitness (71%). Similarly, to yoga, the majority of participants (67%) said that they would feel some degree of comfort if they were to participate in Pilates tomorrow (Table 2c). This response by clients at Power First Fitness also speaks to the nature of Pilates, and one’s own individual level of comfort.

Table 2c Participating in Pilates tomorrow

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Very comfortable	27	26.0	26.2
	Somewhat comfortable	42	40.4	40.8
	Somewhat uncomfortable	24	23.1	23.3
	Very uncomfortable	10	9.6	9.7
	Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		104	100.0	

Zumba

“You’ll catch yourself grinning ear to ear as your hips shake to the hypnotic Latin rhythms of this one-of-a-kind class! The routines feature interval-training sessions where fast and slow rhythms and resistance training are combined to tone and sculpt your body while burning fat. The hour will go by so quickly that you won’t even realize you’re sweating and when its finished, you’ll want to do it all over again!” (Gym website 2017). Zumba is certainly the least populated activity at Power First Fitness amongst the sample group; 83% of the sample said that they never participate in Zumba, and only 4% participate once or more a week. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the sample group (62%) said they would feel uncomfortable (to some degree), if they were to participate in Zumba tomorrow. Based on the sample that identified as never participating in Zumba, these statistics show us that individuals would not feel comfortable participating in an activity with which they have no experience. Unlike yoga or Pilates, in the case of Zumba, the majority repeats that they would feel uncomfortable if they were to perform the activity tomorrow.

Table 2d Participating in Zumba tomorrow

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Very comfortable	13	12.5	12.6
	Somewhat comfortable	26	25.0	25.2
	Somewhat uncomfortable	27	26.0	26.2
	Very uncomfortable	37	35.6	35.9
	Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		104	100.0	

Cardiovascular equipment

More than half of the sample group (57%) said they utilize cardiovascular equipment more than once a week, while the remainder said they rarely, if ever, utilize cardiovascular equipment. While a large proportion of the sample group does not utilize this equipment, only 4% said that they would feel uncomfortable, to some degree, should they make use of the cardiovascular machines tomorrow. No participants felt that they would be very uncomfortable. Therefore, there is not enough variation to test for the gendered nature of participant's engagement with cardiovascular equipment. Much of the cardio equipment offered at Power First Fitness is as simple to operate as pressing a button and starting (e.g., treadmills, StairMaster, elliptical, bike, etc.).

Table 2e Utilizing cardiovascular equipment tomorrow

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very comfortable	68	65.4	66.0
Somewhat comfortable	31	29.8	30.1
Somewhat uncomfortable	4	3.8	3.9
Total	103	99.0	100.0
System	1	1.0	
Total	104	100.0	

Weight training

For the purpose of this study, I explained weight training as including (but not limited to), weight machines, barbells, and dumbbells. Based on this criterion, 34% of the sample population said they very rarely participate in weight training, if ever. The greatest proportion of the sample population (39%) participates in weight training 1-2 times per week. These statistics tell us that of all the activities discussed in this survey, weight training is certainly the most popular one for clients to engage in on a regular basis, as most clients who participated in this survey practice weight training, to some degree. Unsurprisingly, nearly 88% said that if they were to participate in weight training tomorrow, they would be comfortable, to some degree.

Table 2f Participating in weight training tomorrow

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Very comfortable	55	52.9	53.4
	Somewhat comfortable	35	33.7	34.0
	Somewhat uncomfortable	10	9.6	9.7
	Very uncomfortable	3	2.9	2.9
	Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		104	100.0	

Calisthenics

Calisthenics is an umbrella term encompassing all gymnastics exercises or body weight movements as a method to achieve bodily fitness. While some exercises do require a very unique set of movements, coordination, and practice (e.g., handstand walks, kipping pull-ups, “flag” position hold), other exercises are more accessible for the uncoordinated (e.g., squats, pushups). Just over half of the sample size (51%) identified as rarely, if ever, utilizing Calisthenics as a

means of fitness. The remaining 49% participate once or more a week, with only 5% participating more than 5 days a week. When asked how one would feel participating in Calisthenics tomorrow, 76% of the participants said they would feel comfortable, to some degree.

Table 2g Participating in Calisthenics tomorrow

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Very comfortable	47	45.2	45.6
	Somewhat comfortable	31	29.8	30.1
	Somewhat uncomfortable	18	17.3	17.5
	Very uncomfortable	7	6.7	6.8
	Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		104	100.0	

Aerobics/Strength Training

The inclusion of this question covered all other types of fitness that had not been previously mentioned in the survey. Power First Fitness offers an abundance of activities/classes that utilize strength and endurance training, and I wanted to be sure that all of the activities participants engage in were present in this survey.¹ The discussion of aerobics in this question is separate from the aerobics workout experienced in Zumba, Pilates, or Yoga, because participants were given space to discuss each fitness class individually in previous questions. More than half of the sample size (56%) said that they rarely, if ever, participate in other aerobics/strength training. The second most popular response among participants was participating one to two times per week (21%). When asked how folks would feel participating in other aerobics/strength training,

¹ Some examples of equipment utilized in classes include BOSU's, boxing bags, kettlebells, battle ropes, etc. Additionally, clients may engage in other methods of training that has not been named here.

83% of the sample population said they would feel comfortable, to some degree, while only 18% said they would feel somewhat uncomfortable. Similar to cardiovascular equipment use, no participants said that they would feel very uncomfortable participating in other classes, even if they do not regularly participate. The response rate from clients who would feel comfortable participating in other aerobics/strength training, yet do not regularly, is quite similar to those who would feel comfortable participating in weight training tomorrow. I question whether or not participants consider weight training and strength training as intrinsically different; participants feel as though they can comfortably participate in strength training activities, even if they do not do so regularly. Furthermore, the response rate, when considering aerobics, is quite similar to the question regarding the use of cardiovascular equipment; individuals feel quite comfortable participating in other types of aerobics training.

While the relationship between overall comfort and aerobics/strength training is statistically significant, what exactly individuals include within this category is unknown. Participants can include a variety of athletic training, coordination training, kettle bell movements, etc., in their workout regimes, and each one of these is essential to how they experience the gym and how comfortable participants feel in other activities.

Table 2h Participating in Aerobics/Strength Training tomorrow

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Very comfortable	48	46.2	46.6
	Somewhat comfortable	37	35.6	35.9
	Somewhat uncomfortable	18	17.3	17.5
	Total	103	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	1	1.0	
Total		104	100.0	

Another test of comfort in the gym considered the surroundings of the clients, and whether or not they hinder or help one's level of comfort. These questions considered the busyness of the gym, whether or not those of their same gender are around, and whether or not one is working out with a friend. The majority of the sample population (80%) admitted to feeling most comfortable when the gym is not busy. Additionally, the majority (77%) of the sample feels most comfortable when others of both genders surround them. However, when asked whether or not one feels most comfortable when they are working out alone or with a friend, the response was closely divided (56% to 44% feel more comfortable when working out by themselves).

One's overall comfort level is not indicative of the comfort one experiences at different times throughout the gym. Therefore, it is essential to consider all aspects that make up one's comfort to adequately test for comfort, and how it plays out within the gym environment.

Becoming Comfortable

When asked about specific strategies that participants had in the gym, 47% of the responses indicated that attending at a less busy time and avoiding rush hour would allow members to get comfortable with the atmosphere and equipment. Other strategies were utilizing a less populated/visible space (31%), attend (classes) often (19%), follow a workout plan that makes you feel comfortable (6%), and change your mindset (3%). Those who use a less populated space say, "I feel like I may be judged on my abilities, lack of knowledge, and weaknesses [when I am in the weight area downstairs]." They said "upstairs" as opposed to "downstairs, where the younger weight lifters are" allows them to be seen less, and as a result they can work out free of judgment.

When asked about suggestions to improve one's overall comfort level at the gym, many of the respondents included suggestions that focus on the individual being the initiator of change. Participants (32%) identified greater understanding from the outset is necessary to be comfortable in the gym. This includes the "use of trainers/employee's teaching the use of proper form of each machine," "access to workshops," and "instructional sessions." Others (28%) say that changes to the environment need to be considered, such as "a women's only workout room," and "some [new] machines." Some respondents (21%) said "mind over matter" as "the belief that I am not good enough or I don't match up [inhibits my comfort]. Personal change. It is that simple toxic belief that can be a detriment to so many." Other suggestions focus on the importance of gym-etiquette and being mindful of one's actions (18%), the importance of bringing others who motivate you (14%), and lastly, a change in societal beliefs (7%). One person said, "I don't really think it's the gym itself that makes people uncomfortable. I think it stems from larger societal issues regarding body image."

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Gender

Power First Fitness is a co-ed gym that offers plenty of activities and classes to appeal to both women and men. Differences between equipment and classes have less to do with gender and more to do with different fitness goals and regimes. Of the 104 participants, 78% identified as female and 22% identified as male. It is important to note here that participants were not obliged to respond to this question, and could choose two other options: choose not to disclose and, other. That being said, all of the participants identified as either female or male. In addition, because this is a non-random sample, I was limited to the participants who received this email.

Management indicated that they did not have the entirety of the clientele email list and, as a result, only certain members were able to receive the survey. Because of this, it is impossible to tell if these numbers are an accurate representation of gender division between the clientele who attend Power First Fitness. Nonetheless, while 23% may not be an exact depiction of the number of men clientele who attend the gym, it is sufficient to test for and measure comfort and other relationships within the gym.

Gender Frequency - Table 3a

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Female	79	76.0	77.5
	Male	23	22.1	22.5
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

Age

Like most gyms, Power First Fitness requires age of majority to attend the gym alone, meaning individuals below the ages of 18 must attend with an adult at all times. The largest percentage of the sample population (33%) identified as being between the ages of 46 to 65 years old, and the second largest age group (26%) is between the ages of 26 to 35 years old. Twenty percent (20%) of the sample identified as between the ages of 36 to 45 years old and the remaining fifteen percent (15%) of the sample is 18 to 25 years old. Again, this age distribution may not be representative of the gym clientele as a whole as only certain individuals who have given their email with their membership received the email. It is important to consider then how life experiences and, simultaneously, experience in the gym, have influenced the way people perceive their comfort (within the gym). Individuals may experience more or less comfort with

age based on how they perceive ideals of the(ir) body. Additionally, individuals without financial dependents may find that they have extra time and attend the gym more often, and this may be one reason why the greatest population is between the ages of 46 to 65 years of age.

Age Frequency - Table 3b

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	18-25 years	15	14.4	14.7
	26-35 years	27	26.0	26.5
	36-45 years	20	19.2	19.6
	46-65 years	34	32.7	33.3
	66+ years	6	5.8	5.9
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

Experience

I attempted to measure for experience in the gym through three specific questions. Originally, the question I was most interested in was one’s overall experience at the gym. I imagined that, regardless of their current gym, their gym experience would have an enormous impact on their current level of comfort at the gym. As a result, this “level of experience” was used most as an independent variable when conducting tests on comfort.

The majority of the sample (78%) has had access to a pay-to-use gym or facility for four or more years. It is likely that years of experience could be an indication of one’s physical abilities and/or knowledge of the gym and the activities that take place within, and as a result, this could have a substantial influence on one’s comfort within the gym.

Similar to the statistics provided above, the majority of the sample (60%) report being a member at Power First Fitness for four or more years. Certainly, whether or not one is

accustomed to a particular facility or space can influence their level of comfort. How one feels at Power First Fitness, and if they are familiar with the atmosphere of this specific gym, may be entirely different from their experience at previous gyms they have attended. Thus, knowing the duration one has been at Power First Fitness in correlation to their overall experience at the gym was pertinent to my research. The remaining forty percent (40%) who have attended other gyms for more than four years may experience comfort entirely differently than others. The difference here was important to measure and to note during the results.

Lastly, and equally as important, I asked participants how often they have attended the gym in the last two weeks. Seventy-two percent (72%) said that they work out three or more days a week. I thought that specifying a time-frame would prompt the most accurate answer. While my analysis of one’s attendance is entirely based on this question, it is important to consider how this may not be a precise indicator of each client’s yearly attendance. For example, perhaps a participant was sick and was unable to attend as frequently as they do normally, or perhaps they just started a new workout plan and had been attending far more frequently than usual. How often one attends the gym may impact their comfort at the gym, or one’s comfort at the gym may result in a higher attendance.

Overall experience at a pay-to-use gym – Table 3c

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	less than 4 years	22	21.2	21.6
	4+ years	80	76.9	78.4
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

Member at Power First Fitness – Table 3d

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	less than 4 years	40	38.5	40.0
	4+ years	60	57.7	60.0
	Total	100	96.2	100.0
Missing	System	4	3.8	
Total		104	100.0	

Attendance in the last two weeks – Table 3e

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	less than 2.5 days per week	29	27.9	28.4
	more than 3 days a week	73	70.2	71.6
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

Comfort

While I had anticipated comfort as the primary dependent variable, some of the statistics may utilize comfort as an independent variable. Specifically, when measuring one’s experience at the gym, comfort may also work as an independent variable. In many of these examples, it is hard to know for certain what takes precedence. In some ways, this phenomenon is the nature of research measuring ordinal variables as SPSS presents the data of ordinal variables in a lateral way. In other words, if the researcher does not know the independent variable they will still be able to see the significance of the relationship between the two variables. So, while one may find comfort through experience, it is also possible that first one must feel comfortable in order to attend the gym. As a result, the attendance that is gained through comfort results in experience and comfort going to the gym encourages such experiences. Another example, discussed further below, is the relationship between body image and comfort. It is possible that (positive) body

image is highly impacted by comfort with one's body, and in the gym. Certainly, the way in which these variables are understood can impact the results of the research. Therefore, the acknowledgment of these varied scenarios throughout the analysis produces a more well-rounded research project.

Body Image

One's perception of their body image, whether negative or positive, can have an impact on one's comfort levels within the gym. It may also influence what activities one chooses to perform, or the classes in which one opts to participate. Using a likert-type scale, I asked individuals a series of questions about how they feel about their bodies.

When asked whether or not one felt that they are in good shape (Table 3f), eighty percent (80%) of the sample population agreed, to some degree. Forty percent (40%) of the sample size "agree," and thirty-two percent (32%) "somewhat agree," making these two categories the most prevalent. That being said, eight percent (8%) "strongly agree," and in opposition, only one percent (1%) "strongly disagree." Of the questions asked about one's body, this question warranted the second largest positive response (80%), next to physically feeling strong.

Eighty-two percent (82%) of the sample population agree, to some degree, that physically, they feel strong (Table 3g). Again, the majority of the sample said that they "agree" (42%) and the second largest group of participants said that they "somewhat agree" (27%). However, fourteen percent (14%) said that they "strongly agree" with this statement, much unlike any other statement that is body positive. Additionally, no participants "strongly disagreed." This may be indicative of how one measures strength in comparison to how one measures body image ideals. For example, one may feel strong if he/she are able to squat 300

pounds, or hold oneself in a handstand position for an extended period of time; however, this may not be emblematic of whether or not one believes oneself to be in good shape or feel happy with their weight or aesthetics. Similarly, one may feel strong physically, but may not feel comfortable in a gym setting. Additionally, while forty-three percent (43%) of people believe they are overweight, to some degree, there is still a great proportion of people who feel strong. These findings are similar to those who said, “I think I am in good shape,” “I like my body” and “I am pleased with my physique.” This may imply that individuals do not equate their weight to their strength, or liking their body, and this may allow one to feel good about one’s body.

When asked whether or not one likes one’s body (Table 3h), seventy-five percent (75%) agree, to some degree. The majority of the sample size (42%) said that they only “somewhat agree,” with the second largest majority (29%) choosing to “agree.” Similar to those responding to feeling in good shape, the third highest response within this question was “somewhat disagree” (12%). Interestingly, the same percentage of participants “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” to liking their body. Those who (exclusively) identify as liking their body (28%) experience significantly higher levels of overall comfort throughout the gym than those who do not like their bodies.

Seventy-one percent (71%) of the sample population agrees, to some degree, with the statement “I am pleased with my physique” (Table 3i). Again, the majority of respondents “somewhat agreed” (42%), and the second largest majority “agreed” (27%). Unlike the other body positive variable responses, the same percentage (11%) of participants both “disagree” or “somewhat disagree,” resulting in the highest number of respondents who disagree among all body positive questions. I did not ask participants what “physique” they admire, nor did I ask them to place their physique along a specific spectrum. In this case, I was less concerned with

what physique participants actually had, and was more concerned with whether or not they were happy with their own physiques. To my surprise, the majority of participants responded positively to all four questions pertaining to both physical fitness (“Physically, I feel strong”; “I think I am in good shape”) and aesthetics (“I like my body”; “I am pleased with my physique”). In addition, there was only a 5% difference regarding positive body image experiences within response rates for both women and men. I expected there to be significant gender variations in regard to physical fitness and aesthetics, predicting that men would experience body positivity at a higher frequency than women. Although this was not the case, this could be for various reasons, for example, women attending the gym more frequently. Perhaps consistency in the gym has allowed for physical (and mental) progress, leading women to appreciate their physiques. The minor difference in variance may also be an indication of the small sample size.

“I think I am in good shape” – Table 3f

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree (to some degree)	82	78.8	80.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	2	1.9	2.0
	Disagree (to some degree)	18	17.3	17.6
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

“Physically, I feel strong” – Table 3g

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree (to some degree)	84	80.8	82.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	5.8	5.9
	Disagree (to some degree)	12	11.5	11.8
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

“I like my body” – Table 3h

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree (to some degree)	76	73.1	74.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	5.8	5.9
	Disagree (to some degree)	20	19.2	19.6
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

“I am pleased with my physique” - Table 3i

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree (to some degree)	72	69.2	70.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	4	3.8	3.9
	Disagree (to some degree)	26	25.0	25.5
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

Interpretation of masculine/feminine Identity

One’s interpretation of their gender may have a significant influence on how one presents one’s gender and performs in gendered environments. In an attempt to further understand the way individuals identify, privately and publicly, I used a likert-type scale to measure whether or not participants feel more feminine or masculine than the gender with which they identify.

Thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents said that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement “compared to others of my own gender, I feel more masculine” (Table 3j). This is the largest portion of respondents for this particular question. The second largest portion (32%) said that they “disagree.” Surprisingly, nineteen percent (19%) of respondents “agree” to feeling more masculine than their own gender.

When asked, “compared to others of my own gender, I feel more feminine,” the responses were somewhat more divided. While a greater proportion of the sample size selected “neither agree nor disagree” (45%), three percent (3%) strongly agree. However, the overall percentage of participants who agree, to some degree, to feeling more feminine, is less than those who feel more masculine. Similarly, the second largest frequency was “disagree.”

These questions did not explore how participants categorized gender expression or by what criteria they deemed their gender as “more masculine/feminine” than their counterparts. While this information could have been useful in understanding individual and collective gender presentation and expression, it might or might not have addressed identity and comfort levels within the gym. Simply knowing that one felt, in some way, that one was more masculine or feminine than one’s counterparts was a sufficient analysis to help me to better understand gender relationships within the gym.

“Compared to others of my own gender, I feel more masculine” - Table 3j

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree (to some degree)	19	18.3	19.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	35	33.7	35.0
	Disagree (to some degree)	46	44.2	46.0
	Total	100	96.2	100.0
Missing	System	4	3.8	
Total		104	100.0	

“Compared to others of my own gender, I feel more feminine” – Table 3k

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree (to some degree)	14	13.5	13.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	46	44.2	45.1
	Disagree (to some degree)	42	40.4	41.2
	Total	102	98.1	100.0

Missing	System	2	1.9
Total		104	100.0

Feeling on Display

Researchers have utilized tests such as the “Self-Objectification Questionnaire” (Calogero, 2004), the “Body Shame Questionnaire” (Noll and Fredrickson, 1988) or the “Social Physique Anxiety Scale” (Hart, Leary and Rejesky, 1989), all of which approach measures of the male and female gaze. Building on these pre-existing instruments, I created questions that I felt would address and measure gaze within the gym. I asked participants a series of questions based on how they feel within the gym. This included whether or not participants feel like they are being looked at in the gym, whether or not they look at themselves, and whether or not they look at others of the opposite and same sex. Depending on whether one associates feeling on display at the gym as a negative or positive experience, their comfort level may be impacted.

The frequency between individuals who feel like they are on display, to some degree, and those who do not feel on display, is somewhat evenly divided. The majority of the sample population at Power First Fitness said that they rarely, if ever, feel on display (56%), with the remaining percent feeling on display almost all or some of the time. This particular frequency is included here in Table 31 as it was used to run tests between comfort and other variables. However, when broken down, six percent (6%) feel like they are always on display, thirty-eight percent (38%) feel on display some of the time, thirty-six (36%) very rarely feel on display, and twenty percent (20%) never feel on display.

Display at the gym – Table 31

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Some/Almost all the time	45	43.3	44.1
	Rarely/Never	57	54.8	55.9
	Total	102	98.1	100.0
Missing	System	2	1.9	
Total		104	100.0	

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the primary dependent variable, comfort, subsequent dependent variables, and the many independent variables that aid in measuring comfort within the gym. The statistics from Power First Fitness display varying levels of comfort as dependent on one's experiences, identity and how one perceives it, and certain dynamics of the gym atmosphere. As a result, comfort is dependent on many factors and, in many ways, also works as an independent variable. As noted, many variables may have mutually dependent relationships and these relationships and their impact on the results are pertinent to the gym atmosphere and this research. The following chapter will discuss the multivariate analysis that was completed via SPSS.

CHAPTER FIVE: BIVARIATE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this bivariate and multivariate data analysis, I discuss the statistically significant relationships that were found.¹ Many or all of the relationships between various independent and dependent variables attest to how one's level of comfort in the gym directly impacts the foundation of all of one's experiences in that environment. First, I will present the statistically significant relationships and then follow up with a discussion of the most relevant trends. All of this will focus on gendered experiences in the gym as they pertain to comfort, and as a result, call attention to the factors that hinder or heighten these experiences of comfort.

I discuss the ways in which people experience the gym environment, activities, and classes based on their age, experience, comfort, and gender. I also discuss the ways in which the gaze manifests itself in these settings. In terms of overall comfort at the gym, the data analysis failed to reject the null hypothesis, since gender was not significantly correlated to participants' overall levels of comfort in the gym. Age appears as one of the largest influences on overall comfort level in the gym. In addition, I discuss the effect of experience (often closely related with age), and the way in which this manifests in overall comfort reported. Further, I include gym attendance as a specific subset of experience and explain how frequent attendance appears to be related to overall comfort as well. I discuss how one's sense of femininity/masculinity (how individuals feel that they appear in comparison to their same gender counterparts) has a larger influence on comfort (in specific activities) than gender identification (whether they report being

¹ Relationships that are statistically significant have a p score of less than .05. However, due to the small size of the sample tested, relationships that have a score between .05 and .06 is considered marginally significant and will be classified as such in the presentation of data and analysis. However, that is not to say that relationships that are not statistically significant for this sample do not have any real world significance. It is only that I cannot establish their significance in this specific study.

male or female). I consider the issue of the gaze (how one watches and feels watched by others), and how individuals experience it according to the environment, as well as their experience.

While there was no relationship between gender and overall comfort, gender was quite significantly related to comfort with more specific activities in the gym, such as weight training or Zumba. The relationship between one's sense of femininity/masculinity and the activities participants engage in is revealing of the "gendered nature" of the activity. In addition, while age and experience have statistically significant relationships with overall comfort, this is not the case in all activities.

Lastly, the latter section of this chapter is an in-depth analysis and discussion of some of the common themes shown in the results. I discuss some of the experiences participants had in the gym and highlight which factors play the most influential role in ensuring the highest level of comfort. To discuss the significance of the experiences in the different activities investigated, I break down the discussion into different themes of comfort as they pertain to: I) experience and enjoyment; II) the nature of the activity; III) gender variations; IV) uncomfortable experiences; and V) age differences. I revisit my hypotheses and, where applicable, include literature to strengthen my argument.

SECTION 1: THE GYM ENVIRONMENT

In this section, I discuss how participant's experience in the physical space of the gym varies depending on their comfort levels, age, gender, and experience. Many questions in the survey assessed levels of comfort across different contexts in the gym, yet only one question addressed participants' overall comfort level: "Overall, I feel comfortable in the gym." Participants used a likert-type scale to report on their level of overall comfort at the gym; 55.34% strongly agree,

39.81% agree, 2.91% neither agree nor disagree, and 1.94% disagree, and 0% strongly disagree.

While many participants agree that, overall, they feel comfortable in the gym, there is some variation between strongly agree and agree, which has allowed factors like age, experience, and body image to be significant in the relationship of comfort in the gym. Of the 61% of participants who replied to this question, there were 26 responses regarding why one would feel uncomfortable in the gym. Responses varied from having a lack of knowledge and experience in the gym (19%), to having a lack of self-confidence (23%). Others said that being looked at or watched would make them uncomfortable (19%). One person stated that they were approached for “sexual advancements,” and that made them uncomfortable. The majority of participants who responded to this question said that unfriendly staff/members and inappropriate gym etiquette would make them feel uncomfortable (42%). This includes when members are territorial, “catty,” or “pro-wanna be’s.”

I asked participants to explain what makes them feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the gym with an open-ended response question. More than half of the participations (61%) responded to this question, and shared their experiences being either comfortable or uncomfortable in the gym. Others said they are very comfortable in the gym, but provided a response for both scenarios. Of the responses given, 86% of these respondents shared what makes them comfortable in the gym. The majority of these respondents (62%) said the gym is a friendly/safe atmosphere and there is a sense of camaraderie with “like-minded people.” Some respondents said there is a familiarity/routine in the gym (36%); “[Comfort] comes from within but familiarity of the facility also plays a big role. You feel more comfortable if you know your surroundings and see the same people.” Others said they have a love for lifting weights, classes, and working out in general (15%), and some feel that they have a grounded feeling of self-worth

and acknowledgement of self-confidence (13%). The responses that I categorize in this latter subgroup shared opinions like “[I] don’t notice” others, or [I] don’t care” about what others think. One person even stated, “not much makes me uncomfortable.”

I determined that a common theme among some participants was their grounded sense of self. Someone stated that, “not much makes me uncomfortable” and another said, “Overall I am confident in myself.” One participant said, “The gym is where I ground myself.” Many utilize the space as a form of meditation and self-care as it is their only time dedicated to themselves in a day. Many agreed that they “don’t worry about what others think” as they are only there for a good workout. While I appreciate and respect the level of confidence these individuals have, it is very important to acknowledge how difficult this place of contentment is to achieve for many people. Unfortunately, no one discussed how he or she came to be at his or her level of confidence, so much of this must be gleaned from the statistical analysis of variables.

I anticipated a significant relationship between gender and comfort in the gym, expecting men to feel significantly more comfortable than women. I failed to reject the null hypothesis, however, as there is no significant relationship between gender and comfort in the gym ($t=1.58$ $P<.001$). While comfort varies significantly by gender based on certain activities, there is no significant difference between women and men and their overall comfort level in the gym. This may be a result of the selection bias of my sample. If participants pay to attend the gym, they may be reasonably comfortable overall.

Age had the most impact on overall comfort levels in the gym. The relationship between age and overall comfort is significant ($t=-1.996$ $P<.001$), with older clients reporting higher levels of comfort. While age does inevitably warrant experience for all individuals, the results of

this research prove that as age increases, so too does experience. As a result, I have chosen to include the discussion of experience and gym attendance with age.

As one ages, it is (almost) inevitable that experience increases in the gym. Indeed, relationships between age and experience in a pay-to-use gym ($t=2.68$ $P < .001$), and age and experience at Power First Fitness ($t=3.43$ $P < .001$) were both statistically significant. This indicates that the older the cohort, the more experience they tended to have in a gym environment, as predicted. This would still be dependent on how much one frequents the gym. For example, if younger participants only go to the gym twice a week and halt all participation weeks at a time, they may not experience the same level of comfort another person would have after 17 years of consistency in the gym. Similarly, an older person who only just recently joined the gym would also not have the same level of experience as a younger participant who has attended consistently for a few years. Both age and experience variables are important to comfort levels in the gym, but they should not be interpreted as the same thing. Additionally, those who have been members at gyms for longer periods of time display higher levels of overall comfort ($t=1.99$ $P < .001$). It is important to consider how experience and age are correlated and contribute to comfort within the gym and how, opposite to this, younger members without experience are at a disproportionate disadvantage when it comes to overall comfort (however, when considering specific activities, this is not always the case). This is best displayed by some participants' willingness to engage in certain activities tomorrow, despite how infrequently they participate in the activity currently.

Those who work out frequently also identify as being more comfortable in the gym ($t=3.61$ $P < .001$). This statistically significant relationship indicates that frequent use can be a strong predictor of comfort. Although one may attend the gym often and report being quite

comfortable overall, this comfort is not synonymous with comfort in all specific activities offered.

My fifth and final hypothesis considered the nature of gender-relations in the gym. I hypothesized that, given the patriarchal nature of the gym, women and men participants would feel more or less comfortable depending who was around. The data displays 65% of men in comparison to 53% of women feel most comfortable when working out *alone*. Additionally, 47% of women in comparison to 35% of men find working out with others/friends more beneficial to their level of comfort. Lastly, men feel more comfortable than women when working out with others of both genders present (91% of men vs. 75% of women). While each one of my hypotheses seemed to be supported at first glance, the difference between the percentages is not actually significant. However, and notably, women were more than five times more likely to feel comfortable working out around others of the same gender than their male counterparts (22% women vs. 4% men). When asked about working out around others of solely the opposite gender, 4% of men and 4% of women said they would be most comfortable. Some women participants offered suggestions that might help new clientele become comfortable in the gym. Each suggestion focused on the importance of having others around as support. For example, “having supports and motivation in the gym world,” and “offering bring a friend events” are some of the ideas that women participants proposed.

There are many positive relationships between having a positive body image (i.e., identifying as liking their body, feeling strong, being pleased with their physique, and thinking that they are in good shape) and participation or comfort with specific gym activities. In many of these relationships, having a positive body image allows for greater comfort, to some level, in the gym. Participants who identified as feeling strong ($t=3.35$ $P<.001$), liking their own body ($t=2.51$

$P < .001$), feeling like they are in good shape ($t = 4.67$ $P < .001$) and are pleased with their physique ($t = 2.66$ $P < .001$) were much more likely to report being “very comfortable” in the gym. To my surprise, there was no significant difference in (either positive or negative) bodily comfort between women and men, as their responses tended to remain within a range of five percent.

Participants had the option to discuss the criticism they receive, and 18% of the sample population chose to do this. Participants disclosed that they receive criticism based on working out “excessively” (31%), because of a concern for their mental/physical health (5%), or because they’re “very energetic” (5%). Other participants stated that they felt a lack of social support from others (11%); however, the largest group of people said that they receive criticism for not working out properly (50%). This could be related to the exercises they perform, their body composition, or their gender. Of the 18% of respondents, 5% were men in comparison to 95% women. While some men do receive criticism from their friends/family, there were far more instances of women receiving such criticism.

The majority of men (91%) agreed to looking at the opposite sex in comparison to 63% of women. Men are 28% more likely to look at the opposite sex than their female counterparts, and none of the male participants said they “never” look at the opposite sex in comparison to 5% of women. When asked about what part of one’s appearance they assess when looking at the opposite sex, 91% of men (in comparison to 51% of women) agreed to placing judgment on the opposite sex (to some degree) based on their physical appearance. In addition, those who look at themselves in the gym more often identified as having high levels of overall comfort ($t = 2.90$ $P < .001$). When analyzing age with questions about the gaze (at the gym), many relationships were both negatively correlated and statistically significant. For example, the older one gets, the less they feel on display at the gym ($t = -4.20$ $P < .001$), the less likely they are to look at

themselves during their own workout ($t=-2.15$ $P <.001$), and the less likely they are to look at the opposite sex ($t=-2.31$ $P <.001$). While we now know that a large proportion of the sample population look at other people when working out, each one of these aforementioned strong negative relationships signify that as individuals age they become less concerned with others at the gym. In other words, relative to their younger peers, older adults are less interested in what is going on around them, and tend to feel less self-conscious when they are working out in the gym.¹

I asked participants if they feel others are looking at them during their workout; 47% of participants said they do feel like they are being looked at. There is a negative relationship between age and whether or not participants feel like they are on display at the gym ($t=-4.20$ $P <.001$). Therefore, as participant's age, the less likely they are to feel on display. Similarly, as participants age, the less likely they are to feel others are looking at them during their workout ($t=-2.07$ $P <.001$). In addition, there is a marginally significant relationship between those who feel strong and feeling like others are watching them at the gym ($t=1.91$ $P <.001$). This relationship indicates that feeling on display at the gym is a phenomenon that anyone can experience, despite identifying as having a positive body image. Lastly, there are no relationships between any of the gaze questions and those who identified as experiencing negative body consciousness. Surprisingly, those who experience the most positive body consciousness feel most on display at the gym ($t=2.32$ $P <.001$). This demonstrates many interesting relations that

¹ To clarify, the use of terms 'older' or 'younger' is solely to differentiate between different age groups in this study, especially when making comparisons. Older refers to age groups above 36 years of age, and younger refers to the age groups below 36 years of age. These terms should not be confused as identifiers of which age is 'old' or 'young,' as these socially constructed terms hold many preconceived notions that I do not agree with, nor do I identify with. As such, they by no means should be taken to signify my understanding of age (i.e., I do not consider 50 as 'old').

the gaze may pose for participants. I will consider these relationships in the discussion section below.

I asked participants if their experiences with the gaze have ever led to harassment. The 6% of participants who agreed were women within the age group of 26-35 and 46-65 years old. These participants revealed that their experiences did lead to harassment; however, only one participant disclosed the way in which such harassment was handled. The participant said the gym did not do anything to resolve the harassment situation because the perpetrators were “prominent men in the community.”

The remainder of the participants had the opportunity to share their opinions of harassment in the gym, and 43% of the 85% who responded said they do not feel there are any mechanisms put in place by the gym to deal with harassment. Less than one quarter of the participations (21%) said they feel there are mechanisms put in place by the gym; however, these participants admitted to being unsure if this were the case. The remaining 35% of these respondents said they are not aware of any harassment in the gym and/or any policy that deals with the harassment. One participant jokingly, included a comment: “harassment police?”

SECTION TWO: ACTIVITIES IN THE GYM

Some individuals stated that they feel uncomfortable in the gym when gym etiquette (specifically in weightlifting) is not followed. “Sometimes I get annoyed when men put on the heavy weights on the machines and don’t take them off when they are done with them. Sometimes the men don’t want to work in or share machines when doing circuits with others, they just hog the machines.” Others feel uncomfortable when they are around people who “make grunting noises” and “throw” or “drop their weights.” As a result, the participants limit their attendance in the

main weightlifting area. Luckily, this gym has other spaces in which individuals can lift weights; however, this is not the case for all gyms, and therefore it could be difficult for members to feel comfortable in the gym. Power First Fitness does have a “no grunting, no dropping the weights, and a no swearing” policy; however, it is clear that this is not strongly enforced.

Weight training appeared to be a popular activity among participants, as 90% of participants identified as practicing it in some form. In addition, the relationship between those who weight train and the overall comfort in the gym reported is very significant ($t=2.86$ $P<.001$). Therefore, when asked how comfortable they would be if they weight trained tomorrow, the highly significant relationship is unsurprising ($t=6.35$ $P<.001$). However, variations reported in comfort with weight training are more prevalent when considering gender. While there is no significant difference between activities, the time dedicated varies between women and men. For example, 78% of men compared to 22% of women weight train 3 or more days a week.

The difference between the activities in which women and men partake at the gym is also very indicative of the gendered space of the gym. I had imagined the variation between the activities each gender participated in to be quite substantial. While women and men both participate in many of the same activities, the degree to which they participate is much different. When asked about comfort when weight training, the majority of men (83%) said they would be very comfortable if they were to participate in weight training tomorrow, yet only 44% of women had the same response. Therefore, while many women still do participate in weight training, 23% of the same women said they experience negative judgments from others based on how they work out. Whether or not these negative judgments are related solely to weightlifting is unknown, as many of the women stated multiple reasons why their family or friends judge their workouts. Of this 23% of women, only one explicitly mentioned weightlifting, stating that her

family thinks, “women weight training is too masculine.” In addition, those who identified as feeling more masculine than their same gender counterparts participate in weight training more often ($t=2.50$, $P<.001$). This relationship is perhaps the most telling of the gendered nature of weight training; a similar relationship is found between yoga and those who feel more feminine (discussed below).

In addition, there is a negative relationship between age and frequency of weight training, meaning that the older one is, the rate at which they weight train declines ($t=-2.16$ $P<.001$). In addition, gym attendance is also an indicator of how comfortable participants are participating in weight training ($t=3.63$ $P<.001$).

Participants were able to identify whether or not they feel more masculine, or more feminine, than others of their same gender. There were some statistically significant relationships made between this variable (that is an indicator of gender identity in terms of magnitude and directionality) and activities in which clients engage. For example, there is a moderately positive relationship between feeling more masculine than others of the same gender ($t=2.50$ $P<.001$) and lifting weights.

There is a statistically significant relationship between overall comfort and utilizing cardiovascular equipment tomorrow ($t=5.02$ $P<.001$). When reviewing women’s and men’s participation, 52% of women in comparison to 74% of men use cardio equipment more than once a week. The ages of participants who utilize these machines are as follows: 16% of these individuals are between the ages of 46-65 years old, 16% are within the age of 26-35 years old, 13% are within the ages of 36-45 years old, 8% are between 18-25 years old and the remaining 3% are 66 years and older. This highly significant relationship may be due to how comfortable/user-friendly these machines are, if participants who do not use them frequently

would feel comfortable using them tomorrow. In addition, those who attend the gym more frequently are more inclined to feel comfortable utilizing cardiovascular equipment ($t=4.47$ $P<.001$). However, surprisingly, unlike with regard to many of the aforementioned activities, those who identified as having a positive body consciousness are not significantly more comfortable with cardiovascular equipment than their counterparts. Those who are the most comfortable at the gym are more likely to participate in calisthenics tomorrow ($t=3.01$ $P<.001$). Women (68%) and men (70%) participate in calisthenics, with the bulk of attendees (23%) within the ages of 46-65 years old. Those within the ages of 26-35 years are 17% of the attendees, 16% are within 36-45 years old, and 12% are between the ages of 18-25 years old. Those who identified as participating in calisthenics the least are above the age of 66. In addition, there is a marginally significant relationship between those who feel strong and comfort participating in calisthenics tomorrow ($t=1.93$ $P<.001$). Those who think they are in good shape are also more comfortable participating in calisthenics tomorrow ($t=2.31$ $P<.001$).

Greater attendance seemed to increase the level of comfort one might have participating in some activities. For example, the more often participants trained in the last two weeks, the more likely they were to feel comfortable using cardiovascular equipment ($t=4.47$ $P<.001$), participating in weight training ($t=3.63$ $P<.001$), participating in calisthenics ($t=3.13$ $P<.001$) and participating in aerobics/strength training ($t=2.72$ $P<.001$) tomorrow. In other words, the more often people work out, the more likely they are to reap the benefits of comfort in many workout activities and regimes. One participant stated, "I've been a gym rat for about 15 years and knowing how the clique works makes me comfortable. If I want to be around people, I go to the classes; if I need to de-stress, I will aim for the weight machines or if I need time to think, I aim for some serious cardio." The participant discusses how regular attendance has allowed them to

understand the benefit of certain activities, therefore being able to choose which to perform based on their mood. While there are many strong positive relationships between attendance and certain activities, it is equally important to note that regardless of the frequency of one's attendance, there is not a significant relationship between gym time and comfort in yoga, Pilates, or Zumba.

SECTION THREE: CLASSES

On the contrary, there is a significantly strong relationship ($t=3.01$ $P<.001$) between those identifying as feeling more feminine than others of their gender, and those who participate in yoga. There is a similar relationship between those who feel more feminine than their own gender and how often one participates in other aerobics/strength training ($t=2.86$ $P<.001$). These significant relationships speak to the gendered nature of the activities in which members participate, and perhaps further demonstrate the argument that participation in certain activities plays a role in how one identifies (i.e., the activities people do is a product of their identity, and vice versa). The relationship between comfort and yoga is similar to that of Pilates. There was not a significant relationship between those who feel comfortable overall in the gym, and those who participate in yoga. Much the same as Pilates, yoga is not an activity that is commonly engaged in by participants. There is a statistically significant relationship between overall comfort levels and participating in yoga tomorrow ($t=2.30$ $P<.001$). Again, this is an indicator that participants who are comfortable in the gym are more inclined to participate in activities in which they do not engage regularly. The relationship between age and participating in yoga tomorrow is also statistically significant ($t=2.54$ $P<.001$). As participants get older, they are more

likely to feel comfortable participating in yoga (tomorrow). This may be due to the fact that as participants age their participation in yoga also increases.¹

There is a statistically significant relationship between how often one participates in yoga and identifying as more feminine than others of the same gender ($t=3.01$ $P<.001$). In addition, those who are most comfortable participating in yoga tomorrow tend to be those who feel strong ($t=2.19$ $P<.001$), those who like their bodies ($t=3.14$ $P<.001$), those who think they are in good shape ($t=2.58$ $P<.001$) and those who are pleased with their physiques ($t=2.50$ $P<.001$). Similar to Pilates, this positive body consciousness may be an indicator of comfort.

It is important to note that those who felt (overall) more comfortable in the gym were more likely to be willing to participate in different activities that they do not perform regularly (i.e., I discuss each of these relationships below). I also found that those who identified as feeling more feminine or masculine than others of their same gender are more likely to perform specific activities often connected to gender-stereotypes. This was of particular interest since there is not a significant variation between the activities in which men and women participate. However, when one's sense of femininity/masculinity is considered, this variation becomes much more apparent.

The survey results demonstrate that Pilates is not a popular exercise regime among participants as 71% of the sample population do not engage in Pilates. Despite this, many participants indicated that they would be comfortable participating in Pilates tomorrow. The relationship between overall comfort and participating in Pilates tomorrow is very significant ($t=4.12$ $P<.001$). There are statistically significant relationships between those who feel strong

¹ While the relationship between participation in yoga and age is not significant ($t=1.84$ $P<.001$), it is marginally significant (.065). The frequency of which participants partake in yoga increases steadily with each age group. However, the age group 46-65 years old (where it declines 3% than the previous age group) is the exception. This could be a result of many factors, for example, the sample population. For all intents and purposes, it is important to note this relationship.

($t=2.17$ $P<.001$), those who like their bodies ($t=2.00$ $P<.001$), those who think they are in good shape ($t=3.24$ $P<.001$) and those who are pleased with their physiques ($t=2.26$ $P<.001$), as predicting comfort in participating in Pilates tomorrow. While these participants admitted to not actually attending Pilates frequently (or ever), these relationships indicate that feeling good about oneself could act as some form of comfort, thus increasing their willingness to participate in a (perhaps unfamiliar) activity. For example, when asked about what makes participants comfortable or uncomfortable, someone stated, “Nothing in particular. I don't worry about what others think. I participate in the classes with the intention of getting a good work out.” Because this participant is already very comfortable, they are able to participate in classes without the concern of being judged. There is also a significant relationship between age and participating in Pilates tomorrow ($t=2.38$ $P<.001$), indicating that older adults would feel more comfortable doing so than their younger counterparts (again, despite their lack of involvement in Pilates). However, there is no statistically significant relationship between experience and comfort in Pilates, or gender and comfort in Pilates.

Zumba was the least participated in activity among this sample population. There is a statistically significant relationship between overall comfort and feeling comfortable participating in Zumba tomorrow ($t=3.47$ $P<.001$). So, while only 4% of participants practice Zumba once a week, 38% agreed that they would be comfortable trying the activity tomorrow.

While many of the participants who identified as feeling positively about their bodies also identified as feeling comfortable participating in many of the activities tomorrow, this was not the case with Zumba. Again, this emphasizes Zumba as a particularly uncomfortable workout for many participants at the gym, despite their experience, age, positive body consciousness, and

overall comfort levels in the gym. Due to the unpopularity of Zumba among my sample, it is difficult to make a strong conclusion.

There is a statistically significant relationship between overall comfort levels and those who would participate in aerobics/strength training classes tomorrow ($t=3.07$, $P<.001$). In addition, participants with the most experience ($t=3.26$ $P<.001$), and participants who attend the gym more often ($t=2.72$ $P<.001$) identify as partaking in aerobics/strength training classes more frequently. Again, those who feel strong ($t=3.01$ $P<.001$), those who like their bodies ($t=2.29$ $P<.001$), those who think they are in good shape ($t=2.93$ $P<.001$) and those who are pleased with their physiques ($t=2.69$ $P<.001$) are more inclined to participate in aerobics/strength training classes tomorrow as well. In addition, while the relationship between this activity and gender is not significant, there is a strong and significant relationship between those who feel more feminine than their same gender counterparts and reporting comfort in participating in aerobics/strength training classes tomorrow ($t=2.86$ $P<.001$).

DISCUSSION

Navigating between the potentially different influences on comfort was challenging. Nearly all of the participants (95%) reported being comfortable in the gym. Here, it is pertinent to my results to consider the selection bias in place. If participants were paying members they must be reasonably comfortable in the gym, otherwise they would not pay money to attend.

Unfortunately, finding a decent amount of variation here was not possible since non-members were not included in the sample. Further, comfort may play the role of both dependent and independent variable. Those most comfortable at the gym to begin with, for example, will be able to improve their fitness levels, bodily appearance, and experience with specific routines. It

is also possible that comfort was experienced prior to (Power First Fitness) gym membership, or surfaced in the course of one's gym attendance. In either case, it is especially important to know how being comfortable at the gym works as an advantage in terms of how members frequent the gym, the activities in which they partake, and their general confidence toward particular activities. This data was a clear example of the way in which overall comfort in the gym does not indicate that one is comfortable in all activities in the gym, or with their own body. I wonder how participants defined *overall* comfort in the gym if they did not consider each activity or their own presence in the gym (i.e., and the way they or others perceive it).

Only one participant pointed out that comfort comes from within. While I would agree with this participant, to a certain extent, the process is two-fold. Our comfort from within guides our actions, and vice-versa, but sociologists ask how internal states are often the product of external social forces. I wonder if the gym employees could do more to address the former, as well as addressing the latter. While a popular function of gyms is to transition one's physical form, it has the capacity to positively impact one's mental health.

I hypothesized that women would feel lower levels of comfort than men in the gym, but this was found to be incorrect. Many female (95%) and male (96%) participants identified as being very or somewhat comfortable in the gym setting. The lack of significant relationships between most of the variables and overall comfort in the gym is not surprising, given the proportion of respondents who report feeling comfortable. This might have been more significant prior to the 21st century, when women's attendance in the gym was only starting to become more prevalent (Chaline 2015). I believe that the change of societal expectations in regard to gender and bodies, along with many other social-cultural changes, have led to many women utilizing gyms for physical activity. Haelvona and Levy (2012) point out that women's change of status

was a result of widespread feminist activities, which led to a change in gendered spaces, thus allowing women to occupy traditionally male spheres, such as sport. As a result, their experiences in the gym may be similar to those of their male counterparts. While “overall” comfort was my main determinant of understanding comfort in the gym, this was only one question in a series of questions that allowed me to understand comfort levels in the gym. I also asked participants about their comfort associated with activities, the physical space of the gym and, the social space of the gym. The only significant relationships that varied between genders were questions regarding more specific activities and workout equipment in the gym.

My third hypothesis stated one’s experience of enjoyment in the gym would depend on a variety of factors, one of which was age. Age was indeed found to be the most significant factor that contributes to overall comfort in the gym. As age increases, so too do comfort levels. The increased comfort associated with older age categories may be partly due to more experience at the gym, but it may also be a matter of older people caring less about meeting the standards of others. One respondent said, “I am old enough that I don’t feel anyone is really watching me or that interested in me.” Older adults are also more likely to have long-term partners, which might also decrease their concern with the gym as a “meat market” and arena for the gaze. The relationship between experience and comfort is similar to that of age and comfort. Those who are more comfortable overall tend to have been members of a pay-to-use gym for four or more years ($t=1.99$ $P<.001$) or have been at Power First Fitness for four or more years ($t=3.43$ $P<.001$). Furthermore, the majority of the participants who are more comfortable workout more than 3 days a week. Therefore, as one’s experience increases, so too does their level of comfort. One participant said “I feel comfortable just because I’ve been going to Power First for so long.” Another said, “I have been going to gyms for 30 years. I have a very reasonable understanding of

what I'm doing.” Because this study measures comfort at a particular time, rather than longitudinally, the experience one has since gained is best treated antecedently in this causal relationship. But how does one become comfortable enough to gain experience in the first place? It seems that comfort and experience are in a “chicken and egg” relationship – which occurred first is hard to determine, yet certainly comfort may be necessary to precede and enable experience to accrue, which in turn generates higher levels of comfort.

One participant stated, “the fact I have been in the same surroundings with the same people for quite some time” makes them comfortable. Many other participants responded with similar sentiments, suggesting that their experience has allowed them to feel comfortable; “have been attending for years at the same time,” “I’ve been a gym rat for 15 years and knowing how the clique works makes me comfortable,” “I’ve been coming to gyms for 30 years now,” etc. These individual responses, and the relationship between experience in the gym and overall comfort, support my hypothesis. However, while these participants shared that their experience has brought them to a certain place of comfort within the gym, their comfort within the gym during their first experiences is unknown. This information might have been useful to new members to understand how comfort within the gym can be developed.

The relationship between attendance in the gym and overall comfort is also significant and is present across gender and age. This should not be surprising, since familiarity is likely to breed comfort, and frequency of use is probably also a strong indicator of comfort. It remains an open question how participants became frequent gym goers in the first place. Did they immediately attend frequently when they signed up for a membership, or did they only increase their participation once they felt more comfortable? In addition, I only included one question that was related to attendance in the gym, for the past two weeks. While it was important for me to

minimize the time-frame for participants so they could properly address their attendance in an easily recallable time, a participant's involvement over the past two weeks may not be an appropriate representation of their monthly, or yearly, attendance.

Many individuals report that the very fact of being around like-minded individuals allows them to be comfortable; "There is generally a group of people who are always in attendance. They become your 'gym family'." Participants said that having a friendly staff that is always welcoming, and a good group of people who attend, adds to their overall positive experiences of the gym. Others acknowledge "the more often [they] go the more comfortable [they] feel." Certainly, the importance of attendance and experience, coupled with positive social supports, seems to be predictive of one's comfort in the gym.

How one feels about their own body can largely influence their experiences in certain environments, specifically environments associated with (re)creating a particular image. Those who do not like their bodies are likely to feel more vulnerable in these settings (25% of respondents). The series of questions related to one's body image that I asked participants allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how they feel about themselves, in a physical and aesthetic sense. One participant shared "...overall I am confident in myself and I know when I work out it is for my benefit." Feeling good about one's aesthetics appears to positively influence one's overall comfort in the gym, and comfort in certain activities. I expected participants who answered positively to questions related to body image to have a higher level of overall comfort in the gym. I presumed that increased levels of self-confidence would tremendously influence one's comfort levels, especially in an arena that glorifies body image.

The second most common theme regarding why individuals might feel uncomfortable in the gym was related to a lack of self-confidence. Participants said that their "own self-image

issues” or how “critical” they are “of [themselves] makes them uncomfortable in the gym.”

Some women participants also repeatedly made mention of their weight, stating that they are “not in the best shape” or are “over-weight,” and as a result, they feel uncomfortable in the gym. I agree that comfort is an individual experience. The participant’s self-doubt, and the constant blame on themselves and their bodies is mistakenly considered a result of their lack of self-confidence. Participants, particularly the women who responded to this question, blamed themselves for their lack of comfort in the gym. “A preference for thinner and more toned bodies arose in the twentieth century as medical opinion and popular imagery shifted” (Hutson 2015:52). However, not long before this popular ideal came into place, plumpness as a bodily style was viewed positively, thereby demonstrating the constant shift in bodily ideals and preferences. Rather than blaming society at large or the gym environment for idealizing *one* body image/type, individuals believe that they need to change something about themselves in order to feel comfortable in the gym. In many ways, I can relate to these respondents, and I have come across others who feel the same. This is not a topic that is discussed in gym settings; however, I think the conversation would resonate for many individuals. It might be beneficial for gym owners to consider having positive conversations in the gym related to body image and/or confidence. An example might be gym employees utilizing this as a means to attract clientele. I commonly see pictures of certain body types represented in advertisements at the gym (e.g., Appendix E), yet I feel these pictures do not depict anything positive for the gym, nor do they encourage all individuals/bodies to attend. Ensuring inclusive advertisements and positive messaging about what bodies are welcome and normal would be a small gesture that would encourage people to attend gyms without blaming themselves for their bodies. Some participants made connections between societal expectations and stereotypes being present in the gym, and

the autonomy that individuals have over these beliefs. For example, one person indicated “the idea that women don’t belong lifting weights [needs to change]. Changing perspective and judgment levels of people.” If the gym were to help guide this change of perspective related to body ideals, individuals would be more inclined to attend.

I hypothesized that one’s experience would be enjoyable, or not, depending on their comfort with their own bodies outside of the gym, and inside of the gym. Many individuals who feel positively about their bodies experience greater levels of comfort within the gym, therefore supporting my hypothesis. However, understanding one’s comfort with their body outside of the gym was a particularly challenging task. In comparison to those who have a low sense of self and self-confidence, those who have a positive sense of self and a high level of self-confidence stated they feel more comfortable in the gym. However, without specifically stating how they feel outside of the gym, I can only make assumptions that this level of confidence would be operative beyond the gym.

Participants who feel positively about their personal fitness experienced high levels of overall comfort in the gym. While I did not ask participants how they understand what is “strong” or “good shape,” it is quite revealing that participants identified themselves in this way. Like aesthetics, this too speaks to their level of self-confidence in the gym. If one attends the gym to gain strength and alter their “shape,” then those who identify positively about these issues already have an upper hand over individuals who do not feel this way. However, similar to the aesthetic portion above, how one achieved this level of self-confidence is unknown. Learning about *how* they achieved this level of self-confidence could have been instrumental to understanding their current appreciation for their bodies.

Activities

Understanding one's comfort in certain activities spoke more to the gendered nature of the gym than overall comfort levels. Despite participating in the same activities at the gym, how and to what extent women and men engage in these activities, and how they experience and view them, is quite different. Individuals' personal goals might also influence the activities in which one engages. I asked participants to categorize their goals for attending the gym and working out. Only 6% of the sample population included additional goals to the list that I provided for them. While the responses ranged from improving mental health and physique to recovering from injuries, the majority indicated that they attend the gym to maintain weight/shape. In addition, the influence that age has on the activity performed by participants is also highly apparent. To break down this discussion, I first discuss comfort and the way that participants described their experiences of comfort within the gym. Next, I discuss the environment of the activity, and the idea of certain activities being unthreatening to participants. I then discuss some gender variations between women and men, and those who identify as more feminine or masculine than others. Lastly, I discuss uncomfortable experiences within certain activities in the gym.

Experience and Enjoyment

The results of this research indicate that there is a clear connection between comfort and one's experience and/or enjoyment of an activity. Overall, the sample population of this research appears to really enjoy the classes at Power First Fitness (83% said they would be comfortable). Many indicated that they feel "comfortable [when they are] doing classes they enjoy," and that overall, there are "excellent classes" and attending them makes participants feel comfortable. One participant said they "do not use the machines often because [they] thoroughly enjoy all the

classes [they] attend.” Others said that regular attendance in the classes allow them to feel comfortable, and to get to know the other regular attendees. The bulk of the equipment/space in Power First Fitness is taken up by weights (e.g., machines, barbells, or dumbbells). While there is still plenty of room to engage in other types of fitness, the fact that so much space is dedicated to lifting weights is quite telling of the nature of the gym and its ideologies. There may be many reasons why weightlifting is so popular at Power First Fitness; clients might join the gym because of the wide variety of weight equipment, or perhaps the growing societal acceptance of women weight training allows more individuals to participate. Certainly, this space is needed as nearly the entire sample population engages in weightlifting. Many participants even stated that their “love [for] lifting weights” aided in their overall comfort levels in the gym. Enjoyment and experience of specific activities allows individuals to feel comfortable in the gym; however, many participants said that they would be comfortable in certain activities despite their occasional/lack of involvement in said activity.

The nature of the activity

Pilates, Yoga, Cardiovascular workouts, and calisthenics all have one thing in common – the minimal use of “equipment” in the activity. Perhaps individuals who do not partake in these activities deem activities with less equipment to be less intimidating due to the lack of previously required experience (with equipment) needed to participate in the activity (although, certainly these activities do involve a high degree of practice to perform each activity appropriately and in good form). This willingness to participate may be due to the nature of the activity. For example, during yoga, one is encouraged to listen to one’s body during practice and only do as much as the body is willing. The “no pain no gain” discourse is very oppositional to yoga practice as

individuals are told to stop once they feel pain. It could also speak to participants' self-confidence, too, if those who feel positively about their bodies are more willing to participate. Positive body consciousness did not equate to a significantly higher comfort level when using cardiovascular equipment. In other words, my research data indicated that whether or not participants felt positively about their body did not impact their experience with cardiovascular equipment. This emphasizes the idea that perhaps minimal use of equipment may be more inviting for all participants. Older adults may be more willing to participate in Pilates due to the minimal amount of impact movements.

All of the equipment at Power First Fitness allows participants to pace themselves, only applying as much effort, or as little, as they desire. Not only does this characteristic make cardiovascular equipment easy to use, but it also demonstrates how this equipment is not daunting for clients, even if they do not regularly use it. While many participants do not utilize cardio machines frequently, many indicated that they would feel comfortable doing so. However, those who feel positively about their bodies are not more comfortable than others when utilizing cardiovascular equipment. It would have been beneficial to ask participants their previous history with each activity/machine, particularly in the case of cardio machines. In my experience, when becoming a member at a gym for the first time, cardio machines are the easiest and safest workout. However, many of the participants have multiple years of experience at the gym, and it is likely that they have "graduated" from these machines, and instead, participate in other forms of cardiovascular training.

Due to the fact that 51% of participants do not participate in Calisthenics at the gym, I was very surprised to learn that 76% of the participants said they would be comfortable participating tomorrow. However, similar to cardiovascular equipment use, this may be due to

the fact that many calisthenics exercises can be completed without experience, and therefore may not be intimidating for those who do not participate regularly. The relationship between those who feel strong, and those who feel that they are in good shape, and participating in calisthenics tomorrow, could speak to the preferred strength necessary to participate in Calisthenics. While some movements are easily performed without much experience/strength, and can be modified (e.g., push-ups or body weight squats), other activities require an abundance of strength and coordination (e.g., handstand pushups, pull-ups). Feeling strong or in good shape would be a necessary requirement to feel comfortable participating in Calisthenics.

Gender variations

There are few differences between women and men's engagement in activities; however, the degree to which they participate in various activities is different. For example, although many women do engage in weight training, their male counterparts do so at a higher frequency. It is likely that women's engagement in weight training has changed over time due to a variety of factors. It could be the ever-changing ideal female body and/or societal acceptance of women lifting weights (Dworkin 2008), an increased knowledge of the benefits associated with lifting weights, or simply personal preference. Craig and Liberti (2007:678) point out that "women developed greater 'physical confidence' through aerobics, which allowed them to participate in a wider range of physical activities."

While only one participant mentioned that she receives criticism from family/friends specifically in regard to lifting weights, it is possible that other participants who identified as experiencing criticism may experience it for the same reason. This criticism from family or friends has the potential to limit one's workout regime, if even in a minimal way. I hypothesized

that women would experience lower levels of comfort when lifting weights, an activity I deemed to be traditionally masculine. However, this was not supported in this research. While some women discussed how others referred to weightlifting as masculine, or that they find the actual weightlifting area uncomfortable due to other members not performing appropriate etiquette (e.g., putting weights back after using them), no women participants indicated that lifting weights was an uncomfortable activity to perform.

In addition, both women and men who identified as feeling more masculine than their same gender counterparts engage in weight training more frequently. Although participants did not have the opportunity to explain why it is that they feel more masculine, identifying as such may lead one to draw a connection that depicts weight training as a masculinized activity. While others still do engage in weight training, the significant relationship between feeling (more) masculine and weight training cannot be ignored. It is possible those participants do not equate feeling more masculine to their experiences in weight training, and that this relationship is merely coincidental, however, this is unknown at this time. It is also likely the participants who feel more masculine and who weight train most often equate their strength and strong bodies to feeling more masculine. Asking participants to include background information with these questions would have given context to what it means to identify as more masculine. In the absence of this information, we must consider this relationship as evidence that there is a clear connection between weight training and masculinity.

Those who identified as more feminine than others of their same gender are more likely to participate in yoga, and aerobics/strength training classes tomorrow. Similar to the relationship found in weight training, participants were not given the opportunity to explain why they felt more feminine, or what they define as feminine. In addition, we do not know if identifying as

more feminine is at all related to their participation in yoga. However, these data do support a clear relationship between feeling more feminine and participating in yoga. In regard to the aerobics/strength training classes, knowing exactly what types of activities people perform in these classes would help to determine how feeling more feminine might be associated with this activity. Without considering the specific activities, one might consider classes as more feminine or as appealing to women more because of the nature of the classes (i.e., teamwork, culture of sociability, etc.).

There were few participants who engage in yoga frequently; however, the majority of these respondents are women. I hypothesized that men would feel uncomfortable performing traditionally female dominated activities; however, this was not specifically supported in this research. Yoga is considered a female dominated activity, but whether or not men feel uncomfortable participating in yoga is not clear.

Uncomfortable experiences

While many participants do not feel uncomfortable in the gym, some included reasons why they think one might feel this way. The most common response came with inexperience in lifting weights, and with (im)proper form. “Lack of experience with an exercise” and “trying something new when I am not sure I am doing it correctly” leads participants to feel uncomfortable.

Another participant stated, “I feel comfortable because I know what I am doing when I lift weights. If I didn’t feel this way, my greatest anxiety would be that people were watching me do something wrong.” These few examples speak to my third hypothesis, which is that individuals feel more comfortable in the gym if they have greater experience and knowledge of the activity they are performing. However, the limited data presented does not substantiate the hypothesis.

Zumba is taken from a Latin style of dancing that requires (at least) some coordination and experience. While many participants who do not engage in certain activities said they would participate in the activity tomorrow, this was not the case for Zumba. In other words, despite many people's willingness to try activities tomorrow, no participant said they would feel comfortable doing Zumba tomorrow. This was particularly surprising among the group of participants who identified as feeling positively about their bodies. Zumba is unlike any other activity in the gym due to its coordination and dance-style component, and it is likely that this in itself creates an intimidating environment for individuals, despite their gender, sense of femininity/masculinity, age, experience, or comfort. Perhaps the combination of dancing and necessary coordination to participate in Zumba places more of an emphasis on performance and display, and creates a high stress/anxious environment for some individuals, or at least places individuals out of their comfort zone. This may be one explanation for the lack of participation by participants at Power First Fitness.

Age Differences

While older participants do engage in weight training, they do so less often than their younger counterparts. In addition, older women participate less than older men; 30% of women above 46 years old participate less than once a week, as opposed to 2% of men in the same cohort. Throughout the entirety of the activities in the gym, there appear to be cohort differences with workout regimes. This difference in working out is most apparent in weightlifting as younger people are lifting weights, but older people are not. If older adults did not previously lift weights often, they might not be as interested in lifting now. A study conducted in 2005 indicated "over 40% of older adults do not participate in any leisure-time physical activity, and less than 10%

participate in vigorous activity” (Lees, Clark, Nigg, and Newman 2005:24). This study looked at barriers to the exercise behavior of older adults 65 and older. Those who do not exercise indicated that it was because a fear of falling. Barriers identified by those who do exercise include physical ailments, inactivity, and time. These low participation levels from a generation ago may now have an echo effect. Experience does not seem to create comfort here unless people have been weightlifting in the past. Yet we know that weight-bearing activity is really important for older people. Tim Henwood, Anthony Tuckett, Offer Elderstein, and Helen Bartlett’s (2011:1330) research on older adult’s perspective about resistance training discusses the multitude of benefits that result from weight-bearing activity, including, but not limited to “increased muscle strength, muscle power, and muscle endurance.” The findings of this study suggest “with training comes a certain level of education more specific than general knowledge” (1341), thus requiring older adults to have a working understanding of the use of weights, and the appropriate way to use them.

In addition, the different engagement of weight training between each cohort may be due to changing body ideals. “As a symbol of prestige, the thin (or, free of fat) and muscularly toned ideal developed historically due to both economic and cultural shifts” (Hutson 2016:52). Lifting weights has become more popular for gaining overall strength, as well as resulting in optimal performance and a change in one’s physique. However, while Henwood et al.’s study (2011:1341) discussed how older adults acknowledged the multitude of benefits associated with weight-bearing activities, the theme of “body image” was the least of the participants’ concerns and “did not generate significant discussion.” Instead, many older participants turned to “age-appropriate physical pursuits,” often associating both muscularity and masculinity with younger men (Hutson 2016:65). “This valorization of youth influenced participants’ experiences,

reinforcing associations of youth with vibrancy” (Hutson 2016:65). Younger participants of both genders lift more than older adults; however, it would be interesting to see if this would have been the same ten or thirty years ago. Johansson says, “[the gym is a] social space in which young people are occupied with maintaining gender stereotypes, while at the same time new gender and body identities are developed” (1996:34). This influential role that weight training has on youth culture could explain the abundance of young members who engage in weightlifting. However, the benefits of weight-bearing activities for older adults are equally important, and perhaps should be discussed in the gym atmosphere. It could be beneficial for gyms to incorporate seminars for appropriate weightlifting skills to ensure optimal performance and to reduce injury.

Like Yoga, Pilates does not require other equipment, and helps stretch one’s muscles, building flexibility and strength. Pilates is unique in the sense that it focuses on awareness of alignment, improved posture, and strengthens core muscles all in the name of being stronger, leaner, and longer. Pilates is not a common exercise for participants in this sample population, and, despite the fact that literature asserts Pilates to be highly gendered, there was no significant difference in the relationship between Pilates and gender. Perhaps this variation from yoga may be because Pilates is less traditional than yoga and therefore is seen as a more acceptable non-impact and/or stretching routine for men. Those who feel positively about their body image, or have a high level of overall comfort in the gym, are more likely to be willing to participate in Pilates tomorrow. In addition, older adults are more likely than their younger counterparts to be willing to participate in Pilates tomorrow, despite their current involvement in it (or lack thereof).

EXPERIENCING THE GAZE

The results indicated that the more comfortable people are (overall), the more likely they are to look at themselves during their workout. Whether or not participants do this for technical or aesthetic purposes is not clear. Despite having the opportunity in the survey to offer further explanation as to why they look at themselves, participants did not differentiate between how they gaze at themselves. This relationship plays into the gaze that people may experience.

Looking at oneself is a good example of how gazing has become a normalized phenomenon in the gym, so much so that individuals are very comfortable looking at themselves, and frequently.

The heightened level of overall comfort indicates that these individuals may be gazing at themselves for a variety of reasons. While some may view this relationship as related to ego, it is important to remember the initial purpose of mirrors. Haelyon (2012) points out that the use of mirrors in gyms is to meet proper institutional guidelines, which entails the use of mirrors to encourage physical effort and improved performance. Mirrors help to check for proper form, and increase the “muscle and mind connection” (whereby actually looking at the muscle one is working out increases the effort put out from that particular muscle), ultimately “encouraging exercisers to increase their physical effort and improve their performance” (Haelyon 2012:1197).

Those who have gained experience in the gym have gathered knowledge about the importance of proper form and positioning, thus increasing their use of mirrors in the gym. Haelyon (2012) discusses the way that the mirror can create a “private gaze” and this produces the regulation of gazing. I hypothesized that the gym cultivates an environment where the gaze is normalized, so individuals begin to gaze at themselves. The results of this study indicate that 89% of participants look at themselves, to some degree.

Results also demonstrate the gendered nature of gazing at others. Adams (2005:67) discusses how “women’s bodies have been more likely than men’s to be presented explicitly as objects of the gaze, maintaining the stereotypical active/passive and masculine/feminine binaries of heterosexuality.” Both women and men look at the opposite sex (96% of participants) and at the same sex (97% of participants). Of the women participants, 77% look at the same sex in comparison to 70% of men. These statistics support my fourth hypothesis; all individuals in the gym are subject to the gaze, to some degree. However, *how* women and men look is different; there is a vast difference between the number of women and men who judge others of the opposite sex based on their physical appearance. Considering these results, one can especially sympathize with women clients in co-ed gyms who do not feel comfortable. It is no wonder that women-only gyms have become more popular with time. If women are concerned with the male gaze in co-ed gyms, then a women-only gym would be a safe and comfortable alternative.

As the age groups increased, there was a steady decrease in the concern with others being around at the gym. In comparison to their younger peers, cohorts above the age of 36 may find themselves in a much different place that would allow them to care less about the physical space at the gym. On average, adults above the age of 36 have more experience at the gym because of their years of membership, and so they do not experience some of the tensions that come with inexperience (although there were few outliers that did not have the same number of years of experience in gyms, despite being 36+ years old). In addition, unlike their younger counterparts, they may be in long-term relationships and so may be less likely to be concerned with gazing at others for their sex appeal. One participant stated, “I can go there and do my thing any time, with whomever is there in any room.” In addition to experience, older participants have had many years to become acquainted with their own levels of self-confidence, especially if they have been

members of the gym for a longer period of time (as these participants have identified). Another participant echoed a similar response, “I can go to the gym – do my own thing using whatever equipment in any room by myself or with whoever is there at the time.” I would argue that this is a certain privilege that comes with age and experience. Whether or not younger participants can come to this same place of contentment in the gym, without the same experience, is unknown. However, perhaps it is a conversation worth having for gym owners who are looking to attract a younger audience.

I anticipated that those with a positive body image would not experience receiving the gaze to the same extent as others, or rather, not in the same *way*. Bartky (2002) says that there is a duality caused by sexual objectification of women. This objectification causes women to internalize the gaze of the other so that they become both the assessed and the assessor. This internalization may lead to a subconscious awareness of sexual objectification, and therefore all participants may not be aware of this type of gaze. However, those who feel strong, or those who have otherwise positive experiences of their bodies, feel the most on display at the gym, thereby aligning with Bartky’s theory. Additionally, Haelyon (2012) mentioned the initial purposes of mirrors in the gym; however, in my own experience, the uses of them have shifted over time to include gazing at others. Gazing at oneself has become commonplace in the gym, and as participants pointed out, this is for many purposes. Perhaps the individuals who feel positively about their body image feel on display in a “good” way because others are looking at them to appreciate their physique or workout regime. While I asked participants to identify why they look at others, I did not ask participants to make any assumption about why others might be looking at them. Feeling on display may also speak to one’s ego as participants may feel so highly about themselves that they anticipate others are looking at them. It could also speak to

how visible someone is in the gym when they are working out, and how easy it is for other members to see them. While the reason participants feel like they are being looked at is unknown, the significant relationship between feeling on display and feeling positive about one's body image speaks to the versatility of the gaze in a gym setting, and the multiple ways that the gaze can be present to all individuals, despite their comfort in their body.

Harassment

The questions pertaining to harassment in the gym need to be appropriately addressed as they may largely influence women's and men's comfort levels in the gym. These occurrences may not be specific to Power First Fitness¹, as the experiences that take place within this gym may be similar to that of other co-ed gyms.

Most importantly, the responses regarding a harassment policy in the gym seem to indicate some confusion. While many people feel that there may be mechanisms put in place at the gym, a large proportion of participants are uncertain whether or not this is true. Others say that there are not any mechanisms put in place. The individual who experienced harassment from "prominent men in the community" disclosed that the issue was not resolved. By the participant's statement, it is (somewhat) clear that she approached management/employees regarding the issue, but this was not explicitly stated.

Harassment in the gym atmosphere has the potential to be a serious problem. Even if it is not common, it should always be treated with significance. Mostly, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the gym space can already place individuals in a very vulnerable state. Some mentioned that they feel uncomfortable because of their lack of experience, their body image

¹ A reminder that Power First Fitness is a pseudonym; To protect the gym and the clientele, I have not included specifics of the gym, thereby emphasizing that this research is not an attack on this specific gym.

and/or lack of self-confidence. If harassment were an issue in these spaces, becoming comfortable would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for members who are already uncomfortable. If there is a policy at Power First Fitness, which I could not find, it needs to be addressed clearly so participants know where they can receive help if harassment ever becomes a problem. The process of how to follow the policy needs to be clear and concise so there is never a question about being unsure. At best, this might make participants feel that employers are concerned about their safety and put them at ease. In addition to this, there needs to be a zero-tolerance policy for harassment. This should not be waived for any reason, regardless of who the perpetrator might be. Posting policy statements on the walls and posters with examples of the various forms of harassment might help aid this problem. It is the responsibility of management and employees to make sure their members are safe, and doing so would allow individuals to focus on themselves in the gym.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research have indicated that the relationship between gender and comfort is not statistically significant, thereby confirming that women and men at Power First Fitness are comfortable in the gym. However, that is not to say that every participant is comfortable (or every member at the gym). There are gendered variations in comfort pertaining to certain activities in the gym, as the frequency with which women and men participate in certain activities is different (e.g., participation in weightlifting). Moreover, age is an important factor in one's overall comfort level at the gym, as older participants feel more comfortable overall. Experience and gym attendance have also proven to influence how comfortable people are at Power First Fitness.

It seems that participants' experience and overall enjoyment in the activities they perform aids their overall level of comfort in the gym and the nature of the activity can either encourage or impede one's willingness to participate in activities. I discuss gender variations amongst activities in the gym, and include participants' responses regarding their uncomfortable experiences. Lastly, I discuss how (older) age enables members to freely participate in certain activities, and be carefree at the gym.

In Chapter Six, I offer some final thoughts on this research process. I consider limitations related to the sample population, method, and accessibility. I discuss the importance of future research, and reflect on participants' suggestions for obtaining comfort in the gym.

CHAPTER SIX: FINAL THOUGHTS

In closing, I consider the limitations of this research project. While all methods have some limitations, acknowledgement of these limitations is necessary when considering the validity and reliability of research findings. I discuss limitations associated with the sample population, the quantitative methods used, and accessibility restrictions. Afterwards, I reflect on this research as a point of departure for future research. Research on the co-ed gym is limited. The co-ed gym is still a relatively new development in the institutional history of gyms. More research is necessary to order to understand comfort in the gym, and to help to address disparities between women and men, different cohorts, and different populations. Lastly, I discuss some strategies suggested by participants to elevate their comfort in the gym. These suggestions raise awareness of the importance of individual autonomy. However, it is only when the wider collective gym subculture and its institutional management make real, positive changes (in both ideologies and practice) that long-term amendments can be made.

While current research can offer some insight into women's participation in female dominated activities and environments, and men's participation in male sports, to date, research has not assessed women's and men's leisurely involvement and comfort in co-ed gyms. With the use of a feminist framework, I applied quantitative research methods from a feminist standpoint. Surveys allowed me to address the sample population at hand in a timely fashion. While the relationship between gender and overall comfort was not proven to be statistically significant, there were many other significant relationships that considered comfort within the gym.

Many alternative variables were found to have a significant impact on levels of comfort in the gym; gender, experience, sense of masculinity/femininity, and age, had the most influence on comfort levels in the gym. Overall, my sample population has had many years of experience

in pay-to-use gyms. Many participants at Power First Fitness are very comfortable. However, the results indicate that comfort within certain classes, certain spaces in the gym, and certain activities, vary greatly depending on the aforementioned external/internal factors. These relationships need to be acknowledged, understood, and critiqued as they make up individual experiences of *overall* comfort.

LIMITATIONS

Sample Population

Sampling *members only* prevented the inclusion of women and men who feel so uncomfortable or unwelcomed by gyms that they do not attend. Ideally, including these individuals would benefit my research tremendously. Including the experiences of those who have dropped out of the gym would provide a meaningful contribution to understanding comfort in the gym. I was restricted by time and needed to employ the sample that was accessible to me. Also, I believe that by working with those who attend gyms, together we can create a more accepting atmosphere for those who do not yet attend. Future research that specifically targets non-users of gyms may be a valuable place to test similar relationships examined here, and provide a better understanding of the effect of issues such as class, race, gender, sexuality, and disability.

Paying for a membership at Power First Fitness indicates that participants have the means to be able to attend the gym, while also signifying that there is already a pre-developed level of comfort. The majority of the members identified as white/Caucasian. These individuals can afford membership and they may believe themselves to have a right to be there. This could be why there is an abundance of women in the gym; the nature of Power First Fitness is an elitist gym, and it is possible that there is a sense of feeling like one belongs because they are able to

afford it. My sample population lacked diversity in demographics, and so one must consider how this changes the experiences of the members in the gym. For example, membership was restrictive in the sense that I did not get an accurate representation of the diversity of gym-goers that I would have received had I conducted the research at a more affordable, more accessible gym – one where people of all abilities and backgrounds can participate. It is likely that, given a diverse sample population, these findings could be quite different. Unfortunately, expensive gyms narrow the scope of who attends all gyms. Therefore, it is important to recall that I did not and cannot generalize these findings and am only referring to the sample specific to this thesis.

Lastly, this research is constrained by the locality of my sample, and the geographical area in which I am conducting it – a gym in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. However, the issues that I analyzed (e.g., gender relations, gendered training) are not issues that solely exist in Thunder Bay. Therefore, although the sample of my research may be limited in scope, the findings will add to research on gender and gyms.

Accessibility

There is a gap in the research that discusses women and men's relative levels of comfort within gyms in relation to specific types of male or female dominated activities. Due to this shortage, I had to include some non-academic research to account for the history and making of gyms. Additionally, I utilized literature on sport and sport history to discuss women participating in male dominated fields, such as the gym. Using sport history literature was not ideal, as the gym is only a subgenre of a type of individual sport. However, I was limited to the articles that I had access to. Also, I was limited by the access I had to the gyms. It is likely the results would have been different given a different gym/atmosphere, a different variety of clientele, etc. One

example is the addition of a women's-only section in the gym. This option could have added diversity in the responses pertaining to women's comfort. Hopefully, future researchers will consider these limitations and use them as points of departure.

FUTURE RESEARCH

After having contemplated the analysis with the benefit of hindsight, a few delimitations came to mind. For example, the inclusion of background questions to further understand how and why participants identify as feeling strong and asking participants for their previous experience at gyms, specifically their first experience at a gym. This would have been a better indication of how one arrived at their current state of "comfort" in the gym. Other questions that would have benefited the research include questions about body image and self-consciousness outside of a gym setting. A better understanding of how participants feel outside of the gym versus in the gym would clarify if experiences are thematic or isolated.

Conducting similar research on different types of gyms would add validity to the results. The inclusion of gyms that specialize in Crossfit, Bootcamp, Boxing, etc., would showcase whether or not these gendered and age phenomena are prevalent across all workout regimes, or if they are only dominant in typical, machine-focused gyms.

Lastly, and most importantly, the inclusion of concerns and experiences from people who do not attend the gym is crucial to understanding problems and issues associated with comfort. It is likely that at a social level there are many factors that can limit the attendance of women and men in gyms, such as membership prices, time constraints, accessibility related to the gym structure, etc. Reaching out to non-gym goers is vital in understanding how to move forward in creating an inclusive atmosphere. In doing so, the addition of both qualitative and quantitative

methods should be considered. While statistics can display whether or not a phenomenon is existent, qualitative methods discuss the why's and how's of the concerns at hand. Interviews, either focus-group or individual, might be beneficial in determining why people feel the way that they do, and would allow the researcher to include additional questions based on the respondent's answers. The results might be revealing for gym owners and might help them to implement changes in the gym.

Moving forward

While participants demonstrated that they are comfortable in the gym, I asked them to include strategies and suggestions they might have for others to improve their level of comfort. The responses varied to include suggestions about classes and mindset, however 72% of the responses were based on the space that is utilized. Participants connect space to comfort, indicating that less frequented, less visible space would allow participants to become more comfortable. This would be a good initial strategy to familiarize oneself with the gym and the exercises; however, this might not be practical for long-term use/comfort, particularly when time constraints are an issue and individuals are forced to attend during rush hour.

The results indicate that the gaze is present in the gym. Women experience the male-gaze, many participants feel self-conscious due to their body image, and men look at women to judge their physical appearance. These findings suggest that participants, particularly women, feel on display at the gym and also feel negatively about their body. Women may fear that this could lead to further experiences of vulnerability, thereby avoiding the gym. It is of utmost importance for gyms to acknowledge this and to support the safety of their clients. These findings should be considered by employers when trying to address harassment in the gym.

Gyms that are proactive about harassment might have an opportunity to draw in new clients, particularly those who are vulnerable and fear further experiences of being on display.

While all of these suggestions may be easier said than done, the recognition by participants that individuals can create change is very important. That being said, participants neglected to call attention to the impact that like-minded people have when they come together for a common goal. Members acting together within the gym to encourage positive change could be sufficient in cultivating an inclusive space. While some change may come from within, our society needs to amend perceptions of sport, the gym, and (gendered) bodies. This is the first step in moving towards an inclusive gym space, and a comfortable environment for both women and men and those who do not identify as either.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Managerial Consent Form



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Managerial Consent Form: Gendered Experiences in the Gym

I allow Sofia Rizzo to conduct her research at Power First Fitness.

I understand that I, and the staff at Power First Fitness, will not have direct access to the raw data, but only to aggregate anonymous data.

I have read and understood the cover / information letter for the study.

I understand the potential risks and benefits to my clients.

I understand that the participation of my clients is entirely voluntary.

I understand that the data that my clients provide will be stored securely at Lakehead University, in Ontario, Canada, for five (5) years after which time it will be destroyed.

I understand that I can request to read any published research by contacting Sofia Rizzo.

Name (Printed) _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix B: Cover Letter



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Hello potential participants,

My name is Sofia Rizzo and I am a graduate student at Lakehead University. I am asking for participants who would be interested in completing a survey to help me with my research, which is aimed at better understanding of how the social implications of the commercial gym shape women's and men's experiences of physical activity. Benefits of completing the survey include, but are not limited to: providing useful information that will be available to other individuals to help them to move forward in their health, and ideally, encourage a more accepting space within commercial gyms, if this is required.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and will remain confidential and anonymous. Lakehead University and this research project are not affiliated with Power First

Fitness; however, the anonymized results of the project will be provided to Power First management to assist them in providing an environment that all clientele benefit from. It is important to note that conducting my research at Power First Fitness does not denote personal criticisms of Power First itself; rather, based on my research questions and the enthusiastic participation of Power First management, it is the most ideal environment in which to carry out my research. Further, your decision to participate or not to participate in this study will in no way affect your membership at Power First Fitness. The results of the research will be completely anonymous in any publication or presentation, since the data that I receive cannot be connected to you in any way, and will be aggregated and anonymous. You have the right to withdraw at any time by not completing the survey, however once the survey is submitted, it cannot be withdrawn from the research. The data that I collect from this study will be securely stored with Dr. Antony Puddephatt in the Ryan Building, office number 2034, at Lakehead University, for a period of five (5) years. If you desire, the research findings will be made available to you via e-mail by contacting ssrizzo1@lakeheadu.ca after August 2017.

If you agree to participate, you will be able to complete a survey via *qualtrics* (online) by clicking on the link provided, and it will take a maximum of **10 minutes**, in exceptional cases. Participating in the survey allows you to be entered in a draw to win 1 of 3 prizes. Participating in the survey guarantees anonymity! If you choose to include your email at the end to be entered in a draw to win a prize, your responses will not be matched to your email.

Please be aware that questions in the survey will ask you to draw on past experiences of training in the gym environment, so a potential risk may be feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness, depending on your experience. There are resources available to help support you. The Thunder Bay Counseling Centre, whose information can be found below, is one option that provides phone, online, and in-person counseling. Additionally, there is the Good2Talk helpline, which also offers phone counseling.

Your contribution to my research would be very much appreciated. If you are interested in participating in this study, please see the attached consent form.

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research, and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at [807-343-8283](tel:807-343-8283) or research@lakeheadu.ca. If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact me, Sofia Rizzo, at [807-767-7176](tel:807-767-7176) or ssrizzo1@lakeheadu.ca

Thunder Bay Counseling Centre

544 Winnipeg Avenue

Thunder Bay, ON P7B 3S7

Tel: [\(807\) 684-1880](tel:807-684-1880)

Fax: [\(807\) 344-3782](tel:(807)344-3782)

Free: 1 (888) 204-2221

Walk In:

12:00 pm – 8:00 pm (last session begins at 6:30pm) at the following locations:

-1st and 3rd Wednesday of every month at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre -
544 Winnipeg Avenue

-2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month at Children's Centre Thunder Bay - 283 Lisgar
Street

Good2Talk (Student Helpline):

Tel: [1 \(866\) 925-5454](tel:1(866)925-5454)

www.good2talk.ca

Kind Regards,

Sofia Rizzo

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form



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Consent Form: Gendered Experiences in the Gym

- I have read and understood the cover / information letter for the study.
- I agree to participate in the study.
- I understand the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study.

- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I only have to answer questions I am comfortable answering.
- I understand that Lakehead University and this research project are not affiliated with Power First Fitness, but that the anonymized results of the project will be provided to Power First management to assist them in creating a more welcoming space for women clientele.
- I understand that the data I provide will be stored securely at Lakehead University, in Ontario, Canada, for five (5) years after which time it will be destroyed.
- I understand that I can request to read any published research by contacting Sofia Rizzo.
- I understand that my participation will remain anonymous throughout the research project.

By clicking <INSERT LINK>/<NEXT> I understand the nature of the study and agree to participate.

Appendix D: Survey



Department of Sociology

t: [\(807\) 343-8530](tel:8073438530) f: (807) 346-7831

1) Please circle whichever applies to you.

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Other
- d. Choose not to disclose

2) Which do you identify as?

- a. Bisexual
- b. Heterosexual
- c. Homosexual
- d. Other
- e. Choose not to disclose

3) With which racial or ethnic group(s) do you identify with? Circle all that apply.

- a. African-American
- b. Asian
- c. White/Caucasian
- d. Latino or Hispanic
- e. Aboriginal
- f. Other

4) What is the highest level of education that you have *completed*?

- a. Some High School, did not complete
- b. High School Diploma
- c. College Diploma
- d. Undergraduate Degree
- e. Masters Degree
- f. Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.
- g. Professional Degrees
- h. Not applicable

5) What age group do you fall under?

- a. 18-25years
- b. 26-35years
- c. 36-45years
- d. 46-65years
- e. 66+ years

6) What is your household annual income?

- a. Less than \$20,000
- b. \$20,000 - \$34,999
- c. \$35,000 - \$49,999
- d. \$50,000 – \$74,999
- e. \$75,000-\$99,999
- f. Over \$100,000

7) Please circle which ONE answer is most appropriate. If you are employed, please state your profession. For example, if you are a manager at a local grocery store, please indicate “Manager at local grocery store.”

- a. Student
- b. Retired
- c. Unemployed
- d. Receiving other forms of benefits
- e. Employed. Please state your profession _____.

8) Do you have financial dependents?

- a. Yes
- b. No

9) How long have you been training in a pay-to-use gym/facility?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-4 years
- d. 4+ years

10) How long have you been a member of Power First Fitness?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1-2 years
- c. 3-4 years
- d. 4+ years

11) How often did you work out in the past two weeks?

- a. Less than once a week
- b. 1-2 days per week
- c. 3-5 days per week
- d. 6+ days per week

12) Compared to others of my own gender, I feel more masculine

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

13) Compare to others of my own gender, I feel more feminine

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

14) How much would you agree with the following statements? ...

- a. I think I am overweight
 - i. Strongly Agree
 - ii. Agree
 - iii. Neither agree nor disagree
 - iv. Disagree
 - v. Strongly Disagree
- b. I think I am underweight.
 - i. Strongly Agree
 - ii. Agree
 - iii. Neither agree nor disagree
 - iv. Disagree
 - v. Strongly Disagree
- c. Physically, I feel strong.
 - i. Strongly Agree
 - ii. Agree
 - iii. Neither agree nor disagree
 - iv. Disagree
 - v. Strongly Disagree
- d. I like my body.

- i. Strongly Agree
 - ii. Agree
 - iii. Neither agree nor disagree
 - iv. Disagree
 - v. Strongly Disagree
- e. I think I am in good shape.
 - i. Strongly Agree
 - ii. Agree
 - iii. Neither agree nor disagree
 - iv. Disagree
 - v. Strongly Disagree
- f. I am pleased with my physique.
 - i. Strongly Agree
 - ii. Agree
 - iii. Neither agree nor disagree
 - iv. Disagree
 - v. Strongly Disagree

15) When you are at the gym, do you feel like you are more conscious of your body than in other day-to-day situations?

- a. Yes
- b. No

16) If yes, this body consciousness I feel in the gym makes me feel... (circle all that apply)

- a. Vulnerable
- b. Self-conscious
- c. Uncomfortable
- d. Anxious
- e. Pleased
- f. Strong/Powerful
- g. Empowered
- h. Confident

‘Looking’ or ‘gazing’ at the gym, whether at others or oneself, is common in the gym culture. Large mirrors in the gym allow for ease of the ‘mind-muscle’ connection that is known in weight-training or body building, while also making sure one’s form is correct. Gazing at others can also happen in the gym culture, whether it is to appreciate or critique another’s physique.

17) Do you feel like you are on display at the gym?

- i. Almost all the time
- ii. Some of the time

- iii. Very rarely
- iv. Never

b. In what way do you feel like you are on display at the gym? Please explain.

18) Do you ever look at yourself during your own workout?

- i. Almost all the time
- ii. Some of the time
- iii. Very rarely
- iv. Never

b. Are you more or less critical of your body when you do this?

- i. More
- ii. Less
- iii. The same

c. In what way do you look at yourself at the gym? Please explain.

19) Do you ever look at others at the gym of the opposite sex?

- i. Almost all the time
- ii. Some of the time
- iii. Very rarely
- iv. Never

b. Are you more or less critical of other's bodies when you do this?

- i. More
- ii. Less
- iii. The same

c. In what way do you look at others of the opposite sex at them gym? Please explain.

20) Do you ever look at others at the gym of the same sex?

- i. Almost all the time

- ii. Some of the time
- iii. Very rarely
- iv. Never

b. Are you more or less critical of other's bodies when you do this?

- i. More
- ii. Less
- iii. The same

c. In what way do you look at others of the same sex at the gym? Please explain.

21) When you look at others, do you judge their physical fitness and athletic ability?

- i. Almost all the time
- ii. Some of the time
- iii. Very rarely
- iv. Never

22) When you look at others, do you judge their physical attractiveness and sex appeal?

- i. Almost all the time
- ii. Some of the time
- iii. Very rarely
- iv. Never

23) Do you feel others are looking at you during your workout?

- i. Yes
- ii. No

b. Are you more or less critical of your body if you feel you are being looked at in the gym?

- i. More
- ii. Less

c. In what way do you feel others are looking at you during your workout? Please explain.

24) If you answer yes to question 23, has this ever led to harassment in the gym setting?

- i. Yes

- ii. No

25) If yes, did you feel that there were any mechanisms put in place by the gym to deal with this harassment?

- i. Yes. Please explain

- ii. No. Please explain

26) If you have answered *no* to question 25, how did you deal with the harassment? Please only provide as much detail as you feel comfortable providing.

Anxiety can have many meanings and will resonate with individuals differently based on their interpretations of the term. For the purpose of this question, ‘anxiety’ refers to the anxiety that people experience in response to other’s evaluations of their physiques. Circle the answer that applies to you most of the time.

27) When I am in the change room shower, I feel

- a. Highly anxious
- b. Somewhat anxious
- c. Not very anxious
- d. Not anxious at all
- e. I do not use the change room showers

Comfort can be taken to mean something different to everyone. For the purpose of this study, comfort will refer to ‘fitting in’ without being negatively judged by others.

28) How often do you participate in yoga?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week

- c. 1-2 times per week
- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

29) If you were to participate in yoga tomorrow, how would you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

30) How often do you participate in Pilates?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week
- c. 1-2 times per week
- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

31) If you were to participate in a Pilates tomorrow, how could you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

32) How often do you participate in Zumba?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week
- c. 1-2 times per week
- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

33) If you were to participate in Zumba tomorrow, how would you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

34) How often do you use cardiovascular machines?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week
- c. 1-2 times per week

- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

35) If you were to use cardiovascular machines tomorrow, how would you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

36) How often do you participate in weight training (including, but not limited to, the use of weight machines, barbells, and dumbbells)?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week
- c. 1-2 times per week
- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

37) If you were to participate in weight training tomorrow, how would you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

38) How often do you participate in Calisthenics (gymnastics exercises and/or body weight movement only)?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week
- c. 1-2 times per week
- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

39) If you were to participate in Calisthenics, how would you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

40) How often do you participate in other aerobics/strength training classes?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a week

- c. 1-2 times per week
- d. 3-4 times per week
- e. 5+ times per week

41) If you were to participate in aerobics/strength training tomorrow, how would you expect to feel?

- a. Very comfortable
- b. Somewhat comfortable
- c. Somewhat uncomfortable
- d. Very uncomfortable

42) What goals do you hope to achieve through your weekly regime? Circle all that apply.

- a. Fat loss
- b. Gain muscle
- c. Improve strength
- d. Improve cardiovascular health
- e. Stress relief and/or improve mental health
- f. Other. Please specify _____.

43) How do you feel about women engaging in Pilates, Yoga, or Cardiovascular Activities?

- a. I very much support it
- b. I somewhat support it
- c. I am neither for nor against it
- d. I am somewhat against it
- e. I am very much against it

44) How do you feel about women engaging in strength training exercises?

- a. I very much support it
- b. I somewhat support it
- c. I am neither for nor against it
- d. I am somewhat against it
- e. I am very much against it

45) How do you feel about men engaging in Pilates, Yoga, or Cardiovascular Activities?

- a. I very much support it
- b. I somewhat support it
- c. I am neither for nor against it
- d. I am somewhat against it
- e. I am very much against it

46) How do you feel about men engaging in strength training exercises?

- a. I very much support it
- b. I somewhat support it
- c. I am neither for nor against it
- d. I am somewhat against it
- e. I am very much against it

47) Have you ever been criticized by friends and/or family in regards to how you work out?

- a. No, my family and friends have never criticized the way I workout.
- b. If yes, please explain in as much detail as you are comfortable providing.

48) At the gym, I feel most comfortable when...

- a. When the gym is busy
- b. When the gym is not busy

49) At the gym, I feel most comfortable when...

- a. When others of the same gender are around
- b. When others of the opposite gender are around
- c. When others of both genders are around

50) At the gym, I feel most comfortable when...

- a. When I am alone
- b. When I am with a friend(s)

51) Have you ever been approached at the gym by someone who offers advice or help on proper form of an exercise you are doing?

- a. Yes – usually by a woman
- b. Yes – usually by a man
- c. Yes – by both women and men
- d. No, this has never happened to me.

52) Overall, I feel comfortable in the gym.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

53) What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in the gym?

54) What are some strategies, if any, that you use to feel more comfortable in the gym?

- a. I don't feel the need to use strategies because I feel comfortable in the gym.
- b. Attend at a specific time. Please explain
- c. Train in certain areas of the gym. Please explain
- d. Other. Please specify.

55) What are some suggestions you might have to improve one's overall comfort level at the gym?

- a. None, the environment at the gym is very comfortable.
- b. I would improve...

Appendix E



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