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**Women's Embodied Experiences of Fitness: An  
Ethnographic Study of Women Who Participate in a Mixed  
Gendered UK Gym.**

**by**

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**Thesis submitted**

**for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**2018**

## **Abstract**

Although female sporting bodies have been theorised through a range of ‘feminist prisms’ most explorations have been undertaken using approaches that focus on discursive cultural practices, rather than attempt to accommodate corporeal ways of being. Consequently, there remains a paucity of empirical research that allows the embodied realities that women experience to be captured and then interpreted in the light of current knowledge about the body.

Bearing this in mind, the thesis seeks to ‘enflesh’ the sensuous, embodied realities that women experience through their bodies in a range of fitness cultures. A four year ethnographic study was conducted in a mixed gendered gym in the South-East of England. In conjunction with an ethnographic approach, an interpretation of feminist phenomenology was included in order to analyse the structural, cultural and historically located nature of gendered embodiment, and reveal the corporeal and ‘fleshy’ aspects of both the researcher and the participants whilst immersed in the gym.

Findings suggest that female gym users shape understandings of their embodied selves through their experiences in the specific gym spaces they engage in as well as the broader social constructions of the gendered body. Furthermore, insights are provided into the variety of pleasurable aspects that emanate whilst exercising, the complex ways in which gender is performed (particularly through the body), and the distinct gazes (of other participants) identified in the gym. Lastly, revelations of how the women negotiate sexism and banter within the gym environment are also highlighted. Reflections from the overall findings elucidate how unique embodied experiences are created, and demonstrate how the women’s experiences are entwined through particular spatial and temporal aspects that have varying degrees of impact upon how the women ultimately experience their own bodies and fitness cultures.

## List of Publications

The following publications are associated with this thesis:

- Clark, A. (2018) 'I found that joking back actually made me not on edge, and I didn't feel threatened': Women's embodied experiences of sexist humour (banter) in a UK gym', *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 6(1), pp. 15-29. URL: [http://ijgws.com/journals/ijgws/Vol\\_6\\_No\\_1\\_June\\_2018/2.pdf](http://ijgws.com/journals/ijgws/Vol_6_No_1_June_2018/2.pdf)
- Clark, A. (2018) 'Exploring Women's Embodied Experiences of 'the gaze' in a Mix-Gendered UK Gym', *Societies*, 8(2), p.1-19. doi: 10.3390/soc8010002

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all, my sincere gratitude goes out to my supervisors Dr Ian Wellard and Dr James Brighton - your generosity, expertise, kindness and support have made this thesis possible; thank you both for believing in me, and for the time you have given. I would also like to thank Dr Dikaia Chatziefstathiou for your assistance and advice. Thanks to Dr Damian Coleman and the Sport and Exercise Science team at Canterbury Christ Church University, you have all helped me in various ways and enabled me to have some incredible experiences along the way. Thank you to all of the women who gave up their time for me to talk to them, I appreciate all of you. A big thank you to Mum and Derek for your endless support and love – I could not have done this without you. Finally, I would like to thank Vincent; your ‘purrfect’ companionship is greatly missed and I will forever save a space on my desk for you, Lenny and Stanley have since kept me on my toes!

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## ***Chapter One***

### **Introduction**

My hands are throbbing, blistered and raw. The overpowering smell of sudocrem provides a light relief to the sting. I put my hand guards on cautiously whilst tutting, 'these are not going to help at all today'. I've got a three hour training session on the uneven bars and beam. I hate these two apparatus, I'm getting too tall. I wish I could be doing floor and vault today instead. I drench my hand guards in water and chalk - I really need some grip today, the grinding sound of the chalk rubbing against the hand guard makes me cringe. Clapping the excess chalk off and grimacing at the pain, I adjust my leotard and get ready to start on the lower bar. Springing into action my hands curve around the wooden bar. The rhythm and flow of my body enables me to disregard the pain in my hands, I feel weightless and invincible. 'WHACKKK', transitioning to the higher bar I've smacked my feet on the lower one. My toes curl in pain, fighting back the tears in the midst of dismounting, I land on the mat and ensure my feet are firmly on the ground. 'Keep your feet apart and straight - GO AGAIN AMY!' my coach shouts at me from the other end of the bar space, she's been watching me from afar. Quickly wiping the tears away, I stand frustrated at the chalk bowl - I'm ready to go again until my actions are more graceful and perfect. 'Right girls line up, smallest to tallest! Big Amy that means you're on the end as usual!' Retreating to the end of the orderly queue, I put my feet in first position and relish the thought of a hot antiseptic bath - I just need to get through the beam exercises now! (Gymnastics reflection).

'She's on our team by the way, not yours!' Chomping down a granny smiths apple as quickly as I can, I change into my plimsolls and head to where the boys are playing football. I always get told off when I batter my school shoes, so I must remember to change my footwear! We only have a short break and I want my team to win! Picking the correct hand with a stone in, we get to choose which way we are shooting first. The sun is beaming and the vividness of the green field bounces in the light, the smell of summer fills the air. As the kick off begins, I pick out a boy to defend - I may be skinny but I'm a fast runner, I can show these boys up! Although I still do gymnastics outside of school, I play football at the park with my older brother. He has been showing me some tips and tricks! I get the ball passed to me, this is my time to shine. My breathing is controlled and I can see the goal ahead. I nutmeg the boy who is defending me, my team roar with laughter and I score a goal. Filled with pride I lift my top up over my head

like the other boys do in celebration – exposing my white vest that my mum has tucked tightly into my underwear before the start of school. From every angle the boys jump on me and celebrate. The rush of adrenaline pulses through my body, just as we are ready to go again, I hear the whistle blow signalling the end of break time. We gather our belongings and greatly anticipate a rematch at lunchtime ... (Primary school reflection)

My face slams against the cold hard painted breeze block, I feel its coolness emanate on my cheek, then the burn hits. My hands are forced behind my back. The smell of the damp concrete and sweat from the changing rooms floats into my nostrils. I can hear the plumbing of the showers making its way through the walls. I'm cornered, there must be at least four girls around me. 'You lanky boffin! Quick check her bra size, this bitch has big boobs, considering she's so skinny I wanna know her size, she must have tissue down there'. My hands are forced apart. I remain silent, annoyed at my cowardice for not standing up for myself - again. As my shirt is ripped up, I feel a scratch deepen in my back, my bra is pulled from behind me and tightens around my chest. 'I've stopped gymnastics now, I'm starting to grow quicker – why can't they just leave me be?' I hear laughter from behind me and my hands are released, of course with a rough tug on my ponytail too. Pulling myself together and adjusting my PE kit, I turn around to see the usual group of girls walking smugly out of the changing rooms. I had only come in for a quick drink. Gathering myself I walk out onto the playground and continue to the netball court – sports is the only thing they can't stop me from doing ... (Secondary School reflection).

The excitement in the air is palpable. I get onto the coach and chuck my bag onto the seat next to me. We are running late so we have to change into our netball dresses before we get off to play the match. 'Driver can you put some tunes on please!' One of the girls turns the volume up and we start to chant and share stories as the coach takes us to our destination 'C4, C4, C4!' I'm feeling confident, my early morning latte is starting to kick in and the caffeine is rushing through my veins. There are bodies everywhere on the coach, some are tightening their bra straps, and others are fighting with their netball socks and trainers. I have had to change in front of these girls numerous times, the care-free vibe in the changing room is very different from what I've been used to. I stand up and confidently strip off my top. Feeling slightly vulnerable with just my sports bra and shorts on, I try and hurry to put my netball dress on but I get stuck. 'Twitt twooo, go on Clark, you should get those out more often, I'd love to have body like yours!' My team mate helps me pull my dress down, I awkwardly smile and proceed to

help her out with her dress. Inside I'm feeling quite satisfied! (University reflection).

'What have we said about wearing big panties?' The hairs on the back of my neck tingle as his warm breath reaches my ear. The sensation of his unwanted hand covering the surface of my skin as he rubs my bum. Reluctantly, I look around to see who has violated my personal boundaries and projected their body on to mine. He stands close, sweaty and ominous in the middle of his work out. I'm outnumbered here, I'm the only female in the weights area. Mustering all the confidence to project my disgust, I glare at him, 'what have we said about being an asshole and touching people without their permission ...' my heart was pulsating, my breath was short. Wondering what may happen next, I stood firm and held my ground. His mouth curved into a faint smile and an arrogant chortle came out. He turned around and continued with his work out. Needless to say, I could still feel his hand where he had rubbed my bottom long after the incident occurred (Gym reflection)

## **1. Introduction**

The reflections above are included because they are the memorable moments that stand out for me whilst I attempt to reflect back upon my experiences of sport and physical activity throughout my life. Contemplative of these, they are significant because they offer ways for me to help understand the relationship(s) I have developed with my body, more specifically, my sporting body.

The reflections demonstrate the complex relationship that I developed with sport and physical activity. They show that this is not necessarily straight-forward, and an array of emotions are generated when thinking about these. It is evident that sport was not always enjoyable, and amongst my experiences I was made to feel like an outsider at times. Nevertheless, the enjoyment and exhilaration outweighed the negatives, and I maintained a love for physical activity and sport that I still embody to this day.

It is noticeable that while the epochal moments I recall describe aspects of pleasure, accomplishment, pride and exhilaration, there are also experiences of pain, harassment and humiliation. It could be suggested that the negative aspects may

have prompted me to stop my engagement, but they did not. What was it that kept me participating? How was I able to negotiate these situations? How would (or do) other women react to negative experiences?

I acknowledge that the reflections may be considered as subjective personal recollections, they do however suggest that there are many factors that operate upon the way women can develop understandings of their bodies, and as one that can move in sporting spaces. Consequently, questions arise surrounding the extent to which other women have shaped and formed relationships with their own bodies by their own 'significant' experiences throughout their lives – and what do these look like? Indeed, my recollections of being bullied by other girls at school reveal the complex ways in which gender is played out, and which may not be fully explained by simplistic gender binaries. Therefore, the dynamics of how women may (or may not) participate in physical activity pursuits requires a more nuanced exploration of the broader embodied dimensions at play.

The reflections have enabled me to develop a focus for this thesis, and have shaped the pathway of this research. The complex and competing explanations that may be offered to understand these experiences in context suggest that a broader embodied approach to this research is important. Bodies and gender appeared to be central towards my efforts in understanding the world and participating within it. Therefore, the questions that have helped me to organise my thinking can be considered as follows:

- Did my personal history shape my orientation to sport in similar or different ways to other women?
- Are my experiences similar to other women who participate in gym and fitness activities?
- To what extent are embodied practices and experiences important to other women?

I acknowledge that whilst these questions and reflections influence my ontological position in this thesis; it is also important to acknowledge and consider the competing theoretical expectations that are offered in relation to women who participate (or do not) in sport and physical activity. As such, a description of the contextual, theoretical and methodological background is given to clarify the

research topic and its direction. The study's objectives and theoretical framework are then described, which is then followed by an outline of the thesis, and finally, an overall summarisation of thoughts.

## **2. Research purpose and questions:**

This thesis explores the corporeal experiences of thirteen women who regularly participate in the same public gym, and how this gives meaning to their embodied, personal, social and gendered lives. As indicated in the reflections of my own experiences above, the research is influenced by my reality as a white, middle-class, able-bodied sports woman. Informed by my own prior submergence in sports, gym and fitness cultures, and the profound influence it has had on the relationships I have formed with my body and other bodies. Consequently, this thesis takes a self-reflexive, empirically driven, inductive approach to explore other women's experiences of using a contemporary gym, and how they experience their own bodies. Whilst I identified certain experiences in and out of the gym relating to my own life, and the relationships that I have shaped and formed with my own body, I wanted to delve further into how other women experience their bodies, and whether I could additionally relate in some way to these.

Taking into consideration the above, the following research questions were developed in order to guide (but not restrict) these explorations:

- ↔ What are the lived embodied experiences that women negotiate within a fitness environment?

Several theoretical approaches will be considered that help to illuminate the importance of the sentient, embodied, lived, and enfolded realities of women's exercising bodies. Additionally, to enable further focus and definition to the above question, the following sub-questions were identified:

- ↔ How can the women's descriptions of their gym experiences be interpreted?
- ↔ How do these embodied experiences affect their participation in the gym, and throughout their everyday lives?

The emphasis on individual experience is the reason for the first sub-question - since this study applies a great emphasis upon experience from women's perspectives and listening to the ways in which they interpret and understand their embodied selves. The second sub-question then guides this research to a further exploration into the commonalities that exist between women's experiences of the gym. Both research questions allowed for a detailed description into uncovering and exploring women's gym experiences, and enabled the identification and presentation of the embodied influences that shape women's experiences. Furthermore, these questions allowed me to reflect upon my own experiences and explore my corporeality in relation to the other women. Additionally, by addressing these questions it allows an in-depth view into the unique embodied realities that they experience within the gym.

### **3. Early recognition of feminist phenomenology:**

In order to address the research questions stated above, an appropriate approach that incorporated both experience and gender was considered necessary. Feminist phenomenology provides a useful starting point for this specific research. However, it also acknowledged that while feminist phenomenology is associated with traditional phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2010), the research also focuses upon the social-structural position of women in a patriarchal system of gender relations, where women as a social group are systematically disadvantaged in relation to men as a social group. Phenomenologists who work from a feminist perspective acknowledge and analyse the structurally, culturally and historically located nature of gendered embodiment (Allen-Collinson, 2010, 2011). A more detailed explanation of feminist phenomenology and how it links with this thesis is provided in chapters one and four. For the purpose of introducing the methodology, an embodied approach was utilised, in that the body is central to lived experience in order to reveal corporeal and 'fleshy' aspect of the female's experiences within this research.

It is worth noting here that although feminist phenomenology is incorporated in this research as the main theoretical approach; because of the inductive and empirical nature, alternative theoretical positions which incorporated and provided a suitable approach for analysing the corporeal aspects of the lived body are also acknowledged and explored further where appropriate.

#### **4. Thesis outline:**

Chapter two situates my thesis in relation to the key literature and can be best described as a sociology of the body, and more specifically, a body that is gendered. Following this, chapter three provides an overview of the substantive literature surrounding the history of fitness gyms, and how the female body has been considered in this social space. In this section, I detail the feminist phenomenological studies that are most relevant in providing direction and application for this research. It is worth highlighting here again that the inductive and empirical nature of this research does call in to question the specific location of this research within traditional feminist phenomenology, and the theories that emerged within the findings chapters are explained and discussed in greater detail in order to acknowledge the importance of these in relation to the empirical findings. Chapter four then describes the methodological strategies adopted and how the data within this thesis were selected and analysed. This chapter includes a description of the theories surrounding space, and the reinforcement of this to further justify my epistemological and ontological positions in this research which link to the research location described.

Chapter five provides the first discussion chapter presented in this thesis, and directs the discussion to a more detailed and informal structure in comparison to the previous literature and methodological chapters. It focuses on the embodied experiences within the spinning room of myself and the other women in this research. Focus on the spinning space of the gym allows insights into my immersion as a spinning instructor throughout the research process. It also introduces how in the early stages of my analysis by reflexively highlighting the lived experiences within the spin room I personally recognised as an important process for providing a thematic analysis for the remaining chapters. This chapter details my own experiences instructing and participating in spinning, whilst interview extracts from the women who participate in this research breathe further life into my findings, and support my subsequent theoretical positions and findings.

Chapter six reveals the early influences and explanations by the women in the study for exercising and beginning gym life. Highlighting particular discourses that provided significant memories for the female exercisers, this chapter discusses the early motivations for exercising in the gym spaces, and the influences on their continued participation over time. Reflections are provided that illuminate how early experiences of exercise participation

and pressures on women to conform to dominant notions of the 'feminine' body are imposed by structural, cultural, historical and localised forces in ways that affect and shape future physical activity participation and the gym spaces where these tensions are played out.

Chapter seven illuminates the embodied pleasures that are experienced within differing spaces within the gym. Reflections are provided that suggest that attuning to the euphoric feelings experienced by the exercising body, holds a potential in transgressing mind/body dualisms and liberation from dominant discourses that can be imposed on female exercisers in a variety of gym spaces.

Chapter eight delves into the experiences of embodying and interpreting different gazes and stares that are acknowledged within gym spaces. Discussion is provided on how the gym can be identified as a sexually objectifying environment, and the numerous aspects that can be applied to this which can potentially be experienced within the gym. Further analysis is provided surrounding how women make sense and interpret specific 'gazes' encountered within the gym from both men and women.

Chapter nine, as the final discussion chapter of this thesis, delves into the dichotomous nature of humour, and how within the gym environment certain language and behaviour is considered as 'sexist humour'. This chapter aims to explore the tensions surrounding sexist humour (and banter) within differing gym spaces, and explores whether specific spaces within the gym heighten this 'sexist humour', and how the female exercisers cope with and negotiate these experiences.

Chapter ten provides an opportunity to reflect upon the arguments developed throughout. This chapter recognises and evaluates the central methodological and theoretical issues that have been explored in the previous chapters. Furthermore, this chapter explains the significance of the findings and the contribution towards existing literature surrounding gendered bodies, lived experience and feminist phenomenology that are acknowledged within this thesis.

## **5. Summary:**

This chapter began by incorporating epochal moments that capture my early physical activity experiences, and gym experience whilst being involved within this research process. By acknowledging these I have demonstrated how these experiences formed and shaped the relationship with my body, and knowledge about a body but one both physical and social. By

doing so, this enabled me to contextualise the stated research questions, and subsequently question whether my own experiences may align with the other women exercisers, and whether these may be similar or different.

Moreover, within this chapter I have provided a justification of the feminist phenomenological framework that is utilised within this research. Nevertheless, I have also stated that in addition to this framework, alternative theoretical positions are incorporated throughout this research because of the inductive, empirical nature, and also so I am open to capturing in more depth the women's experiences. Finally, this chapter finishes with an outline of this thesis. This section presents a summary of what each chapter encompasses so that an overview of the whole thesis can be addressed and initially acknowledged.

The purpose of the literature review within the next chapter is to highlight, explain, and make sense of the key sociological theoretical perspectives and lenses most suited to this research.

## ***Chapter Two***

### **Theorising the Body**

‘A theoretical perspective is the social world being ‘seen’ through a lens, with one that makes theorising, making sense and explaining what is going on, possible’ (Abbott, Tyler and Wallace, 1990, p. 23). This literature review firstly acknowledges the different theoretical lenses in relation to how the body has historically been identified and theorised within sociology through traditionally ‘masculine’ epistemological and ontological perspectives. An explanation and justification as to why these perspectives do not fully acknowledge the experience of the female body within this research is incorporated. Consequently, embodied approaches are explored, with the inclusion of feminist theory and feminist phenomenology. A discussion surrounding why these lenses are most suited to acknowledging, explaining and making sense of the embodied experiences of the female body, and challenge previous epistemological and ontological perspectives is then addressed. Finally, I summarise my thoughts and identify the gaps within the current literature to acknowledge where this research fits in.

#### **1. The Body and Classical Sociology:**

As I mentioned in chapter one, feminist phenomenology draws upon the theoretical concepts developed in phenomenology. Likewise, phenomenology can be seen to have emerged from the earlier works of classical sociology and philosophy. Consequently, it is worth briefly discussing the key ideas of the founding ‘fathers’ of sociology – which not only reveals a knowledge trajectory, but also helps in our understanding of a later need for greater acknowledgement of women in this knowledge making process.

Classical sociology has barely concentrated on the body; its concerns surrounding the structure and functioning of societies, and the disposition of human action has unavoidably led to aspects of human embodiment being dealt with, although certain aspects have tended to be focused on selectively. Classical sociology nevertheless, has not handled the full associations of human embodiment adequately, although there has been a presence and interest of the body displayed in much recent work, which has been drawn efficiently from the legacy of classical sociology (Shilling, 1993).

## 1.1 Structuralism and the Body

Structuralism can be seen as a significant contributor to what is understood as classical sociology. The structures and formation of society were the main focus for this theoretical approach. One of the key influences upon sociological thought is Karl Marx. Marx's main focus was with the condition of the working classes, and the detrimental consequences of a division of labour that deformed the bodies of workers (Marx, 1973). In this case, the workers were a collective body, in its entirety as a subject of investigation. Bodies that belonged to conflicting classes were in an unequal power relationship between the elite (bourgeoisie) and the manual workers (proletariat) to maintain a relationship of need, where the elite needed the capital by employing the workers who needed to earn a living through paid employment (Marx, 1973).

Marx's understanding of the body was influenced by the notion of physical labour, one that was exploited by the bourgeoisie. However, he did recognise the importance of the individual, particularly in terms of consciousness where the body could become 'alienated'. Here, corporeal alienation consists of a loss of personal control, whereby for example, the ownership of a body under patriarchy and slavery is hindered by political and legal systems of control. Therefore, the agents' experience their bodies as objects, and these are ruled externally (Turner, 2008).

It has been noted that human agency became assimilated with consciousness and the mind, rather than with embodiment as a whole. The body was seen as a less relevant condition of social action, and the mind served rather as a receptor and organiser of images concerned within and deriving from social stratification (Shilling, 2012). This is evident in Marx's focus on an ideology, where false consciousness (proletariat and other class actors are misled within a capitalist society) and reification (objectification) are produced.

While Marx's theory has been critiqued for its emphasis upon the power relationship between two opposing class categories, later sociological theory has attempted to incorporate broader complexities of power relationships while maintaining the relevance of class. Pierre Bourdieu's research is viewed as a dominant paradigm to acknowledge the sociology of the body. Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction focuses on how the body is a socially shaped generator of social class divisions; his conceptual scheme reflects a Marxian concern surrounding social class and reproduction, where hierarchies of class are still maintained, but in a more complex way. (Shilling, 2003, 2012). For Bourdieu, the body is an

incomplete entity that cultivates through life in combination with social forces. Bourdieu (1984) specifically argues that bodies bear an imprint of class due to three main interrelated factors: *social location*, referring to the class-based geographical and other aspects that contextualise people's lives and add to their development of their bodies (Bourdieu, 1985). *Taste* (distinction), referring to a set of acquired tastes which are associated with the upper classes, which has become naturalised generally as good and noble - for example, a taste for a fine wine and classical music are markers of a good distinction. Furthermore, *Habitus* is a concept which asserts the way individuals 'become themselves', develop dispositions and attitudes, and also develop ways in which they engage within practices (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). For example, engaging within a gym environment rather than being in a class, allows for bodywork (or gives the impression) where one can gather capital and then move up the social ladder.

Bourdieu examines the numerous ways embodied subjects have become commodified and embedded within intransigent social hierarchies, by the identification of the body as a form of physical capital; an occupant of power, status and distinctive symbolic forms essential to the gathering of resources (Shilling, 2012). The physical capital production refers to the development of the bodies in ways that are recognised as holding value in social fields, while the alteration of physical capital refers to the translation of bodily participation in leisure, work, and other areas of contrasting resources.

Physical capital is usually reformed into economic capital (goods, money, and services), cultural capital (e.g. education) and social capital (social networks enabling reciprocal calls to make on goods and services of its members) (Bourdieu, 1978, 1984, 1986). Contrasting social classes and class fractions tend to establish noticeable orientations to their bodies, to the technologies and technological devices that are used to embellish and supplement bodies, and to the working body in general; resulting in the formation of contrasting forms of embodiment (Bourdieu, 2000).

Bourdieu's main focus on the habitus functioning as a bearer of class-dependant external structures of cultural codes imposes a limitation on his work, there is also little room in Bourdieu's work for a phenomenological understanding of the 'lived body' (Turner, 1992), especially when accounting for human experience which transcends the irreverent parameters of economic interest. Despite the variety of groups that make up a class (or class fraction); Bourdieu's approach to social class additionally makes it difficult to identify

characteristics surrounding gender oppression which influence directions to the body, and challenge women to some extent across class categories (Walby, 1982a). Shusterman (2002, p. 221) claims that 'no sympathetic attention is given to the phenomenological dimension of lived experience, its power of meaningful, qualitative immediacy, and its potential for the transformation of attitudes and habits'. It is here that the class based central premise causes too many problems.

## **1.2 Post-Structuralism and the Body:**

While Bourdieu attempted to maintain a focus upon the centrality of class, other theorists sought ways to explain power relationships through mechanisms that did not rely on the notion of dominance by a specific class. Foucault, in his attempt to explain power as arbitrary and in constant flux helped extend thinking about the body in more complex forms. However, Foucault's interpretation of the body was one that was subject to discourses of knowledge, that were not aligned to a specific social marker (such as social class), but operated within arbitrary and constantly changing knowledge formation. These were ultimately the main concerns of Foucault and subsequent post-structuralist theorists (Shilling, 2003).

It has been suggested that Michel Foucault has done more than any other contemporary social theorist in directing attention to the body (Davies, 1997). For Foucault, the epistemological view is that body is not only given context by discourse, but is comprised by discourse as a whole (Shilling, 2003). Discourse is aligned with language and refers to an overlapping set of principles which incorporate specific areas of meaning that underpin, establish and generate relations between everything that can be seen, said and thought, in discourse, power and knowledge are combined (Foucault, 1974; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Poster, 1984; Markula and Pringle, 2006). Foucault regarded power as a 'series of relations within which an individual interacts with others' (Markula and Pringle, 2006, p. 138) and suggested that discourses also form the link between daily practices and the organisation and exercise of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982).

Furthermore, Foucault (1983, p. 208) focused on 'three modes of objectification': scientific classification, dividing practices, and subjectivation, which are all related to 'certain attitudes' that are associated and processed with the social construction and modification of humans (Foucault, 1986, p. 18). Scientific classification and dividing practices are mainly

concerned with how people are disciplined, classified and normalised by social processes, which they have little control over. Subjectivation refers to how an individual achieves an identity with power relations, which both 'subjugate' and 'make subject to' (Foucault, 1983, p. 212). This is a twofold process: firstly, the individual is made to be a subject to someone else due to control and dependence, and secondly, it links her/him in her/his own identity through self-knowledge or conscience. These are referred to by Foucault (1988b, p. 10) as 'technologies of power', which can be defined as social practices 'that determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination'.

In his later work, Foucault explored the slow formation of self-experience, and how delved into how individuals began to understand themselves as subjects within power relations (Markula and Pringle, 2006). He believed 'that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty ... on the basis of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment' (Foucault, 1988a, pp. 50-51). The subject was understood as a 'form', rather than a fixed substance, which can be altered under numerous cultural conditions. Suitably, it can be possible for an individual to have the choice of transforming her/his identity by engaging in a process Foucault labelled as 'technologies of the self' - Foucault suggests that they:

Permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18).

The verb 'transform' is often interpreted to suggest that the 'technologies of the self' appear in 'resistant' practices which an individual utilises to change dominant discourses. However, it is not indicated that engaging in technologies of the self necessarily leads to a transformation of power relations (Markula and Pringle, 2006).

It is also important to acknowledge Foucault's concepts of panopticism and bio-power. Foucault summarised that a representative of 'panopticon' was 'the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal' (Foucault, 1991, p. 199-200). On a broader scale it can also be referred to as a 'political anatomy', where mechanisms of surveillance and discipline are no longer locked

within specific buildings or institutions, they 'function on a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body' (Foucault, 1991, p. 208-209).

Foucault argued that bio-power is similar to disciplinary power. Bio-power, as a technology of power, manages people within large groups; its unique quality is that it allows for the control of entire populations, and is intimately linked to the development of capitalism (Markula and Pringle, 2006). Bio-power analyses, controls, regulates, defines and explains the human subject, its behaviour and body (Schirato *et al.* 2012). It refers to the control of human bodies through state disciplines, which are originally imposed from the outside. These therefore become internalised within human subjects, as they gradually accept to subtle regulations and expectations. Bio-power is literally having power over bodies; it is 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations' (Foucault, 1976a, p. 140). This concept of power certainly needs a gender specific analysis, and within this; gender needs to be addressed as a technology of the body within its own right (King, 2004); 'a primary apparatus of scientific bio power that constructs the body as an intelligible object' (Balsamo, 1996, p. 22)

Taking into consideration the above, the epistemology adopted within Foucault's research can be seen as disembodied; the body is present within his research as a topic, but is absent as the focus of investigation. The body disappears as a biological entity and instead becomes a socially constructed product that is highly unstable and infinitely malleable. Once the body is incorporated within modern disciplinary systems, the mind becomes the area for discursive power while the flesh is reduced to inert passivity (Shilling, 2012). Foucault directed attention to how social practises are inscribed in the human body merely as a passive object (Turner, 2012). 'Nothing in man, not even his body, is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for-self recognition or for understanding other men' (Foucault, 1977, p.153). Turner (1984) states that although interrogations of pleasure and desire are acknowledged, Foucault ignores the *phenomenology* of embodiment: the 'immediacy of personal sensuous experience of embodiment which is involved in the notion of my body receives scant attention ... in favour of an emphasis on the regulatory controls ... exercised from outside' (Turner, 1984, p. 245).

Although the body is affected by discourse, we receive a little sense of the body reacting back, and how this affects discourse (Shilling, 2012). Foucault's analysis attempted to show that the body was a contingent effect of power rather than a given fact of nature, ruling out the attention on the lived experiences of the body (Turner, 2012). Additionally,

Foucault failed to recognise the significance of gender within the aspects of power, despite the obvious relevance of his material (King, 2004). As Bartky (1988, p. 63) notes 'treat(ing) the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life'. Foucault suggests that women as well as men, are subject to produce the same disciplinary practices; but he ignores the disciplines that make modalities of embodiment that are strangely feminine (Bartky, 1998).

At this point, it is relevant to note that the 'founding fathers' of sociology (in this case Foucault, Marx and Bourdieu) and the theoretical perspectives used for acknowledging the body, were all embodied as men. The founding of sociology was not only a social project, but an epistemological one too, and men carried these out. The risks of pregnancy, infant mortality and the number of women who died at childbirth throughout this specific time of research surrounding the body, might have been reflected through a greater consideration of the body, if the researchers had been women, or had the theoretical 'tools' to be aware of and empathise with such different forms of embodied knowledge/experience (Shilling, 2012).

## **2. Queer and Feminist Theory:**

Whilst the above highlights how the body has historically been identified and theorised within sociology through traditionally 'masculine' epistemological and ontological perspectives; the following sections now focus and acknowledge theoretical positions and lenses that have made a notable impact on researching and highlighting specifically the female body and embodiment.

Judith Butler (1988; 1993) a post-feminist theorist of the body, has been highly influential in distinguishing the difference between biological bodies and socially constructed gender divergence. Butler considers the ways in which gender is assumed and applied within feminist theory (Brady and Schirato, 2011). Butler argues that the distinction between male and female bodies is itself entirely random, and is an artefact of a social order organised by normative heterosexuality. Women are neither born, nor made; they appropriate the cultural prescriptions on sex. Just as there are myriad forms of 'gender', there are also different 'sexes'. Individuals enact sex through the body and often in compliance with heterosexual norms, sometimes these norms are disrupted, consequently causing 'gender trouble' (Davies, 1997). Butler also criticises the idea of masculinity and femininity as cultural *expressions* of a

corporeal fact, namely the male and female body, and instead proposes the view of gender as a *performative* one. The notion of gender is developed as a performative act using the phenomenological theory in which the acts are how social agents constitute social reality, the idea of gender as an 'act' makes it possible to examine how individuals live their bodies and constitute gender in the process (Butler, 1990).

Furthermore, Butler has also embraced queer theory as a radical perspective of rethinking feminist theory surrounding the body, and created alternative developments surrounding the politics of the body (Davies, 1997). This constructed a way of celebrating a politics of creative subversion, without reversing to identity politics or the approaches surrounding rebellion belonging to the body/politics in the 1970s. The body takes a central role in its transgressive aesthetic performance and display, whilst the feminist body politics entails experimentation, such as the crossing of boundaries and an ongoing decision to shock and unsettle (Davies, 1997). Some feminist scholars have argued that this new form of transgression is a rebellion without content, and a self-conscious posturing which lacks moral sense. However queer theory remains a powerful quest to take subversion through the body seriously, and explore the possibilities for an alternative body politics. Wilson (1993, p. 116) suggests 'it is not transgression that should be our watchword, but transformation'.

In addition, it has been suggested that Butler acknowledges the importance of the body, but overlooks the corporeal aspects (nitty-gritty elements of the 'lived' body) which ultimately influence the way an individual develops a sense of his or her own identity (Wellard, 2009). Moreover, the gendered body as a performative act also suggests that it has no personal status apart from the various 'acts' which create its reality.

## **2.1 The Body and Feminist Lenses:**

Within sports, the woman and the sporting body has been studied from many theoretical angles, including a range of 'feminist prisms' (e.g. Hall, 1996; Wearing, 1998), feminist analyses (Hargreaves, 2007; Lowe, 1998; Markula, 2003b) and gender sensitive lenses (e.g. Aoki, 1996; McKay, 1994; Woodward, 2008).

Research is often considered 'feminine' when grounded in a set of theoretical traditions that privilege woman's issues, voices, and lived experiences (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014). Feminism is a worldview and a theory; however, it is not a consolidated one as feminists do not agree on the specific ways in which women's subordination can be

elucidated, or how a woman can be emancipated, let alone what actually establishes oppression (Abbott *et al.*, 1990).

Feminist theory focussing on the body provides a valuable corrective to the masculinist character of the 'new' body theory, through the acknowledgment of difference, subversion, and domination as initial areas to understand the conditions and experiences of embodiment in contemporary culture. Bodies are simply not abstracts, they are however embedded in the immediacies of lived, everyday experiences (Davies, 1997). According to Davies (1997), feminist theory should be less concerned with accomplishing theoretical closure, and more concerned with examining the tensions that the body arouses. It should embrace, rather than avoid aspects of embodiment which disturb or fascinate us.

DeMello (2013) explains the issues surrounding embodiment, and suggests that we cannot understand biological organism without the understanding first the social, cultural, and historical context that they exist. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling explains for example, that even our biological components - bone, blood, organs, are constructed by complex relationships between biology, and the physical and social environment which we live in. The body has always been seen as a biological object, and typically, has been set aside from the mind or soul, which has generally been seen as a separate entity, subject to different laws. Referred to previously as the mind/body dualism, this was the typical way in which the body was viewed, as a physical being that is separate from, and inferior to the mind. Women have been long associated with being controlled by their bodies than men, who have historically been seen as beings that are more rational, i.e. men are more closely aligned with the mind, while women are more closely aligned with the body (DeMello, 2014).

Feminist theories emerging in the 1970s has successfully challenged this view, but until recently the body was only understood within the realm of biological inquiry. The female body represented all that needed to be disciplined and controlled by the (dis)embodied, objective, male scientists (Keller, 1985). The exploration of the relationship between the mind/body and gender dichotomy displayed the 'anti body bias', masked by the masculine fear of femininity, and the desire to keep the female body and unruliness which is presented at bay. Feminist theory took gender and power into account, thus providing a critique of modernist science with a distinctly political thrust, 'bringing the body back in' meant readdressing and addressing the 'fear of femininity' which had made science a disembodied affair in the first place (Davies, 1997). Feminists have challenged more or less every aspect of

'male concepts' and 'male reasoning' and have therefore produced a flourishing body of thought (Evans, 1995)

## **2.2 Leading feminist perspectives:**

As shown above, feminist and queer theory surrounding the body provides a valuable corrective to the previous masculine perspectives. Throughout this acknowledgement, there have also been various feminist perspectives that incorporate alternative views on the female body. There are three perspectives in feminist sociology that have been clearly distinguished since the early 1970s to the present day: Liberal, Marxist and Radical feminist sociology, there has also been a distinct postmodernist feminist sociology. Other theoretical positions in feminism could be a basis for sociological theory; however, it has been argued that these have not been developed into coherent sociological perspectives (Delamont, 2003).

Liberal, Marxist and Radical feminist sociology are all (relatively) long-standing perspectives, however they are all differentially grounded. Liberal feminists do not necessarily share any theory; however their common ground is a political belief in using research data to effect social reform and a faith in empirical research. Liberal feminist sociology is grounded in scholarship of a founding father. No requirement is needed for the theory to be woman-centered, or that research methods should be feminist. A variety of sociological theories can be used in liberal feminism to conduct research on anything. (Delamont, 2003; Hughes, 2002).

Marxist feminists assert that 'objectivity' is a class-based myth; the ideas of ruling class were proclaimed as objective and universal. For radical feminists, the myth of objectivity is a male one; men invented science in the seventeenth century, and invented objectivity to exclude women and valorise their own thoughts. Furthermore, Marxist feminists are united by their theoretical commitment to Marxism; they believe that the economic system drives aspects of everyday society (such as education) and that class inequalities are paramount. It has been noted more recently that men still maintain their positions at the top of employment hierarches, therefore feminist campaigns for equality have sought to break through the metaphorical glass ceiling that prevents women accessing higher. For Marxist feminists, the subjections and oppression of women and sexism as an ideology are all consequences of capitalist positons. Radical feminists share a foundational belief that sex inequality predates class inequality, and that patriarchy is the fundamental system of oppression (Evans, 1994; Delamont, 2003).

Hekman (1990) explains that postmodernism can be a theoretical perspective, and is a term that can be used to depict the era in which we live in. Postmodern feminism is an approach to feminist theory that assimilates postmodern and poststructuralist theory, this approach can be seen as moving beyond the modernist action of liberal feminism and radical feminism. It is believed to be impossible in this approach for a woman to posit either a single perspective, or a single true story of feminist reality. As liberal, Marxist and radical are all enlightenment epistemologies; they do not 'mix' with postmodernism due to postmodern critique abandoning the basis of these epistemologies. Delamont (2003) suggests that some writers have acknowledged the term 'poststructuralism' referring more to French theories, now these are more usually called 'postmodernism'.

### **2.3 The waves of feminism:**

Whilst the previous section highlights the leading perspectives in feminism and how these differentiate theoretically, it is important to address the history of feminism as a social movement, and the phases of feminist sociology (Hughes, 2002). Three evident waves of feminism have been acknowledged. However recently, a fourth wave of feminism has become apparent.

*First wave feminism (1848-1918):* focused on obtaining women's rights within public spheres, specifically the vote, education, and entry to middle class jobs. The views of these feminists, as expressed in public, were strictly about alcohol, sex, dress and behaviour. Feminists have argued that we are all born equal, therefore we should be treated as equals. Men had the right to vote, property rights, and access to education, so these initially became the focus of feminist campaigning (Delamont, 2003; Hughes, 2002). In an era where only males could study subjects such as algebra and physical sciences, the goal for feminists was to open these to females and prove women could also excel at them. A few feminists queried the epistemological status of the male knowledge base, this however was not a major preoccupation at the time, as women were forbidden to learn male knowledge. Consequently, it was necessary to gain access to it, to then show that women could engage and therefore successfully challenge it (Delamont, 1989, 1992).

*Second wave feminism (1918-1968):* was concerned from the start with the ways in which women's bodies were represented and, as images, consumed. Bodily differences and social effects are often linked through the idea of character dichotomy. Women are supposed

to have one set of traits – men another. Several feminist studies (e.g. de Beauvoir, 1972; Firestone, 1979; Wolf, 1990; Butler, 1990, 1993; Segal, 1997) have highlighted the problematic nature of masculinity and how certain forms of masculine performance have maintained their cultural dominance, bodies have agency and bodies are socially constructed.

Within second wave feminism, the body has always been important through its emphasis on abortion, domestic violence and reproductive rights. In gender studies, it appears to have been disapproved to directly tackle notions of bodies, gender and biological difference. This may be due to the awareness that bodies are politically symbolic areas in which ferocious ideological debates about natural male physical superiority and female inferiority are depicted (Cahn, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Kane, 1995, Messner, 1988). Physical differences were acknowledged in early second wave feminism, this was addressed through the understanding of gender as fully socially constructed, and debates were essentially dissipated regarding biology. It is valuable to note that feminist struggles over female bodies in sport and other cultural practices, have not always taken account of embodied differences between and within groups of women (Brah, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; 2000; Morgan and Scott, 1993; Scraton and Flintoff, 2002). However, feminists have repeatedly raised awareness about fighting for rights, medical intervention, sexual harassment, and domestic violence (Hall, 1996).

*Third wave feminism (1968- 2016/present):* according to Heywood and Drake (1997, p.7), 'is a member-driven multiracial, multicultural, multi-sexuality non-profit organisation devoted to feminist and youth activism for change. Our goal is to harness the energy of young women and men by creating a community in which members can network, strategize, and ultimately, take action. By using our experiences as a starting point, we can create a diverse community and cultivate a meaningful response'

The third wave of feminism builds upon the insights of the second wave, and is all-encompassing to individuals with distinct genders, sexualities, and nationalities. It still fights for equal access, pay and rights, however it also seeks to reconstruct structures that young people work in. The lived messiness is what defines the third wave: boys who want to be girls, girls who want to be boys, boys and girls who insist they are both, gay and straight, masculine and feminine and those who are finding ways to be, and none of the above (Heywood and Drake, 1997).

Third wave feminism, like the first and second wave, does not accept the old idea surrounding the separation of the mind and body, work from life, reason from emotion, it has also been suggested that academic work conducted within the third wave isn't 'real', because it is regarding life as a women. Third wave has also focused on challenging the epistemological basis, methods, and the content of 'mainstream' or 'malestream' knowledge, and has challenged the unity held suggesting that universal objective scientific truths can be achieved by scientific methods (Delamont, 1992). This wave combines insights from post-structuralism, postmodernism, multiracial feminism and queer theory, whilst acknowledging the social locations of individuals that are shaped by a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000). Although individuals contend with privilege and oppression, these manifest in different ways depending upon their intersecting location. Building upon the second wave politics of 'personal' issues, third wave feminists problematize the quality-of-life issues that women face in different social locations. Third wave also acknowledges that lived experience is contradictory, complex, and that one can be at cross-purposes. (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009). These contradictions must be politicised as part of continuous attempt to improve the quality of life and experience, and the third wave engages directly with these complications (Heywood and Drake, 1997).

Dworkin and Wachs (2009) suggest that third wave feminism should not be confused with the term post-feminism. Post-feminism is characterised by a group of young conservative feminists (post-feminists) who explicitly state that they are against and criticise feminists within the second wave (Heywood and Drake, 1997). Post-feminists believe that the feminist movement in the 1970s achieved its attainable goals, and therefore has vanished. Thus, claiming that the women 's movement received the rights to contraception, advances to equal pay and access to mortgage and pensions, that rape and domestic violence were put into the political agenda, therefore opened up many organisations and occupations for women (Delamont, 2003). Women in the 1990s expect this development, and therefore have no interest in campaigning for other goals such as wages for housework and day care. Such arguments have appeared within the media in the 1990s and feminists have produced responses (Coppock *et al.*, 1995), however there has not been a parallel sociological debate. No sociologists have claimed to have established a postfeminist sociology, therefore an intellectual debate central to feminist sociology can be termed 'postmodernism' (Delamont, 2003).

*Fourth Wave Feminism (emerging)*: Recently, Walby (2011b) suggests we are in the midst of a historically significant fourth wave of feminism. This alleged fourth wave is distinctive in a variety of ways. It is present specifically through social media, and less visible in the sense that activism is happening within certain organisations. The fourth wave appears as less of a social movement where individuals engage in protests against holders of organisational and institutionalised power, and instead, often practised inside of existing organisational situations, such as places of work. This feminist activity is in conjunction with a growing acknowledgment that perspectives on gender and equality needn't be framed exclusively from Western democratic perspectives (Munro, 2013).

Third wave feminism offers a critical theoretical foundation which goes beyond the limitations that come from an individual's location in a certain place, in a particular moment in history, and the experience created from this (Mohanty, 2003; Weedon, 2002). This is occurring within the context of persistent sex-based inequalities and gendered discrimination within organisations, this could be in the form of under representing women in professions or gender pay gaps. The fourth movement does not signify the end of feminism, but rather sets a new form of practices that generate renewed social and political discussions (Walby, 2011, Munro, 2013). Feminism has been brought back to prominence through information technologies, including online feminism activism. However, new challenges have been presented surrounding misogyny and the anonymous articulation of sexism, given the rise of virtual organisations (Walter, 2010), therefore presenting new challenges to feminist practice and theory. Additionally, by theorising gender through virtual / social media does not necessarily accommodate the acknowledgment of lived realities. Therefore, it is important to mention the awareness of lived experience, and how such changes in technology are affecting the gendered hierarchy.

### **3. Embodied Approaches and the Lived Body:**

Whilst the above sections acknowledge feminism and the emerging field of 'the sociology of the body', the body has often been replaced with the term 'embodiment' (Wellard, 2015). As Perry and Medina (2011, p.63) suggest, embodiment refers to 'bodies as whole experiential beings in motion, both inscribed and inscribing subjectivities. That is, the experiential body is both a representation of self (a 'text') as well as a mode of creation in progress (a 'tool'). In addition, embodiment is a state that is contingent upon the environment

and the context of the body. According to Ellingson (2017), there are many benefits for those who actively experiment with embodied research. Firstly, embodied research enables individuals to learn about unknowable topics; by adding details of embodiment - this complements the crystallisation of aspects surrounding complex topics, relationships and identities that the researcher can understand. Secondly, explicit attention to embodiment may open new possibilities to represent and analyse qualitative research. The glint of ideas by the researcher can absorb into people's being, and touch their guts, hands, hearts, and other sensory points in conjunction with their thoughts (Ellingson, 2017).

Research within traditional sports and physical activity often separates the researcher from the researched, and tends to entertain 'objectivity'. Therefore, an embodied approach offers the opportunity to recognise both the physical and biological presence of bodies, through the understanding of the social in all its forms (e.g. environmental, sensual, political, and emotional). As a theoretical approach, embodiment embraces the physiological with the psychological and social (Wellard, 2015). According to Rapport *et al.*, (2018), experiencing embodiment is not a completely private affair; it is however, mediated continuously through interactions with people and other objects. 'Doing embodiment' is an active engagement with sensuousness, reflexivity and methods (Ellingson, 2017).

### **3.1 Phenomenology:**

Following on from the above discussion, embodiment has been considered largely within existential and phenomenological philosophy (Weiss and Haber, 1999), and additionally can be seen through the writings of Merleau-Ponty (1962), who aimed to determine the difference between experiencing the body and the objective (biological) body. Central to existential phenomenology, is the aim to bring to life the lived, felt, bodily experience (Allen-Collinson, 2011).

Phenomenology, derived from the Greek 'phainomenon', is the study of things as they present themselves to, and are perceived in our consciousness. It focuses on subjectivity and accords primacy to lived experiences. Phenomenology is 'the study of human experience and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness' (Langdrige, 2007, p.10). Phenomenological research aims 'to capture as closely as possible the way in which the phenomenon is experienced within the context in which the experience takes place.' (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p.27). The phenomenological perspective highlights corporeality and

emotionality of individuals and perceives the individuals as being in a world as an 'embodied consciousness' (Hughes and Patterson, 1997; Butryn and Massuci, 2009). Wacquant (2004) suggests that research needs to be conducted not only *of* the body (as an object of study), but also *from* the body – enabling the body as a tool of inquiry. Husserl (1970) focused on phenomena that appeared through consciousness, and purported that minds and objects both occur within experience, thus eliminating mind-body dualism.

There are different epistemological and ontological positions that determine the numerous and complex strands of the 'tangled web of phenomenology' (Ehrich, 1999). The lived body is a consolidated idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body-in-situation (Young, 2005). This perspective emphasises the carnality of our being-in-the world, through the central category of an existentialist theoretical approach; where the body is central to the lived experience in humans, and that one's own body is the object of perception and the standpoint from which the world is perceived and experienced (Allen-Collinson, 2010). The phenomenological concept of *Dasein* ('there being' or 'being-in-the-world') emphasises this self-world linkage. Mellor and Shilling (1997) note that forms of corporeal knowledge, also known as 'carnal knowledge', are deeply connected to sensory experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2001).

### **3.2 Feminist Phenomenology:**

Despite phenomenology emphasising the environmental situatedness of the body, it can be argued that there is lack of analytic attention to *socio-cultural* and *structural* influences on lived-body experience and embodiment. It has also been criticised for its neglect surrounding imperative sociological variables such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and so on. Consequently, feminist phenomenology as a form of 'sociologised phenomenology' can be used to shape and acknowledge such 'differences' (McNarry *et al.*, 2018). Feminist phenomenology theorises the social-structural location of women in a patriarchal system of gender relations, where women as a social group are consistently disadvantaged in relation to men as a social group (Allen-Collinson, 2010). As Fisher (2000) notes, the significance of the interaction between feminism and phenomenology has only relatively recently begun to be explored. Phenomenological approaches share a concern with collecting and where possible, collating the understandings of experiences found amongst various populations (Price and Shildrick, 1999). When feminists utilise the analysis of their

own or other women's experiences, either in the form of consciousness raising or as formal research, it is with the unequivocal aim of understanding further how and why women are oppressed (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Early research (e.g. Young 1980; De Beauvoir, 1972) provides notable examples of the powerful impact on how feminist phenomenology can be used to explore the lived female experience.

De Beauvoir's (1972) influential work encompassing feminism and phenomenology along with existential philosophy incorporates a gender-sensitive analysis to illuminate the issues surrounding the notion of the feminine *dasein* (being-in-the-world). de Beauvoir's (1972) famous suggestion that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman', launched a whole generation of feminist scholars with the intent on eliminating the belief of 'natural' difference, and showing that differences between sexes were socially rather than biologically constructed (de Beauvoir, 1972). However, on occasions the feeling of the female presence (or *dasein*) somehow contrasts unfavourably with its male counterpart (Allen-Collinson, 2010). Such unfavourable significance therefore produced a great amount of studies dedicated to deconstructing the biological notions of sexual or 'racial' difference, and explored how representations of natural bodies are displayed to appropriate social relations of domination and subordination. This statement can be seen at a first glance as adopting the mind/body dualism, presenting the view of a disembodied agent taking on a gender. However it becomes clear that de Beauvoir:

'does not imply that this 'becoming' traverses a path from disembodied freedom to cultural embodiment. Indeed, one is one's body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one's gender. The movement from sex to gender is internal to embodied life, a sculpting of the original body into a cultural form. (Butler, 1987, p. 131)

De Beauvoir introduces the body as a situation; viewing the body as a material reality, something that can be held, and the body as a situation, is to regard the body as having a specific obligation to take on social and cultural definitions and come to terms with them (Davies, 1997).

Despite many sociological endeavours to study the body in a myriad of different ways; (for example, areas such as the impaired sporting body (Sparkes and Smith, 2002), the gendered sporting body (McKay, 1994; Markula, 2003a), specific bodies in sport and exercise, and physical activities (Markula, 1995; Hargreaves, 2007) and the maturing sporting body

(Wainwright and Turner, 2003, 2006)). It can be argued that there is a relative lack of 'fleshy' perspectives on the body. Studies of sport only rarely engage in depth with the 'flesh' of the lived sporting and exercising body (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Wainwright and Turner, 2003) at least from a phenomenological angle, and in relation to female embodiment.

As Davies (1997) suggests, phenomenology has provided a useful theoretical starting point for making sense of the lived experiences of having a female body (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2006), despite some notable exceptions (Rail, 1992; 1995 Wacquant, 2004; Downey, 2005). For researchers to represent and appreciate such embodied perspectives, it can be argued that an engagement with the phenomenology of the body, particularly surrounding the sensuous and sensing sporting body is required.

There is a relative lacuna in relation to embodied research on the lived experiences of the sporting body, and its lack of utilising an explicitly phenomenological theoretical framework and perspective (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007; Allen-Collinson, 2009). There have been some notable exceptions, for example Young (1980) suggests in her paper 'Throwing like a Girl' that a women lives her body as an object, as well as subject. She combines the insights of Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty to argue that the dissimulation of gender norms compromise women's free movement, therefore producing a certain kind of feminine bodily comportment. Feminist have been quick to criticise and be inspired by Young's work of women's physical appearance of space and movement. Dianne Chisholm (2008) elaborates the vivid descriptions provided by a female mountaineer who has 'free climbed', according to Chisholm, female athletes perform swift, embodied movements which expand their interaction with the world, this is despite of the patriarchal structures likely to encompass women within male dominated fields.

In addition to the above, research by Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson has been fundamental in contributing towards the understanding of feminist phenomenology. The significance of the body has shaped recent knowledge surrounding feminist phenomenology and a form of embodied 'sociologised' phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2009, 2011). Allen-Collinson employs phenomenology through a sociological-phenomenology tradition, rather than a philosophical base. This can provide a rigorous, insightful and grounded analyses of female sporting embodiment, which can productively display the complexities of sporting experiences – both corporeal and cognitively. As highlighted above, traditional philosophical phenomenology has often neglected biological sex and gender within other forms of social-

structural 'situatedness'. One explanation for this oversight is that it has tended to focus on the exploration of specific 'essences' of essential lived experience structures. Feminist phenomenology addresses this shortfall by incorporating a gendered lens when considering these dominant influences and pressures of social structures upon the lived experience, and the specific corporeality of bodies located within certain cultural spaces and times (in this case the gym environment), therefore tackling such philosophical claims head on (Allen-Collinson, 2009; 2010).

#### **4. Summary:**

This chapter provided a contextual background to the literature surrounding the theoretical approach within this thesis. It can be seen until relatively recently, that sociology displayed a rather curiously disembodied view of its subjects (Turner, 1984). Historically it can be seen that the body has been theorised and acknowledged until relatively recently through a particularly 'malestream' lense. From Marx's alienation of the body, Bourdieu's restricted work on the phenomenological exploration and understanding of the 'lived body', to the disembodied epistemology displayed within Foucault's work. It can be suggested that the views adopted by these founding fathers, is a potential reason concerning the contribution towards the lack of early sociological theorisation of the body and lived experience.

The paucity of recognition on women's bodies is evident throughout this theoretical chapter, and through adopting and embracing feminist literature and feminist phenomenology, this has enabled theorising the body (particularly women's bodies) and gendered embodiment to become the forefront of discussion. Relevant theoretical literature has been discussed in order to provide a clear justification as to how and why feminist phenomenology is suited to theorise the lived experiences of women's bodies in relation to this research.

The following chapter, with the basis of feminist phenomenology already acknowledged, discusses the substantial literature surrounding women's fitness bodies, and fitness gym environments and spaces. The purpose of this chapter is to not necessarily appraise all existing research that relates to this study's findings, but rather offers the opportunity to develop a coherent understanding of the concepts that are related to the topic.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Gender in the Gym.**

The previous chapter included a discussion of the theoretical literature surrounding the different sociological concepts of the body. I also acknowledged my rationale for utilising feminist theory and a feminist phenomenological approach for this research. This chapter explores the substantial literature encompassing the historical concepts of gymnasiums, and the complexities of space within the gym environment. I then explore how the female body has been accommodated with the space of the gym, and how broader discourses of gender have shaped how a woman is expected to engage within what might be considered a traditional male (sporting) space.

#### **1. A history of the gym:**

*'The history of the gymnasium is also a history of the human body: its real and idealised forms, artistic representation, shaping, and public and private presentation'* – Chaline (2015, p. 7)

According to Chaline (2015), any study of the gym must consider the meaning of fitness. Fitness is combined with less palpable qualities, living up to assumptions, or looking a specific way. The lived, embodied definition of fitness is not definitive, but it is associated with notions of control (over ourselves; how others see us), feelings of capacity, and understandings of societal norms and expectations. These expectations can be assumed through either the media, medical, or government understandings. Fitness is a complex concept, its criteria and objectives vary within and between individuals, and definitions over the history of physical culture have changed (Smith-Maguire, 2008).

The ancient gymnasium was a state-sponsored institution, including a wide range of functions in addition to the physical training of its members. The original meaning of fitness as Chaline (2015) explains, was 'fit for purpose', and initially termed for soldiers. During this development, the official purpose of the gymnasium was to create citizens and soldiers fit for the purposes of the polis. At the same time, due to the freeborn male citizens composing the government of the city-state, the gymnasium was central to the pursuit of the *arête*, known

to the ancient Greeks as the pursuit and attainment of an individual's full physical, moral, social and intellectual potential (Reid and Holowchak, 2013).

'Fit for purpose' in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries throughout the genesis of the modern gyms can be seen as more coincided with the aims of the state, rather than any individual motivation. It was only when gymnasiums became more commercialised and independent from the state, an individual's 'fit for purpose' became more balanced (Chaline, 2015).

The first documentary evidence for gymnasia dates back to the sixth century BCE. They existed in many Greek cities during the lifetime of the Athenian statesman and lawmaker Solon (c.638-558 BCE). The ancient Greeks were known for training and competing naked (Greek: *gymnos*). Male nudity and exercise were so closely linked that the Greek verb 'to exercise' – *gymnazein*, translates literally as 'to exercise'. The word 'gymnasion' derives from the word 'gymnasium', which can be abbreviated as 'gym'. This is known as a 'place where athletic exercises are performed naked' (Chaline, 2015, p. 24).

As with gyms today, classical gymnasia did not follow a particular plan. They shared a number of basic facilities. However, the size and layout were affected by the date of their construction, the wealth of the city, the geography of the site, and the availability of space and proximity of nearby buildings. One of the major differences between a classical and modern gymnasium, was the lack of permanent equipment on display. Most of the training was performed either without equipment, or with small pieces of portable equipment, such as the javelin and discus. Other activities included practising in the *Turnplatz*: this consisted of ropes, yokes, pegs, strings and skipping ropes and poles for vaulting, lances and balls, saddle cushions; and dumbbells and weights. It also included a running circle track, to leap, throw, skip, wrestle and participate within warm up exercises and gymnastic games; trees or furrows marked all these out (Jahn, 1828).

The first commercial gymnasia opened in Brussels and Paris by Hippolyte Triat (1813-1881) and Eugen Sandow (1867-1925). Triat developed the first set of graduated metal dumbbells and barbells, and concentrated on what is now known as 'group exercise classes' in his *gymastique de planches* (floor gymnastics). The group exercise class is among the oldest forms of gym-based exercise, the ancient Greeks performed dances and group exercises to the sound of the flute in the nineteenth century (Chaline, 2015). By the 1860's there were twenty commercial gymnasia in Paris, including several women-only establishments. Initially,

women were banned from training in gymnasia and from competing alongside men at the Pan-Hellenic games, and were even banned from watching male sporting competitions outside of Sparta. The Spartan's were reputed in ancient times for their physical toughness and fitness, their offspring rigorously trained at the age of seven, and they were known to be the only Hellenic people who encouraged their daughters to train alongside their sons, though not naked, but with their breasts exposed.

The nineteenth century gym still looked very different from the modern gym, and most gymnasia still essentially remained as indoor version of the *Turnplatz*. Although they were furnished with barbells and dumbbells, it closely resembled a large exercise studio or a performance space where exercisers took part in synchronised gymnastic displays. The nineteenth and early twentieth century gymnasium remained a short-lived fad that quickly became out-dated by other health and fitness pursuits, such as indoor cycling classes, outdoor sports, group callisthenic and naturism.

Smith-Maguire (2008) suggests that three particular commodities have shaped the fitness industry over the previous years. Firstly, in the 1970s a new kind of exercise site emerged - the commercial health club. These combined old forms of exercise equipment in a code and service orientated leisure and lifestyle business. Secondly, in the 1980s and 1990s, as the health club industry expanded and consolidated, fitness was represented through the growing genre of lifestyle media. In addition to exercise manuals, consumers could turn to fitness magazines to advise them on the latest tips and techniques of the fitness lifestyle. Lastly, in the 1990s, commercial health clubs made a new kind of fitness service – personal training, available to middle class, mass class market. Personal trainers are new groups of service professionals, providing exercise expertise in one-on-one sessions with clients.

Political activist Jane Fonda was the face for the aerobics revolution which brought millions of women into the gym within the 1980s (Chaline, 2015), this changed the space and social relations of contemporary gyms and somewhat reflected the changes in attitudes towards the body. According to Bolitho and Conway (2014), following the growth of classes and the birth of the aerobics instructor, the modern gym also evolved from the boxing gyms of the 1930s through the spit and sawdust or bodybuilding gyms. 'Low-rent, bare-bones, smoke-and-sweat-saturated hangout for boxers and bodybuilders' such as Gold's Gym (Stern, 2008), which appeared in the mid-1960s, to the modern fitness facilities that started to spring up in the 1950s and 1990s, then to the range of larger chains that proliferate today. It was the

emergence of the fully-fledged Western individual, whose civil rights were guaranteed by a democratic state that was a precondition for the development of the commercial gymnasia. A 'health club' is distinctive to a 'gym' for some individuals - gyms have a 'spit and sawdust' atmosphere, alternative health clubs provide for a more middle class and female clientele, and are often more luxurious (Crossley, 2006). According to Sassatelli (2006), gyms were constructed with aspirations to accomplish and arouse the desire of individuals to keep fit, improve themselves and have fun. Early examples of this consisted of the appearance of bodybuilding gyms, a practise for men who aimed to achieve aesthetic development of their muscles by utilising weights and alternative equipment (Sassatelli, 2006).

Bunsell (2013) notes that a 'spit and sawdust' gym can also be referred to as a 'hard-core gym', used for either powerlifting or bodybuilding purposes. Powerlifting consists of three main exercises: bench press, deadlifts and squatting. Alternatively, another common form of lifting is known as Olympic lifting, this consists of two main exercises known as the clean and jerk, and the snatch (Fussell, 1991). These gyms consist of basic facilities and they do not endorse the luxuries of attractive décor or nice changing rooms. The central bodybuilding ethos, one of practising weight training and dieting, is still ongoing from the 1980s to this present day, it had been adopted by mainstream society to increase profile and enhance performance (Schwarzenegger, 1999).

Alternatively, Chaline (2015) explains that the most serious bodybuilders trained at gyms that had been opened specifically catering to bodybuilders and muscle heads, and adopted the 'powerlifting' techniques. A description by Murray (1980) describes one of the types of gyms that operated within the area of his time spent in Santa Monica, which was nicknamed 'the dungeon':

A descending staircase at the sidewalk entrance led to a huge, somewhat dirty, equipment-filled room. One small iron-grated window gave a tiny view of the sidewalk above. There were holes in the floor, of various sizes, because guys has dropped weights, and some of them would gather water when it rained, due to leakage in the walls and ceilings. Rats lived in the gym, and muscleniks, too, from time to time (Murray, 1980, p.47)

The description above is potentially similar to many individuals' perceptions of an early gym. An environment that consists of mainly men who attend possessing poor hygiene,

with the overall gym bearing a low-level of cleanliness and incorporating basic facilities. Attributes like this can in some way be similar to Bunsell's 'spit and sawdust' or 'hard-core gym' descriptions. Furthermore, it has been implied that whatever an individual's original goals or intentions are; sooner or later whilst attending a muscle-head gym for any length of time, the ethos and training methods will be embraced (and possibly the illegal supplementation too). Moreover, the individual will likely end up as a muscle-head due to the peer pressure being just too great (Chaline, 2015).

### **1.1 Public and Private Spaces:**

Whilst the above section reflects on the historical progression of gym spaces, it is also important to recognise alternative spaces within gyms, and how these may affect the specific corporeality of bodies located in certain cultural spaces and times to support the feminist phenomenological approach utilised within this thesis (Allen-Collinson, 2009; 2010; Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2009). The following sections identify how women were initially excluded from certain spaces, and explores the nuances of space within the gym environment, whilst highlighting the intimacies that occur within these and the changing rooms.

Massey (2005) argues that there are three propositions surrounding the approaches to space:

- Space is identified as a product of interrelations, and can be established through interactions from global vastness, to the intimately tiny.
- Space is understood as a sphere of possibility, whereby the existence of multiplicity is evident within contemporary plurality, this sphere is distinct due to the directions coexisting with heterogeneity.
- Space is recognised as always being under construction. It is always in the process of being made, is never furnished and never closed.

Little attention has been afforded to the gendered nature of spatial segregation. Early feminist geographers identified during the nineteenth and twentieth century that spatial segregation of industry, commerce, and political power within the public sphere and domain of men occurred as a result of the (patriarchal) development of western cities. Women were depicted as occupiers of the private realm of the home and social reproduction (WGSG, 1984;

McDowell, 1983; Bondi and Damaris, 2003). There was great attention surrounding the gendered division of these spaces within the 1980s and 1990s. This included the body of work which examined occupational separation by gender (Hansen and Pratt, 1995), with the inclusion of women's experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in gendered jobs as male (McDowell, 1997, 2009); as well as work that has identified the way women's reproductive labour has been assembled to justify gender inequalities (Macleavy, 2007).

The ideological and physical separation of home and work have been disintegrated; with women making significant progress within the labour market. There has been a blurring between distinguishing public/private growth of home working, and the feminisation of the labour market has created an association of growth within women's incomes (Macleavy, 2007). Women have been targeted as consumers within night-time economies and post-industrial cities (Holloway, Valentine and Jayne, 2009), these have all contributed to women confidently occupying public space (Koskela, 1997). The category of 'woman' has been perturbed by recognising the complex and intersectional nature of identity (Valentine, 1989; 1992; 2007). Because of this, the gendered aspects of everyday spaces appear to have shifted from the geographical agenda and become distinctly less common.

Feminists have studied the separation and interaction between the public and private spheres for decades (Brown, 2006; Scott *et al.*, 2004). The public/private distinction is clearly gendered; this binary opposition is employed in order to legitimate oppression and dependence based on gender, and to additionally regulate sexuality. The private has traditionally been identified and merged with, 'the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, the 'shadowy interior of the household', personal life, intimacy, passion, sexuality, 'the good life', care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction and immanence' (Duncan, 1996, p. 128). Alternatively, the public has traditionally been the region of the 'disembodied, the abstract, the cultural, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, justice, the market place, waged labour, production, the polis, the state, action, militarism, heroism and transcendence' (Duncan, 1996, p. 128). Both spaces are conglomerate, and not all of this space is distinctly private or public. Therefore, space is exposed to disparate territorialising and deterritorialising methods, whereby control over this is 'fixed, challenged, claimed, privatised and forfeited' (Duncan, 1996, p.129). Within some instances, this may socially advance and lead to a development of a safe base (site of resistance), where formerly disempowered groups may convert to being empowered.

Alternatively, isolation within private or quasi-private spaces or spheres may produce undesirable depoliticising effects on a group, which fortifies its challenges and allows the group to carelessly assume independence from the wider public sphere (Duncan, 1996).

## **1.2 Understanding the Gym Space**

The historical demarcations of space described above have influenced the creation of the gym as a male space, particularly in relation to sport/physical activity which is viewed as being away from the private realm. Crucial to understanding the gym and its existence as neither public nor private, and central to thesis, is its gendered and gendering effects. Evidence within research suggests that spaces continue to be occupied and used within gendered ways. The use of gym space is highly structured along gender lines, also evident within Johnston's (1996) study surrounding the experience of female bodybuilders. Men dominate the weights area and gym, and women the classes - with limited mixing in other areas such as the CrossFit box.

The gym environment can be suggested as transgressing the public/private dichotomy. There have been various terms coined for spaces that do not conform to the public/private binary – liminal space, in-between space, quasi-privatised space and semi-private space (Rooney, 2005). The semi-private space is the most applicable term to this study; it is not more or less meaningful than the others noted, but it provides a more concrete understanding in relation to the gym space. Rooney (2005) conveys that a semi-private space “is a site of peculiar intimacies and coercions... self-revelations and decisive constraints” (p. 334). Although Rooney attributes the semi-private space to a classroom environment, this is also well suited to the gym: “the semiprivate room shelters strangers who have in common the quite particular neediness that brings them there, in close proximity to each other and, crucially, available to a host of other people, most of them strangers as well” (Rooney, 2005, p. 335).

Rooney (2002) states that the semi-private room can be considered as a lost site: it assertively emerges in multiple forms, and repeatedly omits out of view as the opposition of private to public. The semi-private is neither inside or outside, but the conscious practice of creating boundaries within a field as neither public nor private can anticipate or guarantee. A semi-private room also consist of spaces where entrance is restricted to a degree and whereby some privacy is expected, however strangers also enter and interact with each other.

This is applicable to the gym - to enter, membership payment is necessary, and everyone pays nearly the same fees.

It is evident that specific spaces utilised and engaged in create and interpret different meanings. Feminist phenomenology not only analyses the structurally, culturally and historically located nature of gendered embodiment, but also entwining this epistemological position within theoretical concepts surrounding space, creates for a further exploration of the women's specific embodied experiences that occur within differing gym cultures.

### **1.3 Inside the Changing Rooms:**

*'Changing rooms are not so much anti-structural spaces where the normal conventions of everyday life are subverted. They are rather ambiguous places, whose interaction resources are highly unstable and where the cultural de-classification which precludes transition is typically experienced individually' – Sassatelli (2014, p. 51).*

Whilst the above sections explore the meanings of space applicable to the gym environment, to appreciate what may go on inside a gym, the local resources that it organises has to be taken seriously (spaces, time, emotional codes, attributes to relationships) (Sassatelli, 2006). During exercises within the gym, the trainers ask individuals to focus on their own bodies, and concentrate on the official tasks they have been set without being distracted. The spatio-temporal management of the surroundings also determines the perseverance of carrying out the exercises. Body practises are assigned in different functional areas within fitness centres. Differing from the areas and activities that the exercisers immerse themselves in, there are changing rooms (clients turn to external realities after their workout, and can get ready within this space). Furthermore, saunas, massage rooms, and in the bigger centres, swimming pools and other facilities for body care are present. The distribution of space is commonly ordered in particular temporal sequences, where physical exercise emerges as a pivotal moment, a time that is designated to be useful, and whose quality is made certain by formulated and relatively rigid margins; therefore, combining individualism and universalism (Maguire, 2002).

The fitness gym is a complex environment - within the gym, body practices are arranged in differentiated areas related to functionality. This environment differs, as it creates spaces where the body prepares for exercise, and consequently returns to everyday reality.

Specific practices, such as direct body care and undressing are usually compelling signs of a situation that is private, and are rigidly and exclusively confined within the changing room space. The particular tone of each gym contributes towards the specific characteristics of the gym (Sassatelli, 1999a).

The distinction of the gym is not necessarily due to its physical separation from external reality, but is essentially arranged through changing room practices. The gym offers a space within its boundaries to enable the shifting of both into the world of training, and back to different external realities. Therefore, the changing room is an unusually complex space. It can be acknowledged as a 'liminoid' space, where the cultural de-classification is lived individually through the simultaneous presence of members who enter and exit the changing room worlds. Each member manages the specificity for his or her own changing requirements. The change into a purpose-made, gym-specific outfit from everyday clothing is not simply a requirement of training; it is also a crucial symbol of tuning in to the gym, being in the right spirit to work out and recognising the precision of work required to be conducted on the body. Regardless of the different routines that members may follow, the changing room practises are always important for them (Sassatelli, 1999a).

Moreover, the changing rooms can operate as a 'segmentation mark'. This is of particular importance for social actors when they undertake activities that conflict normal everyday life expectations (Goffman, 1963, 1974). Therefore, changing rooms are meant to strip the external identities of its users, whilst filtering out social attributes that could interfere with training, and making their bodies equally into objects that can be moulded by personalised and serial training. The sexual division (i.e male/female) in changing rooms openly reproduces arrangements that are accepted in the wider culture to block their relevance whilst exercising. In this manner, there is a tendency on the part of clients and trainers, to portray men and women's bodies as comparable in regards to their exercise inclinations, capabilities and potential, as if the training body were a-gendered (Sassatelli, 1999a).

As the changing room allows members to switch to the realm of exercise and to its meanings and rules, this enables the separation between contrasting workout spaces and facilitates training that responds to the specific needs of alternative training modalities. The gym firstly is a 'social occasion', 'bounded in regard to place and time' and 'facilitated by fixed equipment' (Goffman, 1963). Depending upon how the environment is organised is important

in its own right. Cautious organisation of time and space is essential in creating a milieu, where individuals are able to concentrate on training and obliterate normal duties of their everyday social rules. Notably after training, hearing clients comment on bodily workouts is a valuable production of experience, and is commonplace. This experience is referred to as 'concentration' on the physical activities - a heightened perception of one's own body as defined by the exercise, and a liberation from all external pressures. Internal to the gym, the perspective of the exercising body offers the individual the possibility of control, whilst the changing room body elucidates the limits of such control. During training, participants work on their bodies as an instrument of the self (Sassatelli, 1999b).

The changing space additionally incorporates other body definitions; by washing, dressing up, and doing their hair, individuals display their cultural competence to return to their social roles. These specific practices say something about each individual's social body, about their own explicit embodied roles, and body presentation necessities. Definitions of the body are not simply represented by the gym, nor reproduced by its members; they are however, consistently and sincerely transformed and negotiated (Sassatelli, 1999).

## **2. Contemporary Gyms and the 'Ideological' Female Body:**

The above sections highlight the importance of space and the intimacies that occur within them - both inside and outside of the gym. It is valuable to recognise from the literature how women's bodies are negated within these spaces, and additionally outside of the gym space, and how this may affect perceptions of their bodies and other women who use contemporary gym spaces.

In comparison to Chaline's (2015) description of the earlier gym spaces; contemporary gyms are distinguished by the promotion and prescription of exercise regimes to improve fitness and health. The measurements of health and fitness consist of monitoring body weight, shape, size, posture, and the ability to perform specific tasks – such as muscular strength, endurance, or cardio vascular (CV) efficiency (Smith-Maguire, 2008).

Current gyms vary in type and attract a diversity of people from various socio-cultural backgrounds; it can be implied within the gym space that power is invested in the appearance of the body beautiful, ideals of body perfection, and the fulfilment of optimum physical measures of health and fitness (Mansfield, 2011). Nonetheless, overtime some notions of fitness emerge and become dominant, whilst others become residual, and may become

dominant once again (Williams, 1977). Contemporary gyms can also be associated with neologisms such as 'fitness centre' or 'fitness club', with the concept of fitness seemingly formed by the meeting of two substantial cultural codes of modernity: asceticism and rationalisation, and the search for hedonism and authenticity (Sassatelli, 2006).

Furthermore, today's gyms have distinctive characteristics (Sassatelli, 2000). Firstly, they are integrated centres for physical exercise. A main trait is that they may offer established exercises such as bodybuilding and aerobics, but alternatively occupy more gentle and generic activities such as stretching. Additionally, they can also include unisex spaces to work out in, where mixed techniques of sporting origins are present such as spinning, martial arts and yoga. Secondly, the variation of individual needs and available exercise techniques does not indicate the absence of a minimum everyday denominator, which is embodied alternatively in the dual meaning of the term 'fitness'. This term can be utilised for both 'keeping fit', training in the gym, and for the physical state that training is intended to produce 'being fit, in shape' (Sassatelli, 2006).

## **2.1 Body Projects and Perfectionism:**

As shown above, contemporary gyms enable individuals to focus on their bodies and fitness through a variety of characteristics that they offer. The gym space also enables participants to work on their bodies as an instrument of the self, and to further gain control and 'be in shape' (Sassatelli, 1999; 2006). According to Shilling (2003), the body has become a project in late modern society. The reflexivity of the self has also gradually extended to the body, which is therefore connected to the narcissistic pursuit of the self (Giddens, 1991; Falk, 1994). Working on the body through adornment, maintenance and manipulation permeate our culture and leisure industries. However, not everyone has the same taste for each form of bodywork. According to Bourdieu (1984), different social groups (largely defined by occupation and social class) encompass different approaches towards thinking about the body; class habitus is emulated through various predispositions to work on the body; likewise the body is cultivated in numerous places (such as the gym), where bodies are worked on, looked at and talked about. When entering in to this world, it is inevitable that the individual will become part of a lifestyle, with certain attitudes, styles and bodies being valued higher in comparison to others (Johansson, 1996; Craig and Liberti, 2007; Mansfield, 2011).

The body's health and appearance are now an indissoluble part of an individual's pursuit of his or her own self-actualisation. In the west, embodiment has become one of the key aspects of self-actualisation (arête) (Chaline, 2015).

During the late 1970s and 1980s, fitness emerged as a field on its own right and health clubs became locations not just for exercise, but also for investment into one's self. From then onwards, fitness turned into an individualistic and occasionally narcissistic project of improving one's own body (Baumen, 1993; Featherstone, 1991, 2001; Giddens, 1991; Smith Maguire, 2008). Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fitness was promoted as a route to self-improvement and self-actualisation. Consequently, concerns benefitting the needs of improving appearance and service industries for both consumers and producers became apparent. Additionally, interest appeared surrounding the ways in which individuals were encouraged to evaluate and work on their bodies in the context of commercial health clubs, consumer fitness cultures, the fitness media, and through personal fitness services (Smith- Maguire, 2008). Gyms, exercise salons, and dance studios appealed to women, and the culture validated this activity substantially. The fitness gym as a commercial institution is generally available to those who have cultural competence and the economic capital to operate as a consumer (Sassatelli, 1999).

Training and fitness have since then been constructed as pleasurable experiences, and a way of getting time for one's self to relax and simultaneously improve one's body capital in an ever more competitive society (Featherstone, 1991, 2001; Smith Maguire, 2008). The fitness centre aims to be a place where regeneration can occur, and improvement on the body without complying with the requirements of competition or imposed goals, and even managing to have fun (Sassatelli, 2006).

Previous media representations of fit, feminine bodies typically find three interrelated themes: the ideal, fit feminine body is characterised as narrowly thin, toned and young. This ideal is intertwined with the notion of health, and the responsibility for obtaining such a body is left to the individual women (McGannon et al, 2011). Several feminist researchers have demonstrated that a 'perfect body' is closely connected to fitness and ideal femininity, such as body shape emphasising thinness and tightly toned muscle (Bordo, 1993; Choi, 2000; Duncan, 1994; Krane et al, 2004; Lloyd, 1996; Markula, 1995, 2003). Gendered exercises are often promoted as a means to achieve the ideal, and bodies are flawed when falling outside of 'femininity' (McGannon et al, 2011).

According to Markula and Kennedy (2011), women face a series of contradictions and can never be 'perfect', perfectionism is an impossibility and a social construct. Women's bodies have been used to sell and advertise a wide range of products and services, some aimed at women - such as fashion and makeup, and others that have no obvious link with the human body or female gender (Chaline, 2015). Arnold Schwarzenegger claimed that: 'A lot of time I see women who look fantastic, and they still find a little tiny problem. But that means she is very critical of herself which is healthy. As soon as you feel you are perfect, that's when life becomes very dead', (Green, 1998, p.86). By looking at the body this way, it obviously creates a constant urge for women to change and develop, 'the ideology dissatisfied...'

Within contemporary ideologies of body perfectionism, and in a world saturated with images of fashion models, celebrities and 'it' girls, women are tyrannised by beauty ideals and are under more pressure to conform to a slim, toned, athletic body, and are judged more on their bodies than men (Bordo, 1990). They should also perform a strict range of bodily gestures, postures and movements that emphasises grace and a "certain eroticism restrained by modesty" (Bartky, 1988, p.68). Fitness cultures have therefore sought to market the perfect body through which women can work on their bodies as part of a 'project' (Shilling, 2003).

Fitness provides the opportunity to navigate, resist and comply with the demands of the body's function and form. Furthermore, the body's health and appearance can be disciplined, maintained and improved through fitness, and consequently can be enjoyed. It is through such navigation and negotiation that individuals produce bodily status, as a site of investment, or an instrument of self-production. Mansfield (2011) reports that the tendency in contemporary western culture life is for individuals to perceive that their bodies should be worked on, and worked out, as a means of representing and expressing the individual self. The body is central in looking and appearing fit, and this in many ways, is as important as actually being fit within a contemporary society. A 'beautiful body' as some noticed, was now 'one that is well-toned from exercise' (Stern, 2008, p. 78). The slim, waiflike presentation of beauty from the 1960s and 1970s, was now a toned, strong body - built consciously to exhibit control over all that life had offer and to throw at, and had now emerged along with, if not replaced, the fit, gendered body that was presented - both unconsciously and consciously as performance art (Stern, 2008).

Furthermore, the construction of the perfect body involves questioning over the concerns of gender identity, and how the female body should appear. The fitness gym is not simply experienced as a tool in the search for a perfect body, but also as a place that has its own rules, where a vast assortment of identities and meanings are mediated (Sassatelli, 1999). The gym epitomises the extension of disciplinary body techniques, previously enclosed to production organisations or disciplinary institutions, into leisure environments (Ewen, 1988; Turner, 1987; Weber, 1946).

Masculinity and femininity descriptions are far from being rigid and monolithic, there is furthermore, a tendency to recognise that women are different as much as their experiences, just like men. The scrutiny of body ideals and gender is rarely linked with a suitable focus on the ways in which regular participants experience physical activity and training. The toned body has not only become a commercial icon, but the gym is also a highly visible site where this body is produced. Gym spaces are progressively glamorised and portrayed through an expanding range of adverts. Consequently, temptation is existent to understand what happens in the gym as a direct result of consumer culture. The response to normative injunctions has been to invite those who are joyfully responsible for their bodies, to invest in the presentation of their bodies for their self-constitution, and to work on them as plastic matter (Bordo, 1993; Featherstone, 1982; Frank, 1991; O'Neill, 1985; Synott, 1993; Wolf, 1991). The keep fit culture is not considered as a sense of commercial images, nor as the commodity of broader cultural values, but as a set of placed body practices - that is, practices occur where values are not just reproduced, but translated and, to some extent, filtered.

## **2.2. Fitness and the Feminist Movement:**

The above section recognises that women may conform to stereotypical ideals of the body, and consequently engage in fitness to work on their bodies as a project. However, feminist research often criticises the fitness industry as a location for women's oppression because it usually reproduces and focuses singularly on the narrowly defined 'body beautiful', where exercise is frequently understood as purely bodily enterprise. Bodies represent a symbolic resource in the reproduction and production of femininities (Markula, 2011). Pope (2000) argues that the milestone of feminism is compared with those of changing male body image and gym culture. Furthermore, Pope contends that as women won greater rights, and

therefore became a greater threat to male dominance, men responded by training at the gym to become physically stronger, bigger and more muscular. Pope (2000) identifies that the rising power of women since the emergence of second-wave feminism has challenged male dominance at every level of society. Hence, the subtext of the heterosexual man's desire to become bigger and more muscular is to reclaim his threatened masculinity and project male power against the steady rise of women.

There are multiple rationales also explaining why men desire to become bigger and more muscular; Klein (1993) suggests men built muscles in response to deep seated personal anxieties, and to secure ontological anxiety. Muscular development can also permeate the body with physical capital in response to class insecurities, and the impossibility of attaining alternative forms of cultural status (Wacquant, 1995). The most common motivation for bodybuilding is a reaction to masculinity crises, where gaining muscle is seen as an engraved manifestation of hegemonic notions of masculinity (Fussell, 1991; Monaghan, 1999). As Klein (1993) highlights:

In particular the erosion of men's traditionally occupationally derived privileges in a post-industrial order prompts some to compensate for their feelings of powerlessness by embodying the physical trappings of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Accordingly, 'the muscular body' becomes synonymous with the culturally idealised masculine/powerful self/self-assured body (p. 242).

The expanding feminist movement affected women; fitness acquired a powerful meaning to their new economic roles, volatile marital and social environment, and the rise of women's sport (Stern, 2008). The definition of the ideal female body as physically weak and slightly corpulent is a social construct of relatively recent historical vintage, and one only to women of a certain social status. This impact has continued to be felt in the present day through the often-difficult relationships that women have with their bodies.

Historically, women played an important role in expanding the fitness movement. It was estimated that women represented 60-65 percent of the fitness movement, and that industries had to understand the market in order to serve it better (Gottlieb, 1981). Women advanced to exercise for numerous reasons during this time; ideological feminist attitudes consisted of physical fitness and strength were understood as crucial to counterpart the increase in social influence and empowerment. With strength 'your need for a man is apt to

subside from desperation to something more pleasant and proportionate', feminism and fitness therefore intersect and reinforce each other (Gottlieb, 1981, p.239).

Participation in sport and fitness also increased through the second wave movement, with the addition of Title IX to the Civil Rights Act, and the development of the organised women's sports in secondary schools (Stern, 2008). Women increasingly deferred marriage and child bearing due to entering the workforce, leaving them with more independence, wealth, and money to spend on items such as 'physical exercise which made them feel and look better, and provided a welcome relief from stress' (Richards, 1982, p. 6). However, fitness was a double-edged sword, it contributed to empowering women, and for them to enjoy leisure time without feeling pressured into bodywork in gyms for bodily outcomes; concurrently, it committed women to externally creating and imposing standards of sexual attractiveness and beauty. This shifted the obligation for maintaining a particular shape entirely onto the individual, therefore challenging some standards (e.g. female bodybuilding), and accepting others (the firm, taut, commercial look) without question (Stern, 2008). Subsequently, women's taste for the field of fitness stemmed partially from the ways in which physical empowerment and control over one's body and health have been combined with women's gains in political, social, and economic empowerment (Smith – Maguire, 2008).

Dinnerstein and Weitz (1998) argue that feminist thinkers have interpreted the success of Jane Fonda's aerobics video during the 80s as proof that women are still victims. A patriarchal system, even today, obligates women to show excessive concerns surrounding their outward appearance. Other feminists have illustrated that the connection to aerobics and being overweight, is comparable to the obsessions of women who suffer from eating disorders. This continual self-observation during exercise makes it difficult for women to accept their own bodies, and consequently does not liberate. The expansion of aerobics strengthens the accepted standards of femininity, and tends to disconnect women's sporting activities once again (Lloyd, 1996).

### **2.3 Women in the Weights Room:**

*'Muscles on women clearly have meaning, but exactly what they mean and how they are valued is not agreed upon even among feminists'* - St Martin and Gavey, (1996, p.47)

As discussed above, the increase and inclusion of women in fitness has made a notable impact throughout the feminist movement, enabling women to participate in sport and exercise. An increasing number of studies have explored women's bodies at the 'extremes'. That is, there are more works on female bodybuilders, on the one hand, and anorexics on the other. Yet little work explores the everyday women in fitness who fall somewhere in between. Heywood (1998) argues that weight lifting is specifically a third wave feminist strategy to physically self-empower, ward off attack, or heal previous bodily victimisation and abuse; whilst Brook (1999) notes that the built female body resists cultural norms, and challenges assumptions regarding a women's natural physical weakness.

Popular conceptions still continue and view the gym as a masculine institution. Dworkin (2001) suggests that women face a glass ceiling not only in male-dominated occupations, but also in fitness too. According to Dworkin, women who seek muscular strength within the weights room may find their bodily agency limited, not by biology, but the ideologies which are emphasised by femininity. In her research Dworkin (2001) discovers that non-lifters and moderate lifters negotiate uniquely a glass ceiling by avoiding, adjusting or holding back on their weight workouts, and takes in to consideration what may be forcing women into new definitions of emphasised femininity that push upwards a glass ceiling and muscularity.

Further research uncovers how women choose strategic choices to construct particular bodily forms within socially constrained choices. A continuum of bodies is also conceptualised, with extreme size and muscularity on one hand – and extreme thinness on the other, and the many in-between. Moreover, women consciously structure their fitness activities and determine how far they go in either direction to get a place on the continuum (Dworkin, 2003).

Fundamentally, it is too straightforward to take in what 'we see' in fitness cultures, and use this to reinforce beliefs from society about natural, definitive gender difference. On the other hand, it is important to understand the narratives of women that elucidate careful negotiations concerning bodily knowledge, practices and ideologies, which in turn compose the bodies we see. Both the mass and upscale market-orientated clubs deal with issues surrounding bodybuilding and gender. Numerous 1960s clubs omitted women due to them being male only, and earlier venues promoted alternative days for women and men. For Women Only (FWO) clubs commenced in the 1960s, up to 67 percent of women questioned

in one particular study claimed they would favour same-sex workout sites, with many owners of fitness clubs noting that this attributed towards the goals of mainly older and married women. Over five hundred Gold's Gym franchises established women-only areas due to the demand in privacy (Stern, 2008).

There are still rather strict rules concerning construction of gender and the relationship between muscles and gender. Women could only participate originally in bodybuilding accompanied by beauty contests and bikini shows (Lowe, 1998). Title IX and second wave feminists enabled the birth of female bodybuilding, women built bodies to challenge hegemonic notions of femininity and to cause a stir in society (Huxtable 2004; Wennerstrom, 2000). Additionally, McGrath and Chananie-Hill's (2009) research found that female bodybuilder's experiences affected their somatic and behavioural gender norms within a western-industrialised society.

Female bodybuilders also competed in more 'feminine' and less transgressive athletic forms of embodiment (Bunsell, 2013). Fitness, figure and more recently 'bikini' competitions are now within the 'industries mix of power, labour and capital' (Bolin, 2011, p. 45). Female bodybuilders have had mixed feelings between wishing to build and push their bodies to the extreme and develop huge, defined, hard muscles, and alternatively developing a toned, athletic appearance. Fitness competitions are judged on aesthetics similar to bodybuilding, but women are expected to have a lot less muscle and higher body fat; they are also judged on their dance routines that incorporate gymnastics and aerobics. In comparison to male bodybuilding 'fitness contexts became more mainstream and competitions showcased more sex appeal' (Kennedy, 2005, p. 116). Research conducted by Bunsell (2013) illuminates the spaces and essential lived experiences that make the female bodybuilder. The 'Janus-faced' nature of female bodybuilding was revealed, and the ways in which females negotiate, resist and accommodate pressures whilst engaging in more orthodox and feminine activities and appearances was explored. It has been suggested that women seem to challenge distinctions of their gender through deliberate expansions of their muscle mass, yet in competitions they are confined to demonstrating their femininity through hyper-feminine postures (Lowe, 1998; St.Martin and Gavey, 1996).

McTavish (2015) chronicles the transformation of becoming an extraordinarily tanned and crystal-encrusted-bikini-wearing 'figure girl' from an art history professor. Contemporary issues are explored such as body image, identity politics, fat studies, and 'post feminism'

whilst rethinking fitness cultures, diet regimes, reproductive activism, feminist politics, performance art and the social function of photography. McTavish (2015) additionally explores the specific bodily sensations that were experienced during weight lifting, and engages with Merleau-Ponty's theories in conjunction with models of feminist phenomenology developed by Simone de Beauvoir and Iris Marion Young. McTavish (2015) contends that weight lifting introduces the body to a variety of novel sensations, which are sometimes mistaken as pain due to not falling into the domain of comfort, which is promoted as the only desirable kind of sensation within contemporary consumer culture.

It is possible to focus on a special milieu where bodies are being constructed, in order to examine the changes and stable patterns of gender identities. Gyms are not only spaces where individuals exercise; they are also a place where particular gender identities are constructed. The gender order is manifested in clothing, body techniques, pictures on walls, magazines, and facilities. Specific techniques of the body and locations related to the female body, where others may attribute this to a male body, can be seen in the gendered gym space (Johansson, 1996; 1997).

#### **2.4 The Gym as a Site for Transformation:**

Following on from the above discussions surrounding gender, women's bodybuilding and fitness competitions. It can be suggested that 'hard bodies' and normal individuals were desperate to reshape their bodies and self-image into the clubs they were involved in. It has been noted that gyms are owned and managed by athletes, bodybuilders, local fitness advocates, and by someone who wants a church to 'preach' the gospel of fitness and turn passion into livelihood. Some of these are stand-alone, independent, organisations, whilst others are linked to larger networks of fitness corporations (Stern, 2008). The gym has once again become a quasi-religious space – a temple dedicated to perfectibility of the body and personal identity, where members follow and attain their individual *arête* (Chaline, 2015).

Although the gym is a voluntary act, people find themselves once inside the environment obligated to facilitate a constant and exclusive concentration on the performing arbitrary activities. Individuals who attend the gym to keep fit appreciate this environment, as it 'pushes' them to work out even when they don't feel like it (Sassatelli, 1999). To be encouraging, the activity has to enable the individual to forget, at least in some way, the identities they have outside of the gym, and even their own aesthetic frustrations and

aspirations. In a usual scene of exercise, members work out together and focus on their own bodies; the bodies next to them become to some extent, neutral and innocuous, useful and relevant to only the exercise. This ensues firstly through a number of rules that lay down the way in which the participants should display their involvement in the action. Through a myriad of body signals (attitude, position, facial expression, glances) and with a brief exchange of words, the members establish constantly what they are doing is solely and exclusively training, and furthermore, that only particular characteristics of their bodies should be considered. Applying themselves to performing the activity accurately, whether working out in a group, or alone with equipment, also requires the participants to set aside their own and other people's designs on the body (Sassatelli, 2006).

### **3. Summary:**

The above chapter presents a detailed description of the relevant substantive literature that supports and addresses the central issues raised by the thesis research questions. Furthermore, this chapter provided an early historical timeline of gymnasiums, highlighted the development of gyms and fitness, whilst discussing how the female body is negated within alternative spaces. Additionally, this chapter discussed the impact of gyms and female participation, and explored how fitness markets sought to create the 'perfect body', and how specifically the female body is under pressure to conform to slim ideals within alternative spaces.

The following chapter engages in the methodological underpinnings of this thesis, and explores the strategies, techniques and processes that are used to research the embodied experiences of woman in fitness cultures.

## ***Chapter Four***

### **Methods and Methodology**

The literature reviewed in the previous two chapters detailed the issues associated with the theoretical underpinnings of the body in sociology, and identified the substantive literature surrounding fitness gyms and women's bodies. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the strategies, techniques and processes that are used to research the embodied experiences of woman in fitness cultures. An explanation and justification are presented for the reasoning of my choice of specific qualitative approaches that I utilised to develop the knowledge surrounding fitness gyms, exercise classes, female bodies and embodied experiences.

I begin this chapter with an overview of the methodological considerations in order to present the characteristics and nature of the research, with the application of why this approach is appropriate and has been used in conjunction with epistemological and ontological perspectives, in this case feminist phenomenology. The powerful stories that emerge in this research and the questions asked in this process, stress my embodied and lived experiences of the situations I immersed myself in, and reveal aspects of contemporary culture that could not be analysed or rationalised using quantitative methods. In doing so, this thesis aims to explore the relationships built from myself as the ethnographer and the women who participated.

Considering the above, it is important to reiterate the questions that are used as the focus for this research:

- ↔ What are the lived embodied experiences that women negotiate within a fitness environment?
- ↔ How can the women's descriptions of their gym experiences be interpreted?
- ↔ How do these embodied experiences affect their participation in the gym, and throughout their everyday lives?

The chapter then follows with a discussion surrounding the reasons why a critical self-reflexive approach is included to further support my ontological position. Following on from

this, the design and strategy of my research, specifically how I have utilised feminist phenomenology with ethnographic methods is discussed to demonstrate how these have enabled me to explore and produce appropriate knowledge regarding femininities and embodied experiences. Additionally, the manner in which participant observations and interviews are used is elucidated, and the women and research site (gym) in this study are introduced. Finally, the considerations of access, ethics and data analysis and representation are addressed. There is potential for this work to add to the existing literature and the growing knowledge on women, femininities, embodiment and experience in sport and exercise. I have attempted to fulfil this by outlining the selected methodological, epistemological and ontological concerns incorporated in this study.

### **1. Methodological Issues and Considerations:**

From the onset, because this research was adopting a feminist perspective, there was no doubt that I would be employing a qualitative approach and applying the techniques and methods related to this. There is no clear-cut, unanimously agreed definition of qualitative research (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as a field of inquiry within its own right, cross cutting disciplines, fields and subject matters. This thesis is multi-method in focus (Brewer and Hunter, 1989), it takes a self-reflexive, empirically driven, inductive approach to explore other women's corporeal experiences of using contemporary gyms, and how they experience their own bodies (Clough, 1993). The combination of multiple methods used is best understood as a strategy to add rigour, breadth and depth to the investigation and to attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being researched (Flick, 1992; Silverman, 2000).

The triangulation of ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs have shaped how I as the researcher have seen the world and acted in it. This 'paradigm' or interpretive framework can be seen as a 'basic set of beliefs that guides action' (Guba, 1990, p.17). Moreover, entering the gym phenomena enabled me to discover what was significant about the viewpoints and actions of the women who experience it in relation to place, time, context and situation, and people through utilising a feminist phenomenological approach. Consequently, this thesis celebrates the discovering of taken-for-granted meanings that inform individual's actions, which mostly are tacit, implicit and liminal (Charmaz, 2004). The socially constructed nature of reality and the intimate relationships between the women, gym

phenomena and myself is studied. The situational constraints that are shaped within inquiry are stressed, rather than emphasising its focus on quantitative measurements, or analysis of causal relationships between variables. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

## **2. The situatedness of the researcher:**

Various scholars have described the process of *epoche*, *phenomenological reduction* and *bracketing* (Jones, 1975; Klein and Westcott, 1994; Osborne, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1983). These are often used synonymously; there are nuances in the underlying differences between them, however they tend to be referred to equally. Husserl mutually uses these terms to refer to the 'change in attitude necessary for philosophical inquiry' (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990, p. 27). For the purpose of this thesis, and to avoid deep philosophical debates surrounding these, I use the term *bracketing*, although this is not accepted across phenomenological traditions (Allen-Collinson, 2011). According to Ashworth (1999, p. 708) bracketing includes making a persistent effort 'to set aside theories, research propositions, ready-made interpretations, etc., in order to reveal engaged, lived experiences'. Husserl suggested that one needed to bracket out the outer world as well as individual biases in order to achieve contact with essences. This is a process of suspending one's judgement or bracketing particular beliefs about the phenomena in order to see it clearly. Jones (1975) challenged us to extend our understanding of bracketing beyond a suspension of belief to a cultivation of doubt to help open one's self to the work at hand.

Similar to Merleau-Ponty (1969) who highlights the impossibility of any complete reduction, there are numerous reasons why the process of phenomenological bracketing is troublesome for this research. I chose this study based on the surrounding gaps discovered in the literature, but also regarding my own personal interest and involvement in the gym. Heidegger (1962) suggests that it is not possible to eradicate pre-understandings of the area of investigation, as these understandings are responsible for the researcher's decision to study the phenomena in the first place. It would make no ontological sense to try to eliminate my knowledge and worldviews, and my own experiences of being a woman in a fitness culture.

Being a woman in the gym allowed an important part of my access, granting me to approach women for the research. Without my own experiences, the women may have been less inclined to agree to meet and share their own experiences with me. The essential

meanings in phenomenological research must also reflect the women's life world (Lopez and Willis, 2004). My experiences and knowledge of the gym were essential in understanding the women's experiences, and I was able to interpret them the way they were intended through thoughtfully representing them throughout this thesis (as further discussed within this chapter). Additionally, 'thick' descriptions of first-person experience brought to life the lived, felt, bodily experience in the research site (Allen-Collinson, 2011). The combination of meanings uncovered are that of my own and by the other women; known as fusion horizons (Gadamar, 1976; Lopez and Willis, 2004), meaning that essentially the worldviews and experiences of two people blend in the process of interaction. Therefore, the elimination of my personal experiences and knowledge would have been a crucial downfall, as this experience and knowledge is a fundamental aspect for enhancing the richness of this research.

I have taken into account how the women's experiences could be influenced (Laverty, 2005) therefore my personal stances are elucidated throughout; experiences and knowledge about gyms are intertwined and blended throughout this project. Both spheres of my historicity made me part of the research process and results. Through carefully acknowledging this, I was able to utilise both appropriately, and where necessary.

## **2.1 (Self) Reflexivity:**

As stated above, certain tools from phenomenological approaches are used in this research to ensure my position as the researcher is appropriate. Whilst I have considered bracketing and consequently recognised this would not be sufficient as explained in the above section; a self-reflexive approach can be seen as a useful tool to research, understand and delve into and represent the lived experiences of the women in this thesis, and myself as the researcher. According to Wellard (2009), there has been a distinct lack of reflexivity apparent in other areas of sociology that have been more willing to embrace feminist ideas. Therefore, my role as the researcher in data collection analysis and representation will be highlighted (self-reflexivity), this can also be seen through my initial epochal moments identified in chapter one to shape the orientation of this thesis. From this process, it is hoped that sensitive, enlivened, experiences will be illuminated to help to explore the research questions. Feminist scholars argue for a self-reflexive approach in order to theorise the foreground of how relations of power may be shaping the production of knowledge in differing contexts

(Naples, 2003). It is important to note here, that the feminist phenomenological approach allows for the acknowledgment of multiple, layered intersections of bodily experience, and this in turn will also contribute towards the representation of the unique lived realities that myself and the women within this study experience.

Scott (1992, p.37) comments that 'experience is at once always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation'. In this thesis, methods for the study of my personal experiences are simultaneously focused around four directions (Bruner, 1986):

- *Inward* - internal conditions of feeling, aesthetic reactions, hopes, moral dispositions and so on.
- *Outward* - existential conditions, such as the environment or 'reality'.
- *Backward and Forward* - the temporality of past, present and the future.

To experience an experience, is to experience it simultaneously within these four suggestions, and to ask questions which direct in each way. Skeggs (1997) notes that experience has been seen as the basis of feminism, as feminism is a social movement. Personal politics was established the moment women began to talk to each other and make sense of their experiences as women, and the experience is the site of subject formation (Goodman and Martin, 2002).

Throughout this research, the subjective experiences of the women are important; however, adopting a subjective stance is also an important method for myself as the researcher. This includes the ways in which the research is conducted and how this may affect myself and the interpretation of findings. Only in recent times has reflexivity 'exploded' into academic consciousness as a means by which qualitative researchers can transform the 'problem' of subjectivity into opportunity (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Subjectivity is paramount, I aim to explore multiple meanings that individuals apply to their experiences, and how they identify and describe the social processes and structures that shape these meanings. I have attempted to capture the social events from the perspective of those involved, and provide an insider's view of social life by 'walking in their shoes' for a greater understanding as to what and how they feel in making sense of the world around them. I also needed to be mindful of the particular contexts surrounding the ways in which people act, and how this influences their context of thought, beliefs and actions, in order to understand

the meanings they construct. Because of this, I studied a relatively small number of individuals and situations, adopting an ideographic approach to try to preserve the individuality of these during the analysis. This approach is best used to understand how meaning, events and actions are shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur (Sparkes and Smith, 2014).

### **3. Feminist Phenomenology and Ethnography as a Method:**

Following on from chapter one that highlights the literature surrounding feminist phenomenology, this section delves into how feminist phenomenology collectively with ethnography, can be utilised to explore methodologically the embodied experiences of women exercisers in the gym. Phenomenological data can include the researcher's personal reflections on the topic, lived experiences gathered from the research participants, and the deceptions of experience from outside the context of the research project. The participants need to be willing to talk about their experiences, and be diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and exclusive stories of the specific experience (Schwartz, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1983; van Manen, 1997).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggest that experience is the starting point and key term for all social inquiry. Feminist phenomenology as a methodology is suitable to illustrate the lived experiences of the women exercisers, as it captures the voices and experiences from the lived female body (Allen-Collinson, 2009). The gendered lens incorporated within feminist phenomenology considers the dominant influences and pressures of social structures upon the lived experience, and the specific corporeality of bodies located within certain cultural spaces and times (in this case the gym environment) (Allen-Collinson, 2009; 2010).

Krane and Baird (2005) suggest that the aim of an ethnography is to understand the culture of a particular group, from the perspective of the group members. Therefore, the group culture provides an insight into the values, emotions, behaviours and mental states of group members to gain an in-depth understanding of the social environment, and perceptions of the members within the social group (Sparkes, 2009). As an ethnographer, I will be seeking to generate theory through experiential education - seeing, feeling and doing first hand research is deemed the best way to believing, theorising and knowing sociologically about members of other cultures (Atkinson, 2012). Furthermore, I will be endorsing experiential and sympathetic methods utilised within ethnography, which are seen to compliment

phenomenological insights and feminist research (Klein, 1983; Reinharz, 1983; Mies, 1983; Stanley and Wise, 1983). More recently, there has been a growth in 'feminist ethnographers' due to the importance of connection, respect and empathy between the researcher and informant, and an emphasis on the quality of relationships within the research (Reinharz, 1983).

Taking into account the above; by incorporating a gendered lens when considering the particular corporeality of bodies placed within certain cultural spaces and times (in this case the gym culture), and the influences and pressures of social structures upon the lived experience; ethnography combined with feminist phenomenology is a suitable approach to represent and explore the lived embodied experiences of the women exercisers (Allen-Collinson, 2010, 2011). By combining these methods, it enables a further strategy to develop and enhance not only an approach that adopts a traditional ethnographic stance, but also one that incorporates feminist phenomenology and considers an embodied approach. Feminist phenomenology alters the way in which I am using these traditional techniques in significant ways by capturing through a gendered lens the lived experiences of myself and the other women in the gym, and recognising the *socio-cultural* and *structural* influences on lived-body experience and embodiment (McNarry *et al.*, 2018). For example, the notion of 'fusion horizon' (Gadamar, 1976; Lopez and Willis, 2004) embedded through my methodological approach allowed for me to get closer to the women's experiences, and the notion of *dasein* (being-in-the-world), further enabled me to get closer to the experiences encountered, whilst also highlighting the sentient embodied realities myself and the women face in the gym space to create these narratives.

It is particularly important to reflect upon the representation of the narratives elucidated throughout this thesis, as these further enhance the distinctiveness of feminist phenomenology. The uniqueness of utilising feminist phenomenology also enables bodily experience to be represented in multifaceted ways, such as ethnographic vignettes, and ethnographic fictions (which are used throughout this thesis) in order to convey embodied experiences more holistically, and to challenge the binary between direct experience and represented experience. As seen in chapter one, my own experiences as the researcher are woven into the thesis to further represent my ontological position, and apply further meaning to the embodied experiences of the women exercisers. By divulging into my own experiences surrounding the relationships I have developed with my own body and sporting body, this

enabled me to connect with the women (through the notion ‘fusion horizon’), and the themes that consequently emerged from these were through a feminist phenomenological lens – but were still structured with an ethnographical approach. By utilising feminist phenomenology, this allowed for my own important narrative to be entwined throughout the thesis, and enabled further connections to the rationale of this research. Although the central importance is the other women’s experiences in the fitness cultures, it was vital to still be mindful of my own embodied narrative and how this can be suitably represented through more conventional ethnographic qualitative methods - such as interviews and observations, which were consequently enhanced by the distinct feminist phenomenological approach adopted.

#### **4. Observing the gym environment:**

Participant observation is the most distinctive tradition used in qualitative research. Atkinson (2012) suggests that it is a process of knowing a subject by doing and becoming through ‘immersed observation’. Being in this immersion develops embodied ways of knowing, through an engagement with all the senses of fieldwork. Furthermore, depending upon how the researcher is participating, it will determine what they see, touch, hear, smell, taste or feel (Jorgenson, 1989). Whilst being in the field, I embodied many observational forms (Sparkes and Smith, 2014), these included:

- *Complete observer*
- *Complete participant*
- *Observer as participant*
- *Participant as observer*

I moved through a continuum of the roles that changed throughout depending upon the circumstances that arose (Gold, 1958), this included working as an employee behind reception, and participating within a work out at the gym as a member. By doing so, I captured the dual role of ethnography; I was both a participant within the gym culture, but also at the same time an academic observer (Atkinson, 2012).

Conducting observational methods enabled me to examine gym life as it happened in ‘real time’. This facilitated with presenting data beyond the experiences discussed in the interviews, and allowed me to record the mundane, unremarkable and taken for granted

aspects of 'everyday life' that the individuals may not feel worthy of commenting on. The observations in the gym were rigorous, and I perceived the workings of people, culture and society additionally through my own senses (Jorgenson, 1989). I recorded the observations for roughly four years; these were conducted for a long duration to provide a contextual understanding of the gym user's actions and interactions within the environment. On average, I spent around 16 hours per week observing the gym environment, exercising and instructing classes; my field notes were documented in a diary, and my observations mainly occurred in the peak hours of the gym (between 8–11 a.m. and 4–7 p.m.). Consequently, I was able to gain a better understanding of the gym users, rather than just know about them, enabling me to 'get close enough to grasp it with one's own body' (Wacquant, 2004, p. 7). The observational data captured in this thesis predominantly emerges through the descriptions of the gym spaces provided, and the identification of how specific times and spaces of the gym environment impact the women's experiences. Furthermore, additional descriptions of how the women (and myself) transition through the gym space is further demonstrated through the gym map provided in section seven of this chapter.

The advantage of being able to transition through the various observational forms enabled me to negotiate access (as discussed in section eight of this chapter), as I held myself in an 'emic position', in the sense that I was already a member and 'insider' of the gym culture that I wanted to research. I had in effect what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'the rules of the game', where social actors develop a certain individuality for action, including a set of typical body movements and mannerisms within specific fields or settings (Bourdieu, 1993). Exploiting different roles and remaining in an 'etic' position where I tried to be an 'outsider', and not participate within the culture and observe margins came with particular barriers as discussed in section eight of this chapter - which further confirmed the decision not to utilise 'bracketing' whilst researching this phenomenon.

According to Alder and Alder (1994), observational techniques are fundamentally naturalistic in essence. They occur in the natural context among individuals who naturally participate within interactions, following the natural stream of everyday life. Because of this, I was not restricted by pre-determined categories of measurements or responses. I was free to seek concepts that appeared meaningful to the research. Subsequently, this was a welcomed enjoyment and encouraged me to observe into the phenomenological complexity

of the gym, where correlations connections and cause could be witnessed as and how they unfolded (Alder and Alder, 1994).

## **5. Interviewing Women at the Gym:**

As articulated in the above section, although participant observation was a vital source for collecting data and understanding the gym culture, it was considered from the beginning of this research that incorporating interviews would allow me to gain additional valuable and evocative data. Asking questions and listening became a beneficial tool for me to gain information about experiences, and further information about the gym culture that one could not possibly receive from direct observations.

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways to understand human beings (Benney and Hughes, 1956). This thesis illuminates interview extracts throughout from the women gym users. As Holloway (1997, p.94) implies, an interview is a 'conversation with a purpose'. As the interviewer, I aimed to gather the perspectives, perceptions and feelings from the women in this research. By applying interviews, this allowed multiple readings of transcripts, enabling me to segment the data into relevant themes that emerged (Borkan, 1999). This process was not only guided by recurrent themes, but also by the structural relations that appeared to have an impact on the field of study (Harvey, 1990).

Each interview was semi-structured in nature, a provisional list of topics was available; however there was no rigid set of questions to follow which enabled the loosely style structure of interviews to occur. This allowed the recognition of individuality for each woman, also granting new and interesting topics to arise (Huang and Brittain, 2006). For the interviews to be successful, I ensured that it embodied 'all the warmth and personality exchange of a conversation with clarity and guidelines of scientific researching' (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p. 191). The use of semi-structured interviews were highly standardised and allowed the participants to have greater control than other interview forms, such as structured. There is also potential to allow a certain degree of flexibility, and reveal deeper knowledge of the interviewee (Sparkes and Smith, 2014).

Although it was impractical to seek consent from everyone involved (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001), spontaneous conversations were also occasionally initiated in the gym. These were never recorded with a Dictaphone, therefore any information I felt to be worthwhile I recorded in my field notes. When the opportunity derived, I also tried to discuss further any

experiences the women had, which sometimes felt to be more 'real' rather than being in an interview situation. During other times, if a particularly relevant issue emerged I would probe a little further for additional information and this was always successful. Because of my long employment at the gym, I had gained trust and respect and developed a greater rapport with the women who I was speaking to and interviewing at the gym.

### **5.1 The interview process:**

All of the interviews were arranged in advance. I either personally spoke to the women whilst at the gym, or made use of social media and text messaging to connect. Whilst approaching women for the purpose of an interview, I asked them initially whether they would be interested in participating. Occasionally, some women would pull an anxious or worried face, and would ask whether they needed to prepare anything for it. I changed my approach and alternatively asked if they had a spare hour for a chat and a coffee to share their gym experiences with me. This seemed to be less intrusive and more comfortable for them to respond without feeling under pressure; it therefore enhanced the initial foundations of the rapport and intimacy surrounding myself as the researcher. I chose to conduct all of the interviews in the same environment (gym premises) to enable a sense of familiarisation, also hoping to obtain information in more detail from the women due to them feeling comfortable in a familiar environment (Goffman, 1956).

Most interviews lasted between one to two hours. I stated to the women that each interview would be confidential, and that only my immediate supervisors and I would access it. In addition, because of the relaxed approach of the interview, the interviewees were willing to share their own experiences in as much detail as they felt comfortable.

Amidst the interviews, the women discussed their experiences of physical activity from their childhood, and shared intimate stories of their experiences in the gym environment. They revealed corporeal, enfolded, and embodied aspects of participating in these environments, and it became apparent that some women were willing to divulge further into their embodied experiences whilst in a private one-on-one situation. Furthermore, alongside this whilst self-reflecting on my personal experiences, similarities of what I had observed and personally experienced were illuminated through such interactions, thus creating a fusion horizons as described previously, emphasising the importance of sharing lived experiences (Gadamar, 1976; Lopez and Willis, 2004).

Shields (2013) claims that emotions are embodied through our bodily and facial expressions that potentially allow for objective assessment. At the same time, emotions are passing and may be questionably expressed; thus creating an opportunity for subjectivity in the observer's assessment of the person's behaviour. Considering this, it is important to acknowledge here that the interviews were an embodied process too. Many women used their body, and incorporated facial expressions to emphasise or expand on the subject they were discussing. This is expressed throughout many of the extracts in the discussion chapters of this thesis. For example, one woman shrugged her shoulders and pulled a facial expression to emphasise the experience she had encountered. Throughout the interviews, I was also vigilant on the phrasing and type of questions I asked. Occasionally, during particular interviews I was questioned on what certain words meant. Consequently, I rephrased specific questions and tried to omit complex terminology. Once transcribed, I offered the women the final interview transcription; only four of the woman were interested in reading and reflecting on their interviews, this enabled them to analyse some of their comments and thoughts after the interviews had concluded.

## **5.2 Sampling:**

I made strategic decisions regarding the place, event, setting and times that would be best for gaining the data needed to address the research questions whilst considering the sample for this research (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Schwandt (1997) suggests there are two important sampling issues that need to be acknowledged:

*Selecting a field site where the phenomenon will be studied* - It was clear that I would not be studying the gym site itself, but rather the phenomenon within it. It was an obvious decision to select the gym as the field site for this research, since I had been working at the location since 2010. I had uncomplicated access, and was able to connect with the women members efficiently for interviews.

*Sampling within this field site* - Holloway (1997, p.142) suggests, 'sampling is not fixed in advance but is an ongoing process guided by emerging ideas'. The most applicable category of sampling for this research can be termed '*criterion based sampling*'. This is where I had predetermined the criteria for selecting the place, site, or case (Quinn-Patton, 2002). The participants were chosen based on particular features, attributes or characteristics, and had specific experiences (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). In this case, identifying as a women and

having knowledge of gym setting where the phenomenon was being researched, was the main criteria based on the sample chosen for this research.

Whilst the emergence of gym cultures and those who attend the specific spaces is further demonstrated in chapter two; taking into consideration the above, the gym for this particular research was used due to the uniqueness of the environment – as demonstrated through the photos in section 7.2, this gym consists of basic facilities and does not endorse the luxuries of attractive décor or nice changing rooms, it also embodies the central bodybuilding ethos, one of practising weight training and dieting. It is also heavily male dominated, and therefore it is hoped that the women who immerse themselves in this unique cultural phenomenon will provide sensual, embodied realities that they experience through their bodies in this location, experiences that they may not necessarily encounter from alternative high-end gyms that are addressed with the female consumer in mind (for example, Bannatyne, DW fitness, etc).

## **6. Who are the women in this research?**

The interviews and sample above comprised of thirteen women. Their ages ranged from 22 to 54 years. All women were dedicated to the gym and consistently attended group exercise classes (Spinning, Bums, Legs and Tums, or CrossFit), worked out in the main gym, or participated within both. I have known some of the women for the entire duration of my employment, and some at the time of interviewing for only a few months. Only two women have undergraduate degrees, and all of the women are white British. Their occupations were concentrated on working either in the working class or middle class range (ranging from a cleaner, to a secondary school teacher). The majority of women are in heterosexual relationships, and six of the women have children. All of the women have spent the majority, or their entire life living within the local area of the gym. Their original names have been changed to pseudonyms in order to adhere to anonymity, privacy and confidentiality (Fontana and Frey, 2008). Their corporeal experiences in the contemporary fitness culture, and how this gave meaning to their embodied, personal, social and gendered lives are revealed and discussed throughout this thesis:

- ↔ Alex - 50 years old, participating in classes for around two years.
- ↔ Alice - 39 years old, participating in classes for around two years.
- ↔ Becky - 42 years old, participating in gym and classes for nearly one year.

- ✚ Charlie - 29 years old, working out at the gym for around 15 years.
- ✚ Georgina - 26 years old, participating in gym and classes for around three years.
- ✚ Hayley - 23 years old, working out at the gym for around one year.
- ✚ Jenny - 48 years old, working out at the gym for around 10 years.
- ✚ Joanna - 22 years old, working out at the gym for around 6 months.
- ✚ Katie - 54 years old, working out at the gym for around three years.
- ✚ Lily - 25 years old, participating in gym and classes for around three years.
- ✚ Penny - 48 years old, participating in classes for around three years.
- ✚ Stephanie - 51 years old, participating in gym and classes for around four years.
- ✚ Victoria - 48 years old, working out at the gym for around two years.

## **7.0 The Research Space:**

All of the interviews and observations outlined with the women above occurred in the gym. Whilst carefully selecting this site, analysing the environment, and deliberating upon the tensions of space outlined in the previous chapter, it became evident that certain spaces women engaged in enabled them to create and interpret different meanings in the gym. The acknowledgement of specific spaces also suitably corresponds to the feminist phenomenological approach taken for this study; where this strategy incorporates a gendered lens and considers the dominant influences and pressures of social structures upon the lived experience, and the specific corporeality of bodies located within certain cultural spaces and times (Allen-Collinson, 2010). With this in mind, a description of the differing gym spaces below offers an insight into the areas the women transitioned through. Furthermore, including my own self-reflexive accounts enabled corporeal and rich descriptions of the research locations at specific times and locations that I was immersed in as the researcher.

### **7.1 The Spit and Saw Dust Gym – (2005-2012):**

*'... so I walked into the [old] weights room, and I was at first, I was, not intimidated, that's the wrong word because everyone is friendly, but, I didn't know anybody, I'm actually quite shy ... everyone was so friendly that within a month or so, you, you know, even the guys that that lifted really heavy weights and stuff. Because they could see that you were erm, training, you weren't just flicking your hair around, and batting your eyelashes at them, that they realised that you were serious and so they kind of took you on board as well and helped you out if you*

*needed a hand and you knew that ... I knew that I could just go up to anybody in the gym and say, can you show me how to do this, can you show me how to do that, and they would stop what they were doing and they would show you, and I liked that ...' – Jenny.*

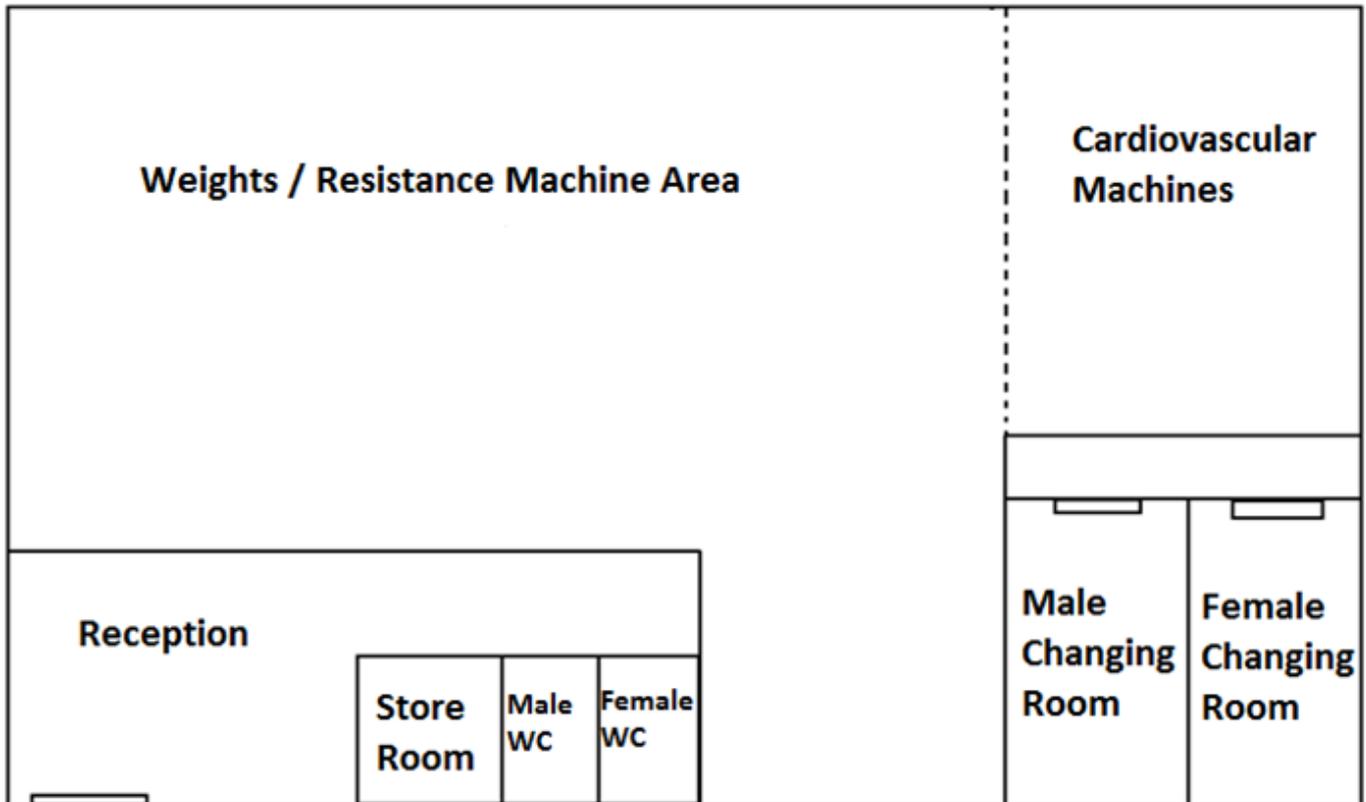


Figure (1): Gym Map - 2005-2012

Entering into what was an old abandoned warehouse on an old industrial estate, the car park is of average size with a few parking spaces to spare. An old metal shutter is lifted to let the gym receive the only natural air and light available, covered with an old railing the visibility to the inside of the gym is limited, grunting and groaning can be heard over the top of a powerful floor fan that is whirring, struggling to blow air into the gym.

Walking into the reception, I am immediately intimidated by the shelving, towering from floor to ceiling full of various supplements and proteins, all available to purchase and take home. Some are colourful, contain large attractive letters ... MUSCLE MASS ... MUSCLE GAINER ... PURE WHEY, all aiding in the 'growth' of the body. I can hear the thumping of music penetrating the MDF wall ... 'Smack my bitch up ...' Behind the main reception there is a hole cut out of the wall, enabling individuals from the weights area to peep through and ask for any drinks or aid that they require. This little hole

in the wall would be very frustrating whilst I worked here, as many men would tap their money on the counter or whistle to try to get my attention. I remember ignoring them until they verbally and politely asked me to get something for them. Walking past the main 'gym bar', stools and a work surface are set in front of shelving full of supplements for members to mix up on the spot, bodybuilding and powerlifting magazines are scattered everywhere. The new releases displayed on a magazine shelf, the older magazines stacked in a glass cabinet, these would provide a relief of my time whilst working a ten-hour shift. The wooden flooring echoes under my feet as I continue to walk through reception. Two leather sofas are placed in front of each other, in the centre on the wall an old TV is visible, with the sound barely audible with subtitles.

To walk through to the main gym floor, I pass the female and male toilets on the right, only one toilet is available per person, the smell of bleach and cheap air freshener fills my nostrils. There is also a 'spare' room, which consists of old weight training belts, a massage bed, and not forgetting a microwave and kettle. These are not only used by the staff, but also for the members too who need to re-heat their food whilst being on a restricted diet and training at the gym. It is a very male-dominated gym, no other females are present at this time, usually only two or three venture in to this gym at a time, I'm outnumbered.

Entering the main gym, the lack of cardio vascular equipment is apparent, there are only a few unused treadmills, stationary bikes, rowing machines, arc trainers and cross trainers, a maximum of two each are available to use. These are old, shabby but clean, very rarely are they used and they feel slightly unstable under foot. TVs are set on the wall, the news and other channels displayed are subtitled. Just off the CV area are the changing rooms, they are small, damp and musty smelling. Consisting of one basic shower, no windows and a few benches and pegs on the walls, the carpet is damp in areas and vacuumed only once a week at the very least.

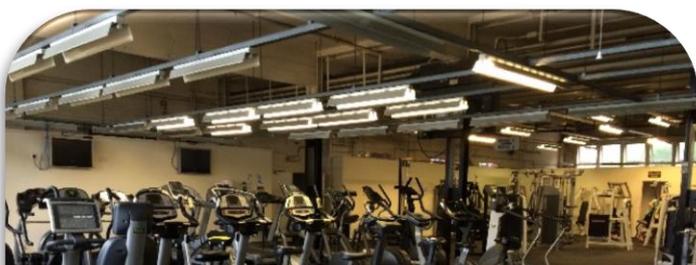
Walking back out of the changing rooms, the rest of the main gym floor is visible, the lighting is very dim, and my eyes take time to adjust as there are no windows here. The only visible natural light I can see is from the shutter at the other end of the gym, piercing its way through the gloomy building. Resistance machines, barbells, dumbbells, straight bars, e-z bars, chains and mirrors are all set under the dim lit area. Initially these machines looked very oppressing, intimidating, over time with the knowledge and rapports built, these would be cathartic and prove to be a great source of fun. The thumping of the music is louder here, filling the gym with the same crazy, adrenaline producing beat. Around 90% of this gym is weights orientated. The smell of metal and baby powder permeates the gym floor;

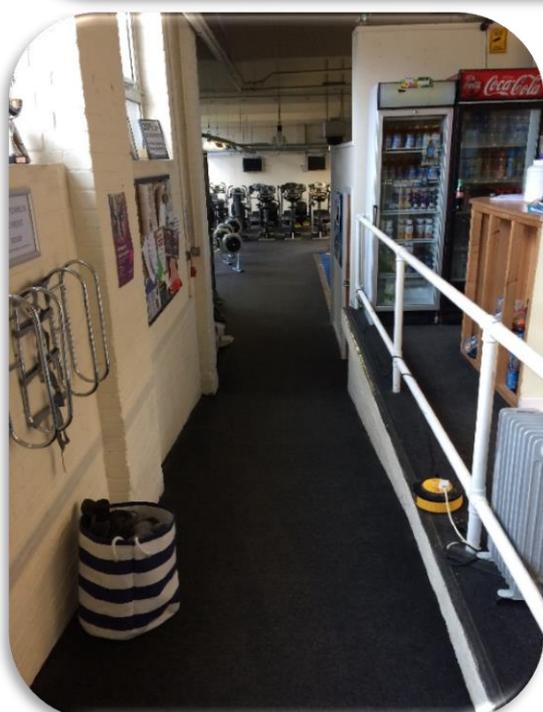
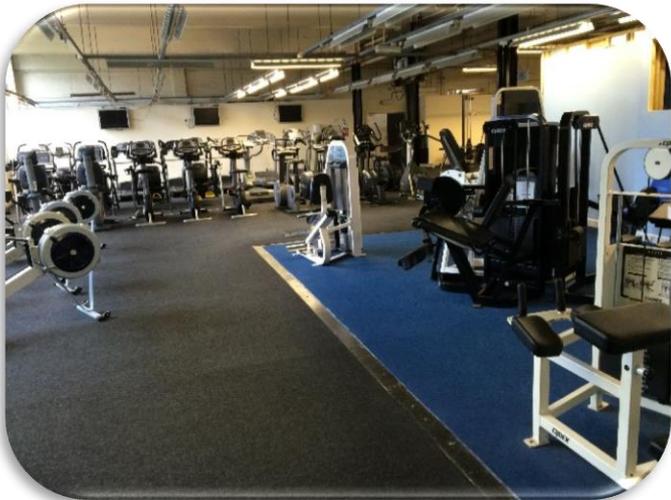
the squat racks are stacked with fifty, twenty-five, twenty, ten and five kilogram plated weights, ready for someone entering the gym to complete a 'heavy session'. Many individuals refer to the term 'training' when they come in to use the gym.

Many a time these weights, particularly the fifty kilogram ones, are left lying around on the floor. I would lift the fifty kilogram plates back to their original place, and was looked upon with many confused faces - a girl of eighteen years of age at the time, who had my tiny, slight frame, could possibly lift such a thing! Eventually, I understood this as the 'look of appreciation or approval'.

Walking back through the gym and passing the men who are training, most have the stereotypical 'meat head' look - very muscly, lift extremely heavy weights, and are in to the central ethos of the gym - bodybuilding, powerlifting, and strongman orientated training. It is a very working-class gym, with members training after a day's work in their work boots, high visibility gear on, and torn track suit bottoms covered with paint or dust from their days work. They smell of their days work too, concrete and lime powder, putty, wood and sweat. As I retreat back outside, the fresh air fills my lungs, and my eyes sting from the natural light - this was once unfamiliar territory, and now it feels like home.

## 7.2 The Modernised Spit and Saw Dust Gym – (2012-2018):





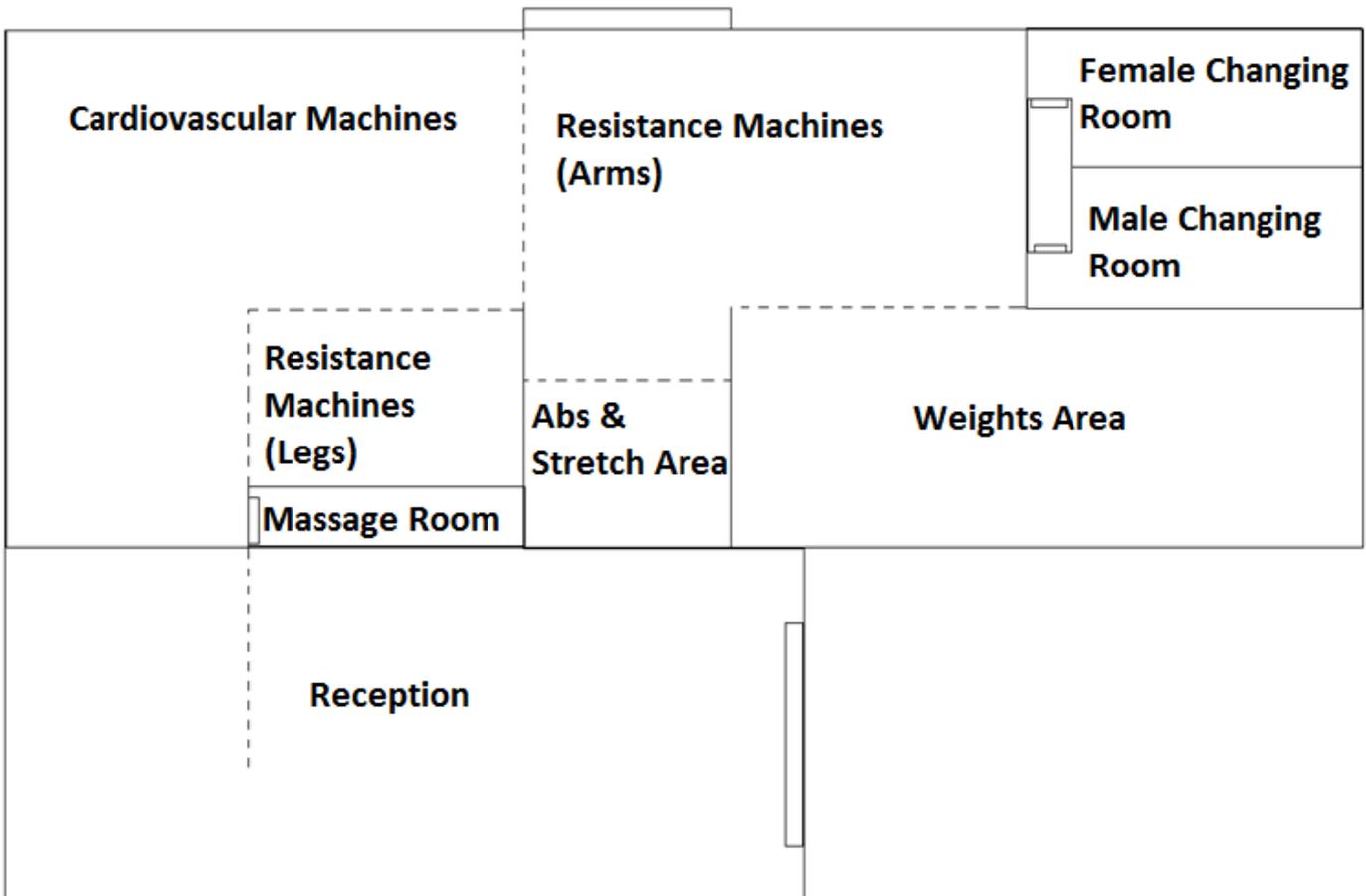
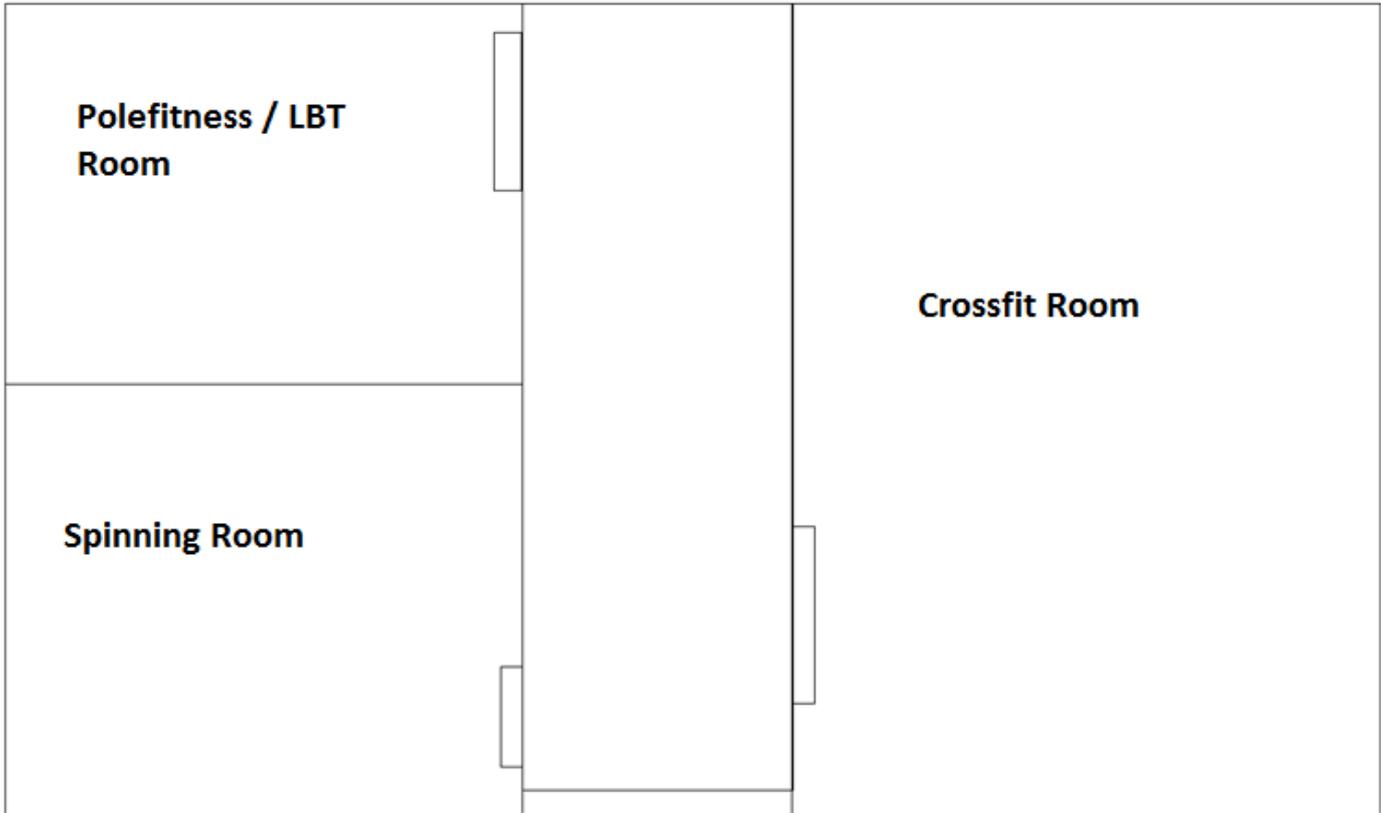


Figure (2) and Image (1): Gym Map and Pictures – 2012-2018

*'This isn't like the leisure centre gym, where you have to cover up, and you know, you have to smell nice, and you're not allowed to grunt and you're not allowed to do this, if you wanna come to the weights room you need to be prepared that you're gonna come to a proper gym, you know. Where the men don't dress up, they don't wear lycra, you know they, they wear their work gear, they wear their work boots, you know, they come in here straight after work sometimes still in their bloody florescent jacket, this, this is the way it is ...' – Jenny.*

I can tell it's a busy night tonight, I'm struggling to find a space to park my car and the CrossFitters are running up and down the car park making it difficult to manoeuvre. I've come at a peak time meaning that I'm going to struggle to find equipment and will have to train in a crowded environment. Groaning and muttering explicitly under my breath, I've finally parked. Walking to reception, I let out a huge sigh. I can already hear the clanging of the weights, manly murmurs and heavy grunting coming from the windows where the 'male space' of the weights section is. Upon reaching reception, I can hear the music 'smack my bitch up...' I'm thinking it's a heavy lifting session today, this always plays when the 'serious' trainers are in.

The reception is crowded, smells of over-exerted and sweat – empty protein shakes that have been used for replenishment are left on the work surface in conjunction with pre-workouts and all other concoctions that are used to aid in 'building' the body. Walking into the main gym, I can first see the larger cardiovascular area, filled with many machines. This area is predominantly facilitated by women and girls, 'womanly murmurs' are only heard in this section, most are either in pairs chatting whilst having a 'casual cycle' on an exercise bike, or are individually running or working out with headphones on. This is a welcoming space, and a non-threatening environment where many individuals easily approach the machines and get on with their workout. A mixture of perfumes and deodorants float into my nostrils, the majority of women who are working out have some sort of make up on, and they are continuously adjusting their clothing (or lack of) constantly. The whirring of machinery reaches my ears; it's a mechanical orchestra, all working simultaneously together, pushing and encouraging the individual who is working on it.

In the open – planned gym, the floor feels cluttered, full of oppressive air. The resistance machines, free weights and ab/stretching area are filled with the hustle and bustle of swearing, laughter and 'banter', with the odd scream of pain in between when pushing out a rep. The metal bars clanging, weights smashing to the ground, and the shouting of encouragement from an individual's partner when they are pushing what seems to be an over bearable weight. The music in the background still blaring 'I'm a fire starter

...', the smell of damp, sweating bodies, the hint of baby powder, and musty, dry chalk fill my nostrils - all men no women present. Evidence of hard work from the dust of chalk and baby powder is present, raw, rough and ready to train. This is the space where I enter what was previously the traditional 'spit and sawdust' area of the old gym. Even when entering into this 'territory' I feel slightly vulnerable and claustrophobic; although I'm used to this environment, I'm still not sure I should be here. This is a testosterone-filled environment, and I am entering this as a women. I can almost taste the saltiness of the air, the windows and a shutter are open for ventilation, but this doesn't seem to be enough for an escape. I keep my head down, knowing where I am going and what I need to do, although I can feel some piercing eyes on me, and I'm not sure what they mean ...

As I walk into the female changing rooms, they are dark, dingy, and smell of old shower gel, perfume and deodorant. There are a couple of mirrors placed randomly on the walls, one full length and the other head height. Next to the lockers is a little travel hair dryer attached to the wall, this is very basic, nothing like a superior changing room! A little heater kicks off automatically when someone walks in, releasing a burnt smell. A couple of blue plastic chairs are thrown in the corner, and the lock in the loo is a little dodgy, but this is all part and package of how this gym makes you feel, comforting, not too showy and overly worried about how you should be looking. Certain attributes from the previous spit and saw dust gym have been maintained here, the ethos is still underlying but now almost hidden. Due to the gym becoming more 'female friendly' and greater women becoming members, a slightly different dynamic of ethos is present, there are more cliques present due to the differing spaces, and larger areas to work out and participate within. 'I didn't want it to be like that, it just had to change to keep up with today ...' expresses the gym owner. Walking out of reception, the fresh air is a welcomed relief to my lungs; I look forward to this experience and what may occur on my next visit to the gym.

## 8. Access and Phases of Research:

*'The sole support which strangers-in-meeting may count on must be woven from the thin and loose yarn of their looks, words and gestures. At the time of the meeting, there is no room for trial and error, no learning from mistake and no hope of another go' – Baumen (2000, p.95)*

An issue that was taken into consideration from the outset of this research was the initial access to the research site described in the section above. From the beginning, access to the gym was an uncomplicated matter. I had been working at the gym since 2010, and I worked and lived close to it in the South East of England. I had been involved in the gym changing premises two years into my employment, and was fully immersed in the logistics of it.

My access to the people and research site and people who worked out there reflected that of a 'networking system'. As the gym is privately owned, there has always been one main manager, with whom I have a working rapport. Holloway (1997) refers to this as a 'gatekeeper' - the manager granted me formal entry and access to the gym to conduct my research. He and the other staff members at the gym were supportive and happy for me to conduct research at the gym, and there were no obvious barriers to my research. I was given the autonomy to observe the 'nitty-gritty' aspect of the gym life. Furthermore, I was free to approach any member of the gym to negotiate access to interview them.

The amount of time needed for various steps was reduced, such as the groundwork for building a rapport and trust, which had already been established due to my employment and friendships built over the previous years (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Whilst there were no problems in accessing the facilities and gym environment, deciding on how to approach individuals for interviewing was more problematic (as discussed in section 5.1).

When I explained the questions and my research approach to staff and members of the gym, the response was generally one of interestingness. They wanted to know a little bit more about the research, and were keen to offer their own opinions and thoughts to the questions and research topic that I had briefed them on. As Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggest, there can be some disadvantages whilst conducting research in a familiar setting. I found myself expecting particularly enriching and exciting data from certain areas of my research, which proved to be at some points very dissatisfying. Because I was a well-known member of

staff at the gym, I occasionally felt confined to my employment role, and it was sometimes difficult to remain as a researcher rather than an instructor / gym employee to gain information. Overtime, my position became ambivalent within the gym environment. My beliefs surrounding feminism changed, as I found on many occasions where certain events occurred with some men in the gym (such as being touched as reflected in chapter one) to be an annoyance to my research. I became more vocal surrounding what I believed the acceptable and appropriate actions within the gym environment should be, and therefore made individuals aware of this – over time, the way some people saw my position at the gym changed, as I no longer acquiesced certain actions and behaviours that I previously would have experienced and ignored (Allport, 1954).

From the outset, I explicitly made individuals aware that my research was inclusive of only women and their experiences in the gym. This was not without some initial distain and harsh opinions from the male members of the gym. Towards the latter stages of my study, many people would joke around and comment that they should not be speaking to me, or they did not have time for me as they were men and my study was only regarding women. However, I was still in an advantageous position, I had knowledge of the ‘insiders’ (gym members) therefore, accessing and discussing my research overall presented no barriers.

## **9. Ethical Considerations:**

Ethical clearance for this study was gained through the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Canterbury Christ Church University. Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggest that although ethic approval has been sought and granted by a committee, it is not assumed that the research project will have a satisfied all requirements of ethical research, due to the nature of ethics not being a static event, but a continual process.

Research ethics refers to the adherence of moral and professional codes of conduct in the collection, analysis, reporting and publication of information regarding individuals (Marshall, 1998). There are a number of ethical positions that can be adopted, each having important implications for how a researcher conducting qualitative research would go about their work from start to finish (Sparkes and Smith, 2012; 2014).

Recent feminist scholars have proposed an ethical position that emphasises care and responsibility rather than just outcomes. This position focuses on particular feminist informed social values, which revolve around personal experience, nurturing relationships and context.

Blee and Currier (2011) suggest that feminist ethics is located in moral understandings within a larger framework of social relationships, additionally they note that morality 'is part of ongoing social life, not solely a function of philosophical thought' (p.403).

I have chosen two particular feminist approaches to guide this research project. Edwards and Mauthner (2012) suggest a 'feminist ethics of care' approach. This incorporates how to deal with difference, conflict, disagreement and ambivalence rather than attempting to eliminate it. The other ethical position is advocated by Lahman *et al.*, (2011), known as culturally responsive relational reflexive ethics (CRRRE). Incorporated within this approach is a stance that suggests I will not be able to fully understand the perspectives of the varied cultures within the field of interaction, and I therefore need to be 'flexible and open to studying ethical issues from the perspective of the participants to the extent possible' (p.1401). CRRRE signals for me to include and practice three interrelated 'R's' of ethics: Culturally responsive ethics, relational ethics, and reflexive ethics.

Ethical dilemmas related to this project included the presentation of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality of the people involved. The women who I interviewed were given a pseudonym. According to Walford (2005) anonymity simply means that 'we do not name the person or research site involved but, in research, it is usually extended to mean that we do not include information about any individual or research site that will enable the individual or research site to be identified by others' (p.85). In terms of the people who I observed and interacted within the field, it was always made clear that the research was academic in nature, and that findings would not identify them. The importance of remaining anonymous was to ensure confidentiality, and to minimise the risk of harm to participants (Kaiser, 2009).

Women who participated in the interviews read and signed an informed consent (appendix three) that enabled them to agree or refuse further participation within the study. I was also verbally explicit whilst stating the nature of the research, why it was being undertaken and to whom the information was to be disseminated. Such information could not be made to every exerciser I observed in the gym; however with this in mind, a poster remained on the gym notice board (appendix four) containing information to make them aware that research was being conducted at the premises.

The women interviewed were able to see transcripts of their interviews, some personal field notes were made available and shared with during the interview, known as 'member checking' (Maxwell, 1996). This was done to engage in the process of consent, and

include an entering dialogue with participants about ethical dilemmas that had arisen during this project, and may have possibly emerged in the future (Phoenix, 2010). Some interviewees did read and reflect on their interviews, which enabled them to clarify on some of their comments and thoughts, although no one withdrew from what they had discussed.

Throughout this project, not only did the participants need protecting, it became evidently clear and imperative that myself as the researcher needed to be aware of protecting myself. As Morse (2007) states 'safety of the researcher is one of the least addressed yet most important considerations in qualitative research inquiry' (p.1005). This not only concerns physical safety, but the care of the emotional self too. Because of the nature of this project and the inclusion of a critical self –reflexive approach. I was acutely aware of the risks involved, and was consistently alert to my surroundings. This enabled me to achieve and develop a highly tuned 'sociological antenna' (Sugden, 2012), and allow me to illuminate the 'nitty-gritty' and corporeal aspects of my embodiedness in the gym.

## **10. Data Analysis and Representation:**

There seems to be no set procedures for analysing and writing ethnography. After I had finished the formal phases of research, I was left with approximately seventeen hours of transcribed material from the thirteen interviews that I had conducted and recorded with the use of a Dictaphone, these were all subsequently transcribed verbatim. I had several notebooks and field notes inclusive of my self-reflexive diary. All of this evidence needed translating and collecting into a coherent and accurate portrayal of myself and the other women's experiences and the gym environment.

I wanted to ensure that my interview transcriptions remained consistent (see appendices), therefore transcribing them verbatim allowed for consistency and accuracy. The interview transcriptions were also easily understood when referring back and reading through them due to complying to the same transcription conventions applied by Tilley and Powick (2002, p. 310)

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**Sounds:**

Thinking before someone speaks	Umm, ah
I've never thought of that before	Hmph (=huhm, ha, huh)
Affirmative Sounds	Yup (=yep), yeah (=yah, yea, ya)
Listening + encouragement	Uhum (=aha, uha, mmm)
Environmental Sounds	(tapping), (knock at the door), (shuffling papers)

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**Tone of speaker:**

Louder	CAPITAL LETTERS
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**Demonstrative expressions:**

Words spoken while laughing	(laughing)
Laughter when both parties are laughing at something	(laughter)
Other	(Coughing), (sighing), etc.

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Pauses + 5 seconds	(Pause)
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Interruptions	Use (inter.) where the break happens
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Self-talk or repeating what someone else said	Use "quotes"
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Repetition	Type out the repeated words, words, words
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**Punctuation:**

End of thought	A full stop (.) at the end of the complete idea
End of phrase / clause	Use a comma (,)
Thought not completed	Use an eclipse ... as the thought trails off

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Cross – talk: two or more speakers speaking at the same time / over	(CT)
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Tape is unclear / muffled and can't make out word or phrase of one speaker	(indistinguishable word / phrase)
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Tilley and Powick (2002) suggest that the aim of these conventions are to re/present experiences in a general nature, not calling for minute details such as exact pause counts or hesitations; moreover these conventions are suited to analysis procedures which are established to uncover codes, themes and categories to understand the women's experience.

After adhering to the transcription conventions and transcribing verbatim, I analysed the data by exploring emergent themes. I organised and described the rich data collected in detail through the identifying, analysing and reporting patterns that arose (Gbrich, 2013; Sparkes and Smith, 2014). It was a straightforward and flexible form of analysis, and highlighted the similarities and differences across the data. Considering its strong emphasis on interpretation, I had the potential to divulge towards a deep, aesthetically satisfying and freewheeling interpretation of the data. Furthermore, a thematic analysis does not adhere to a specific theory, so I therefore was not restricted on my interpretations (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). In the initial stages of my analysis, I utilised the software Nvivo 10 which provided me with a useful starting point whilst searching for specific themes that were emerging from my data. I found overtime this software became an inconvenience and coding manually was far more successful and worthwhile. There are six phases for conducting a thematic analysis, I adhered to these throughout the process of my analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

- **Phase one:** *Immersion*
- **Phase two:** *Generating initial codes:* the researcher produces codes across the entire data set in a systematic fashion and then identifies and produces a long list of the differing codes across the data set. Once this has been initially coded, the researcher then moves on to collate data relevant to each code.
- **Phase three:** *Searching for and identifying themes:* the researcher focuses on the analysis at the broader level of themes rather than codes. The different codes are sorted into possible themes and then entails the gathered relevant coded data extracts with identified themes to produce a set of candidate themes.
- **Phase four:** *Reviewing themes:* the researcher checks that the themes work in relation to the coded extracts, and then ascertains whether the themes work in relation to the entire data set.

- **Phase five: *Defining and naming themes*:** the researcher defines the ‘essence’ of what each theme is about and determines what aspect each theme captures. Sub-themes may also be used if a particularly large and complex theme is present.
- **Phase six: *Writing the report*:** the researcher provides vivid extracts of data in order to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme. An analytic tale is produced where themes are embedded to provide a clear interpretation of the data.

In this study, there was also an element of phenomenological analysis and representation (Cresswell, 2013). I had included rich and full personal experiences throughout the interviews so that these could be directed to the women (Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, this incorporated a horizontalisation of the data, treating each statement with equal worth. The significant statements were then grouped into larger units and used as themes or ‘meaning units’. A portrayal of what the women in the study have experienced with the phenomenon was then addressed, inclusive of verbatim examples, with a description of how the experience happened. Finally, the ‘essence’ of the experience was described with textual and structural descriptions, telling the reader what the women experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2014).

### **10.1 Representation of Qualitative Research:**

As previously mentioned, all research is subject to researcher bias. Quantitative and qualitative views have their individual ways of approaching subjectivity, and are very much influenced based on the paradigm guiding the research (Morrow, 2005). Encapsulated within the conversation surrounding subjectivity is the concept of *representation*. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to the ‘crisis of representation’, which attributes to the growing concern of reflexivity. More specifically, the crisis of representation manages questions about whose reality is really represented in this research. This ‘crisis’, is particularly important due to addressing the impossibility of a dichotomous disengagement between the researcher and researched, alternatively it leads to a greater comprehension of the intricacies of ‘fairly representing the experiences of participants and of seeing participants, rather than researchers, as authorities on participants lives’ (Morrow, 2005, p.254).

As the researcher, I adopted numerous strategies to ensure I fairly represented the women’s realities during the data gathering process, this included (Morrow, 2005, p. 254):

- Asking for clarification
- Delving ever more deeply into the meanings of participants
- Taking the stance of a naïve inquirer

This is of notable importance due to researching as an ‘insider’ of the gym culture, and being familiar with the phenomenon inquired. By utilising the above strategies, this assisted me in achieving *fairness*, and representing the participant’s experiences and views equitably to avoid one-sided interpretations that may represent my bias, or only certain participants. I was also mindful of Heshusius’s (1994, p. 16) *participatory consciousness*, where there is an ‘awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known’. My full attention was merging, present, related empathetically, and gave holistic apprehension to reality as mutually evolving.

## **10.2 Evaluating the ‘Goodness’ of Qualitative Research:**

Whilst quantitative research is often based on judgements of objectivity, reliability and validity (Spencer *et al.*, 2003, p. 59), the application of these traditional criteria to qualitative research is not always a ‘good fit’ (Schofield, 2002). When making evaluative judgements about qualitative research, there have been over 100 sets of qualitative research criteria identified (Stige *et al.*, 2009). Whether research is, ‘good research’ is an important aspect to consider; despite what paradigm the research is conducted or experienced. From any type of research, the ‘goodness’ of the this is first and foremost of interest, as such qualities reflect on the trustworthiness of its findings (Lincoln, 1995; Patton, 2002). The crisis of legitimation refers to ‘a serious rethinking of such terms as validity, generalizability and reliability, terms already theorised in positivist, feminist, interpretive, constructivist-naturalistic and critical discourse’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 19). This crisis is problematic as it threatens the ability to extract meaning from the data. As Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2004), note:

‘Lack of legitimation means that the extent to which the data have been captured has not been adequately assessed, or that any such assessment has not provided support for legitimation’ (p. 778).

In an attempt to address the crises above, and to ensure that this research is not ‘sloppy research’ (Guba, 1981, p.90), there has been an increase in the focus of frameworks for making qualitative data analyses more explicit (Anfara *et al.*; Constanas, 1992). This is to

ensure that qualitative studies ‘promote openness on the grounds of refutability and freedom from bias’s’ (Anfara et al., p. 28). Spencer *et al.*, (2003) constructed a framework for evaluating interpretivist research (contributory, rigorous, defensible, credible, affective), in addition to being informed by Garman’s (1994; 1996) recommendations that research should be judged by its vitality and aesthetics (Northcote, 2012, p. 105-107). It is hoped that these principles can be evaluated and reflected upon throughout my research:

- **Contributory** (*significant contribution*) – to advance a wider knowledge / understanding of policy, theory, practice or a specific substantive field (Tracy, 2010).
- **Rigorous** (*openness and clarity*) – research conducted through organised and clear collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative data (Cohen and Crabtree, 2008)
- **Defensible** (*goodness, integrity, fittingness / consistency and reflexivity*) – design of research is strategized and addresses the evaluative questions posed (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Smith, 1993; Garman, 1994; 1996; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009).
- **Credible** (*consensus and meaningful coherence, interpretive adequacy*) – the arguments are well founded and plausible surrounding the significance of the evidence generated (Cohen and Crabtree, 2008; Eisner, 1991; Tracey, 2010; Shank and Villeda, 2004).
- **Affective** (*sincerity*) – acknowledging the excitement associated with research discoveries, the emotional involvement of the participants and the enthusiasm of the researcher (Tracey, 2010).

## 11. Summary:

This chapter provided insights into the ethnographic and feminist phenomenological methodological underpinnings and tools used for this research study. Feminist phenomenology proves to be a suitable method for studies aiming to understand the lived corporeal experiences of women’s experiences in particular times and spaces, and to explore the circumstances that influence the experience. Furthermore, in this chapter I introduced the research site and discussed the importance of being aware of the different spaces to support my epistemological and ontological positions. Additionally, I highlighted the importance of utilising a qualitative approach, and introduced the women that have their experiences illuminated throughout this study.

The following chapters reveal the experiential descriptions, and the embodied meanings of the women's gym experiences. Interlinked with many quotes from the women, the purpose of the next chapters are to bring to life the phenomenon and assist with the understanding of them. Divided into five distinctive chapters, the findings aim to provide rich, evocative and corporeal descriptions of the holistic experiences the women encounter throughout differing spaces, therefore each chapter's findings are interlaced, and often overlap.

## ***Chapter Five***

### **Embodying Spinning**

The previous chapter examined the various methodological techniques and processes that are utilised throughout this thesis to explore the embodied experiences on women in fitness cultures. Continuing with the focus of self-reflexivity and to further explore my own and the other women's narratives against the feminist phenomenological approach outlined in chapter four; this chapter illuminates the 'sensuousness' of my experiences through instructing and participating within spinning classes, whilst also revealing the 'nitty-gritty' aspects from the women in this research who also partake in them. By firstly conducting a sensual ethnography of the spin room, I initially reveal how my body is feeling whilst spinning, and what senses are heightened within this experience and space. I have interpreted my experiences as a means to understand and develop questions to ask the other women in relation to how they embody their experiences in the spinning room. It also provided a greater insight into my 'position' within this research, and the relationships that I am able to develop throughout the shared embodied experience. I then continue to discuss my journey and how spinning was introduced, and focus on the intimacies that occur within the spin room, and consequently how these are embodied within this specific space.

When I enter the spin room, it is dark and empty, almost neglected. A mechanical whirring from an overworked fan is echoing throughout the room. The windows are open and the room smells fresh. Outside, traffic noise can be heard. As I turn the lights on, a sudden change in appearance occurs as the light bounces into the room and reflects off the mirrors. I drop my bag down behind my spin bike and take out my disc selection. I flick through the forty different play lists I have created so far over the years and finally choose a disc that I consider will deliver a good 'torture' session, one where I can push my body to a maximal level while accompanied by a good song. All the time, commanding others to push their own bodies to the limit. I will be the one dictating the way in which the session will run and possibly how they will experience this spin class. My choice of playlist is crucial as this will determine whether more sprints or hills climbs are included within the class.

The spinners slowly start to enter the room. The majority of these are my regulars although every now and then a beginner or newcomer will join in. They normally retreat straight to the back row of spin bikes, expressing what seems like nervousness when I ask them if they have participated in spinning before so I can go through the bike set up with them. The more advanced spinners claim their usual bike in the front row, towels and water bottles are lined up on the bikes. I can hear murmurs of anticipation and friendly laughter before the class starts.

When the time arrives to start the class, I press the close button on the stereo, as the CD slides in, a rush of adrenaline and anticipation flows through my body. I adjust the volume of the speaker, normal placing the dial on the same volume level. I take a deep breath and look down on my bike, making sure it is in line with the tiled floor. Heavy beats fill the room, sitting on my bike, I adjust my foot straps, making sure they are not too tight. I look up and all eyes are on me, ready and waiting for my first command. My body feels like it is moulded to this bike, it is a familiar sensation. The seat, handle bars and resistance all work together with me. When I start to pedal I can feel the metal against the bottom of my feet. If my feet aren't correctly aligned they will start to ache and hurt, so I make sure every time that they are secure, but doing a quick 'shuffle' with my feet whilst I'm seated. This familiar practice took a while to for me adjust to, I remember feeling very uncomfortable on the bike seat, but it gradually got better each time. I always tell the new spinners this too, so they are aware that it will get better and it is a normal experience to have, I also joke and say that my bottom is now moulded into the shape of the bike seat!

I start with the warm-up, stretching and making sure everyone gets used to the pace and 'feel' of the bike. I feel my body flow with the beat as I sing to the songs that I have chosen to include within the playlist. In any other context I never find myself singing in front of such a large group of people, but in front of my spin class, I find this fun, comforting and acceptable, and I use it to aid with my breathing and shouting. Gradually becoming warmer, the usual physiological signs occur. My heart rate increases, my breath becomes warmer and as the class progresses from the warm-up to sprints, jumps, endurance and hill-climbs, I start to sweat. I'm working at my best when I'm sweating. It's interesting how sweating in front of class is acceptable in the spin room. My eyes and neck are stinging from the sweat dripping down my body. I can smell the perfume being released from the pours on my drenched body. I feel a sense of empowerment by the demands that this spin bike is placing on my body, and knowing my classes and instruction might be helping other spinners feel this way too.

Grabbing my towel, I quickly wipe the excess sweat away. I'm not feeling conscious of how I may be looking, my hair starts to curl more and my days make up wearing off. I wear tight clothing when on a spin bike as I'm sure this aids my performance. I do not like the feeling off baggy clothing as it leaves me cold and damp during and after a workout. I remember how I used to wear brightly coloured clothing, but over time I found myself choosing to wear darker clothing, so as not to draw too much attention to myself whilst I'm in the main gym, however my trainers are always brightly coloured.

The spinners are concentrating on their own efforts and appear quiet, flushed, sweating and breathing heavily as they wipe themselves with their towels. The flywheels of the spin bikes are working as I can hear its distinct grinding against the resistance. The bike is keeping up with me, my body being pushed to its limits, the burning sensation in my legs and my hands are gripping tightly to the rubber handle bars. As I shout out every command, the spinners follow, pushing themselves further. I'm sure they trust me. Sweat drops off my body, some splashing on the body of the spin bike. My mouth is dry although relief is at hand as I replenish with my usual choice of water. I always let the spinners know when they have two songs left before the cool down - some say this helps them with a final push towards the end of the class while others gesture (some with two fingers, others with facial expressions) their dissatisfaction for knowing!

After 45 minutes the class slowly decreases to a cool-down, less frenetic music fills the room and the resistance on the bike is released. I can hear the sigh of relief and satisfaction follow. Some spinners even cry out with gleeful cheers! As we start stretching I can feel muscles slightly start to pull and ache as each one is manipulated. My ears are humming and my heart beat is pulsating in my head. The mirrors in the room are steamed up – I always love it when this happens, as it signals to me just how hard everyone has worked out.

The fan is still hard at work, trying to relieve the class with some cooler air. As my breathing slowly decreases, I get off my bike and looking around I can see that all of the other spinners are doing the same as me. I count out hygiene wipes to make sure the bikes are left clean and suitable for the next class. As I hand them out, always starting from the same direction, I thank everyone. A feeling of satisfaction flushes through my body knowing everyone has had a good workout – I can see it in their faces.

As I wipe down my own bike, I feel a further satisfaction (is this a form of euphoria?) as I remove my sweat, and evidence of my hard work off the bike - leaving it clean and ready for another demanding workout. Endorphins are still buzzing through my body, and when the spinners depart and say

goodbye, I look back into the room as I switch the lights off. It looks empty and neglected again. I'm looking forward to the next workout already.

## **1. Introducing spinning:**

Indoor cycling is a relatively new gym activity (in comparison to other forms of aerobics). There has been insufficient research surrounding its distinction or practices from other forms of group exercise. The activity advantages its own consideration, especially given the nature of its combination. Indoor cycling in some ways is outdoor cycling adapted for consumption by cyclists and gym goers alike. It can simulate an outdoor training ride, or an intense aerobic and anaerobic workout produced on a stationary bike (Newhall, 2010).

Indoor cycling entered into the gym in the 1990s after the initial step aerobics craze. Fitness giant Reebok had a hand in this phenomenon too, though many companies manufactured bikes and have painted their own programs applicable to indoor cycling (Newhall, 2010). The concept of indoor cycling is fairly simple; a room full of stationary bikes, with instructor(s) who lead participants through various exercises which create both cardio and strength workouts. This is all set to a music playlist, with differing positions performed on the bike. The various positions enacted on the bicycle whilst listening to music include 'climbing' (cycling whilst standing), 'jumping' (alternatively standing and sitting), and 'hovering' (where the spinners body remains low and their bottom is 'hovering' just above the seat) (Hernandez, 2000).

The indoor cycling classes appeal to a wider demographic of individuals in comparison to the traditional aerobics classes because of the mix of cardio and strength elements, additionally because it is not marked as 'feminine' in the same ways the traditional aerobics programmes have been known for (Newhall, 2010). Additionally, it has been suggested that men prefer the use of equipment when they get into classes (Sassatelli, 2000). Outdoor cycling enthusiasts who consist of professional and amateur cyclists can participate within indoor cycling classes to stay in shape during their off-season. It also presents a change in the monotony of traditional cardio workouts such as those conducted on elliptical trainers or treadmills. Because it has not been feminised and sexualised in the same way that step aerobics has, it is in theory, more inclusive to a diverse range of people (Newhall, 2010).

Within the classroom, there is also an element of individuality and privacy. Although there other people are present in the room, only the individual knows how high, or how low

the resistance on the dial is set. The competitive nature of the aerobics classroom and the surveillance facilitated by mirrored walls is sometimes mitigated in the indoor cycling room. The ability for the individual to privately control their intensity within the workout makes the indoor cycling class a better motion for empowerment (Malin, 2010; Newhall, 2010). Within the indoor cycling classroom, it is difficult to portray the population due to the nature of the activity; it attracts a versatile range of regulars, infrequent cyclists, and the occasional one-timer.

### 1.1 Spinning journeys:

*Alice: 'probably just because it was something I hadn't done before and it was like 45 minutes [...] you get in there and I imagine you've got to stand, you wanna keep going and not walk out. It's just, in, do it, out! There was no commitment, you paid up front, you know there was no commitment, I gave it a few months before I sort of became a member'*

*Amy: 'so what made you come back and be a member?!'*

*Alice: 'I just loved it, yeah just really really enjoyed it, yeah even your classes haha! When you wouldn't even let us open the door! We used to go like that (waves arm out) and hit someone! It was hilarious ... sweaty ...'*

*'With spin I did feel like exhausted, but really good and like, I ached and soon recovered but came back each time. You know I used to do Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and it used to kill you three days on the trot, but I still came back where I knew it was doing me good, and I felt like I had had a good workout.'* - Penny

The reflections above illuminate Alice and Penny's personal experiences of when they first engaged in spinning and their reasons for continuing. It is important to recognise and link the arbitrary ways that one arrives at spinning through personal histories, and how this activity creates an embodied awareness within this space.

I became an indoor cycling instructor in 2011. Often the term 'spin' is used as a shorthand for indoor cycling, but the term 'spin' is actually a trademark of Reebok and refers

to its specific indoor cycling program (Newhall, 2010). I use the term 'spin' or 'spinning' for the classes I instruct at the gym, and refer to the participants as 'spinners', these references are used most frequently whilst at the gym. When the gym changed premises and I had completed a few of my gym instructor qualifications. I found the spinning qualification very appealing to do, although I had competed within gymnastics from the ages of three to twelve years, exercise to music classes and Zumba classes never appealed to me as I didn't like the dance aspect of it, whereas my gymnastics routines were regimented (and I have two left feet!). After a day of training, I was fully qualified to teach it. We also had a room specifically built within the new premises that was catered for certain classes to be instructed.

The room had no windows, no natural light, and the only source of coolness was powered through an industrial fan – which I could never have on because it was too loud, as I do not use a microphone when I instruct so it was difficult to fully hear me shout. It was a very intimate room, overtime when more bikes were added they would be placed side by side, with the handlebars nearly touching in order for them to fit into the room. The environment became extremely warm very quickly, it was renowned for being termed 'the sweatbox'; sweat would be dripping off my body within the second track, and members from the main gym could hear me shout instructions over the beat of the music through the thinly built plasterboard walls.



Image (2) Old Spinning Room

Whilst reflecting upon my initial spin classes, the demographics were mainly female participants. There were significantly more women than men who attended, and predominantly the age range was around mid-30s to 50 years. Newhall (2010) suggests that certain classes provide a model of a feminist community based around physical exercise, and at the time, the same women came in to spin within specific times of a class, and it did very much feel like a tight knit community where the participants would spin and work on their fitness together. I was initially the only instructor who taught these classes, and I was also the first spinning instructor to start regular classes at the gym, and in the local area there was at the time no other spin classes within a ten-mile radius.

After a few months of successful sold-out classes there became a waiting list for people to participate, a reserve list also became available in case a space arose due to a cancellation. I started off with around only ten spin bikes within the classroom, these were bought second hand, and even though they were pretty shabby, they were clean. They were an older style of bike, had a clunky ride to them, and were forever being maintained. Eventually I had to start instructing back to back classes to make another class available to those who hadn't been able to book on to the previous class. This was often referred to as 'double spin' for those who also wanted to book and dare to stay on a do another after the first class had finished. A new male instructor started to instruct one class every Monday evening and eventually a few months later we had another female instructor. The three of us instructed at different times of the day but on a regular basis each week. I was still instructing the majority of these classes but most members who take a spin class in general are aware of the differing styles of instructors. We all have a differing style to how we teach, many women shared the same belief as Stephanie, that they '*have to like the instructor*', in order to have a good workout and return. Alice participates in all the spin classes with differing instructors she explains:

*'...yeah I try and do them all. I think it is keeping it more versatile and it's just different days and timings, but it's interesting how different people work and it's also interesting to see with different instructors you feel yourself, you get a better workout. Is it a particular one where you know you're gonna get a good workout so you stick with that one, or others you know you might sort of you know might be sort of more of a fun*

*element to it, erm things like that is why I try them all, but you know they are all different ...' – Alice.*

Towards the end of 2013 a separate room altogether in another part of the building became available for the gym to use as a spinning room. More bikes were incorporated, these were newer, branded, still second hand, but shiny with a more comfortable ride.

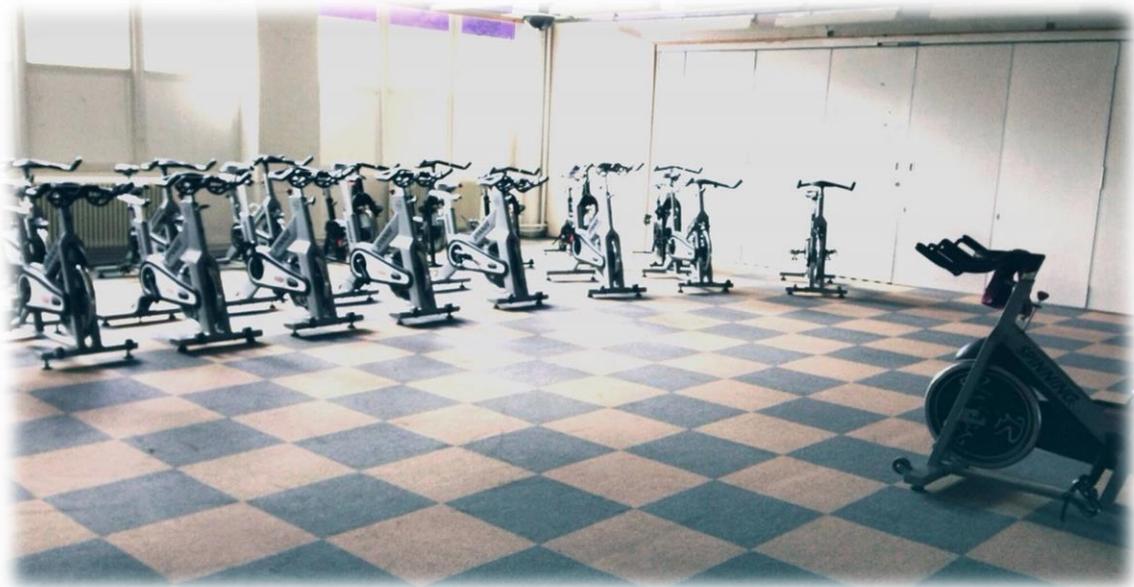


Image (3) New Spinning Room

Overtime the demographics in the different room changed dramatically. The classes were still populated with more women, but more men came to the class than in the previous room, sometimes there can be half-and-half, on rare occasions more men than women. The age range was anything from 16-60 years, participants within my class fell along a wide range of fitness levels, including beginner exercisers as well as the occasional competitive racers.

## **2. Experiences within the spin room:**

*'the variety of it I suppose because it's not just about sitting on a bike, it's about ... you're kind of using your whole body if you know what I mean rather than. See spinning to me I just, I just like it, it's fun, [...] I like the intensity of it, especially when we are climbing and stuff, I like, I like that coz you really feel like you're working don't you' – Becky.*

As described above within Becky's reflection, many experiences can be embodied throughout the spinning room for those who engage within this space. Whilst I have acknowledged my spinning experiences and highlighted the sensuousness of this space in the above sections, the remainder of this chapter now focuses on the women within this research and describes their embodied experiences that occur within the spin room.

### **2.1 Spinning for calories:**

*'You feel good about yourself that you've done that you know, so if I had had any treats that day I'd feel ok about it and I wouldn't think, oh you know I've had a chocolate bar today and a bag of crisps today so it kind of like eliminates them feelings ...'* – Penny.

The body, exercise and food within Western Culture are inseparably linked; issues of body management and weight and size have become important areas within both medical and popular discourse (Markula, Burns and Riley, 2008). It has been said that individuals are inundated every day with messages of how our bodies should look, and how the ideal health and beauty can be achieved. At the same time, messages conveying the ways in which individuals should eat and exercise in order to attain those ideals are saturated within the media (Bordo, 1993; Kilbourne, 1999). Due to this, it is often difficult to consider how bodies separate from food and exercise. Research has shown that gender adds complexity to the relationship between the body, exercise and food, and with many female athletes demonstrating high anxiety and distress surrounding their weight and bodies, which often are combined to eating and exercise practices (George, 2005; Krane, Waldron, Michalenok & Stiles-ShIPLEY, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004; Markula, 1995; Zanker & Gard, 2008).

Spinning is renowned for its weight loss benefits (Newhall, 2010). In some instances, women discussed their relationship with food and exercise, as Charlie and Penny reflect:

*'...just makes me feel better for the rest of the day and I can eat and drink more as well ...'* – Charlie.

*'...I did lose when I first started spinning, and that was about 2 and a half, three years ago, probably about a stone, which did make me feel so much better. So yeah that's why I've kept it up, I really enjoy it, erm, time goes really quick and I notice a difference*

*in the shape of my body since doing it you know, and I feel a lot better about myself ...'*

– Penny.

From these extracts, the cardiovascular exercise Charlie and Penny participate in such as spinning, appear to be a more appealing choice as they feel this exercise 'burns' enough calories in conjunction with the amount of food or drink they have eaten the previous days before the class. Numerous times before I have instructed a class I have overheard women discuss their food intake; one member stated to me *'I ate my own bodyweight in Chinese last night so I really need to spin it off!'* It also appears that women come to a spin class due to its high intensity, so they will also not feel guilty or bad about eating food or drink the days after the class too:

*'I think coz I, as long as I do the fitness side of things and burn the calories, regularly then I don't really mind what I eat ...', - Lily.*

*'I just think well I can spin that off on the Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday! [...] If I have like my bottle of wine on the Friday and Saturday, then Monday, Wednesday, Thursday go spinning, spin those calories off! It like eradicates the calories!'* – Penny.

*'I'll go home, clothes are soaking wet and I'll go 'yep', I've earned that fries and chocolate cream that I'm now gonna eat, you know I just love that feeling ...'* – Jenny.

As shown above, it is evident that certain women exercise in order to feel that they have to 'earn' particular foods and drinks they will consume after exercising. Some women felt that although they very much enjoyed spinning and started to do it every day, they realised that they could not keep up with maintaining a class every single day:

*'I've now set myself that I have a day off and that's a Friday, because I realise my body has to recuperate as well, so I've now set myself that goal of where I was spinning every day and I was thinking ooohhhh ...'* – Becky.

Becky demonstrates here that she is aware her body is not just an object, but also it is a subject, and something that communicates with her. It is part of her, or more accurately, her body simultaneously interacts with her and is controlled by her. Counihan (1999) suggests that historically, a deep connection between women and food has been present, with women

primarily carrying out a nurturing role through food preparation, serving, feeding and satisfying others through food. The relationship between the body, food and exercise is complex, and still remains poorly understood. Current literature stems from disordered eating grounded in objectivist perspectives. Body experiences and eating have been primarily conceptualised through pathological and/or individual deficiencies (such as low self-esteem and body image distortion) (Busanich and McGannon, 2010). However, it appears that the women sharing their experiences with exercise and food helps to deconstruct this discourse and illuminates their experiences subjectively.

## **2.2. Music as a motivator:**

*'I guess the sounds, so the louder something is the more intense you get, I get, erm, so music really helps, coz obviously if you've got boom boom boom (smacks hands in a beat together) you're gonna get that rhythm and that ...'* – Alex.

Susan McClary (1994, p.23) writes in her book on feminist music aesthetics *'by far the most difficult aspect of music to explain is its uncanny ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms'*. An experience with music forces an encounter between the mind and body; it clears a liminal space, which is at the same time charged with affect (the intensity that allows us to feel) and filled with tension. Experiencing music exposes the abandonment of binary divisions between subject/object and memory/imagination (DeChaine, 2002). This encounter between the mind and body is evident within reflections below:

*'the music is probably the bit that keeps you going as well, erm ... I find that some music gives me more energy [...] I like the hover, because I'm feeling like my back and my tummy (pats back and tummy) you see, so I think of that, and the jumps I'm thinking of my arms, so all the time I'm spinning I'm thinking 'oh what am I doing now!'*  
– Becky.

*'I am aware of what muscle groups I'm working and stuff so I will push myself in certain areas, so it's knowing your own body isn't it'* - Alex.

The experiences above also acknowledge the different bodily experiences, movements and gestures, in conjunction with the music that Alex and Becky hear whilst spinning. This arguably eliminates the mind and body dualism, and appears to suggest that they experience their body with movements and gestures from spinning, through music whilst exercising. Merleau-Ponty [1945] (1997) suggests that contact bodily intuition and maturity can be acquired through tying a particular body part with consciousness (or being able to 'isolate the muscle'). It is the ability to recognise one's own muscle movement, proprioceptivity, capability of understanding and being able to feel your body from 'within'. It is being in your body and action / movement, rather than having a body and performing an action. Becky and Alex demonstrate this by being able to recognise the specific muscles they are using, and the sensations of these muscles that occur whilst working out and listening to the music.

Furthermore, the main principles of spinning consists of two inter-related components: rhythm and timing. Rhythm arranges the flow of action whilst concurrently being part of the action. The rhythms of spinning are largely repetitive, in that the spinner has to remain in time with the beat of the track and this instructor, this is accompanied by coordinated breathing patterns and lower limb intonation, although other parts of the body are involved such as the upper limbs, particularly when 'jump' tracks are included (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2017). For the spinner to achieve rhythm, coordination of body parts are negotiated through particular bodily alteration necessary to align with the tracks played, for example, whilst in the 'hover' position. To efficiently do this, a sense of timing is also needed. Goodridge (1999, p. 44) defines this as 'the act of determining or regulating the order of occurrence of an action or event, to achieve desired results'. Moreover, depending upon the playlist there is a general rhythm set for every spin class. The classes include aerobic and anaerobic work, or in some cases a combination of both; this requires rhythms that are intimately related to particular goals the spinners have in mind. Changes of rhythm are also foreseeable, particularly in certain tracks that are audible (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2017).

Alex also suggests that for her, loud music also creates an additional competitive element to the spin environment. Within this reflection, Alex recognises the corporeal experience of rhythm, she recognises when she 'holds a rhythm', and this is through her sensorial dictators (Hockey, 2013).

*'it's intense, and you just come in and it's boom, boom, boom, boom, boom and then it's done. Got loud music and I can just focus on that and then you've got trainers telling you what to do, and you are sort of against other people so you've got somebody either side of you normally or somebody behind. So you are aware of what other people are doing, and I just wanna be competing against someone so therefore, especially if I'm next to a bloke I think I'm gonna have you I can do better than that! And I'm gonna really go for it' – Alex.*

Experiencing 'the groove' is also evident within the reflections above. As explained by Roholt (2014), grooves have four intuitions: firstly, they have a feel. Secondly, they involve the body and its movement. Thirdly, the intuition has to be surrounding what it means to *understand* a groove, and finally, the fourth intuition combines all of the above; feeling and understanding a groove does not occur within a thought, nor listening to music alone, but it occurs *through* the body. The groove is not noticed until an individual finds himself or herself in a sort of communication breakdown, their musical ontology presents a groove that is revealed, and fleshed out through active, embodied engagement. It can be seen that whilst working out and listening to certain music, Alex and Becky construct their own 'grooves' through their exercising bodies whilst spinning.

It has been claimed that music can set the tone of a spin class; with some spinners suggesting that certain music keeps them 'going'. It has also been mentioned that the spinning playlists containing eight-minute tracks with the same continuous beat distracts them from being able to focus on their workout. The reflections below demonstrate how Alice and Penny have an awareness of this, known as 'auditory attunement' (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2017).

*'I think music is the key thing, it's a real key thing coz I'm not up to date on all this modern stuff ... sometimes you know with the music it's peoples personal choice, sometimes isn't it. It's almost like a sing along, sometimes a bit karaoke which I prefer just to have separate songs and have each thing [...] if it's just going boom boom boom boom boom, I don't know who it is ... it's just like oh my god but no, the music I think, the music is really important, not too loud as well' – Alice.*

*'sometimes it just boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom boom, erm, which gets on my nerves [...] if its good music that you, like, you tend to have, I dunno the time seems to go a lot quicker'* – Penny.

Feld (2000) contends that sound and our own awareness of 'sonic presence' constitutes a powerful force that shapes an individual's everyday awareness of a sense-making activity. This produces a distinct 'acoustemology' (acoustic epistemology) formed on the ways in which the sensual and the bodily experience of sound creates a specific bodily way of knowing. In relation to this, Bull and Black (2003) illuminate 'deep listening'. This requires an individual to 'attentive auditory retention and attunement to the nuanced and multiple layers of meaning enfolded in the sound' (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2017, p. 183), which can be elucidated from the reflections above. 'Non-symbolic sonorous expressions' acknowledged by Vannini *et al.*, (2010, p. 331), include the various terms for sounds surrounding non-musical, non-linguistical bodily processes, for example coughing and sneezing and laboured breathing. These 'non-symbolic sonorous expressions' are acknowledged within spin classes, from spinners who are breathing heavily, or through the grunts and moans whilst the body is exercising.

### **2.3 Oi! That's MY bike! Spatial preference in the spin room:**

*'That's my bike, and I know exactly how it works and feels'* - Stephanie

Whilst chapter two explored the alternative spaces in the gym and how this space can be recognised as semi-private (Rooney, 2005). This section explores in more depth how the women construct spatial preferences within the spinning environment. Each spinner tends to have their own favoured area within the spin room. The more advanced spinners prefer the front row with a double bottle holder in the handle bars, the shyer or less confident spinners retreat to the back and try not to sit near anyone else, and tend to not be fussed on what bike they use. Joanna, Penny and Alice describe:

*'I like it, as long as I'm at the back I like doing it ... coz no one can see me ... if I fall off the bike or anything'*. – Joanna.

*'I used to be at the back but as I grew more confident, I used to be right at the back ... and then slowly I did a layer forward. I think coz I'm like used to doing coz it was all*

*the unknown you know in case I muck up I'll have to stay at the back and then once I got more confident in doing it knowing what I was doing, then I was fine and slowly moved forward ...'* – Penny.

*'You do have your favourite bikes and you do you know like when you first start you go from you're quite happy to be tucked away at the back, and then watching everybody which is good coz you get an idea of what it is, in the hover, and things like this and you sort of think, we are gonna jump now. But when you are at the back you can watch everybody then it's fine and obviously as you got more confident you then, you would then move forward erm so yeah, I do tend to have a certain bike, well there's not many brilliant ones now anyway is there! But there are certain ones that everybody likes I suppose ...'* – Alice.

Following on from the conversation with Alice above, I then continued to ask what her favourite bike was and why:

*'well one of the two handled ones at front [...] just because you know what the resistance is like, you know and obviously, you get to know now where you need your saddle and sort of your handles bars don't you so you know it's probably not going to conk out! And then you get confidence and you are at the front! So! Then you think 'oh god I've gotta keep going!' so I suppose that motivates you coz you are at the front sort of, you don't want to be seen sitting down ...'* – Alice.

I always tend to recognise those who may have participated within my spin classes previously. If I don't recognise someone who enters the room, or if I can't remember seeing them before, I always ask if they would like me to go through the safety and spinning tips with them. Most individuals come with a friend and suggest they have been spinning before elsewhere, so I always mention that if they need my help at all to let me know. It becomes evident through their performance in the spin class that these individuals have not been spinning before.

Goffman (1956, p. 30) suggests that 'performers may even attempt to give the impression that their present poise and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period'. This can be seen within Charlie's reflection in the spin room:

*'It's easy to hide in spinning; it's very easy to hide. Like I would pretend to turn my hand, I'd just turn my hand'* – Charlie.

These individuals tend to sit within the back row, and very rarely sit at the front. This could also be attributed towards their confidence levels as the other women have discussed, however as Goffman suggests an individual who is 'fumbling through a learning period' may retreat to the back row in order to feel that they already know what they are doing, whilst being able to copy those in the front row. Interestingly, only myself as the instructor can observe this as those who are at the front cannot see behind them, and those who may be sitting next to them are focusing on their own performance or looking at myself as the instructor.

Foucault's (1991, p. 139) 'essential techniques of discipline' (control of activity, the organisation of geneses, and distribution) enables a further understanding of space and disciplinary practices that occur within the spin room. The essential techniques are typically concerned with the controlling of individuals and the production of work through the manipulation of space, the organisation of time, and the production of productive 'docile' bodies, through repetitive or systematised 'exercises'.

To enable efficient disciplinary practices, spaces cooperating these practices are needed (Foucault, 1991, p. 141). Discipline requires an area that 'is the protected place of disciplinary monotony', and it can be seen there is a special area within fitness practises as this is an enclosed space dedicated to physical fitness. Distributing discipline requires 'partitioning' (Foucault, 1991, p. 143) to avoid formations of groups that are difficult to control. Therefore, space is organised temporarily to eliminate the grouping of uncontrollable human bodies; and also 'to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits' (Foucault, 1991, p. 143). Within the spin room, each spinner tends to take up their own space instead of engaging within a group task, they reserve their own space whether this be the actual spin bike, or space surrounding it before the class starts. The bikes are already 'disciplined' into certain areas and rows, therefore each spinner who enters will unconsciously direct themselves to a bike and will not group together.

#### **2.4 Battling the body capital:**

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'body capital' describes the values that are attached to individuals attractiveness, appearance, or physical abilities that may be exchanged for other forms of social, economic, or cultural capital. It has been displayed through research that an individual's bodily capital is substantial within many realms of their social life (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Clifford & Walster, 1973). Body capital as a concept, describes why individuals invest money, time, and energy into their own bodies, and have the expectation of a return on investment surrounding those investments (Hutson, 2013). In relation to my physical capital as an instructor, first impressions of people are important (Bauman, 2000), Penny's comments:

*'... looking at you at how perfect you are, but then you, you dress you know you could dress like so skimpily and show off your body where you never do, you know which is nice as well. You're not like you know, oh look at me I'm perfect or anything like that, you know which is really comforting when you come in to like a spin class. You don't come in like in little shorts and a little top you know, trying to say this is like the perfect figure how women should look or anything like that, you know it's quite good you're more like, tomboyish and that, erm, which is good for most people I think ....'* – Penny.

Personal trainers convert their bodily capital into economic and social capital (Smith-Maguire, 2008). It is well known that personal trainers also have to follow the popular discourse of being toned and thin, hold a fit-appearing physique, and symbolically represent health and fitness. All to which are valued by those within the field (Bourdieu, 1984; Jutel and Buetow, 2007). Hutson (2013, p.68) suggests that 'your body is your business card', referring to a personal trainers physicality in terms of credibility, by successfully recruiting and retaining clients. 'Aesthetic labour' is integral to understanding display and performance in service work (Witz *et al.*, 2003). Aesthetic labour is defined as work whereby the aesthetic labourer (or myself as the instructor) loans their 'embodied competencies' (Warhurst *et al.*, 2000) or physical capital (Bourdieu, 1985) to the company (or gym in this case). Aesthetic labour is often manifested in the 'look' or the comportment, voice or other physical characteristics of the employee, which is often by the labour process, turned into competencies which are focused on producing a 'style' of service that is deliberately intended to appeal for the customers to encounter for commercial value (Nickson, Warhurst, Cullen and Watt, 2003). Aesthetic labour of the employee is often considerably valuable for the company as an

organisational artefact, or an aesthetic artefact, concerning the employees 'look', which portrays the image, strategy and body of the company (Hancock and Tyler, 2000).

Harvey *et al.*, (2014) suggest there are three interdependent components which form aesthetic labour: adornment, capacity and physique (Light, 2001). Adornment refers to the extra-physique adjustment of appearance, such as wearing particular clothing, body art or jewellery; it is influenced by the need to acquire new physical goals. A relatable example of this is my journey during my sensual ethnography. I choose to wear tighter fitness clothing as this aids with my performance during my workout. Many spinners also wear lycra and performance clothing with the belief that their performance will excel. Capacity relates to the physical ability of the individual, this can be measured in terms of speed, strength or fitness, and this also impacts adornment. Lastly, physique refers to the physical attributes of the individual, such as weight, height and build. Bodily physique unavoidably impacts on an individual's capacity, this can be seen through the physique of athletes of different sporting disciplines (Harvey *et al.*, 2014). This is evident in Becky's reflection:

*'when I first came here it was your class I first took, and you know I didn't feel intimidated or anything, so that was nice, coz I could of done, you know thinking, oh, but no it was nice ...'*. – Becky.

Becky's experience of her first spinning class, and how she viewed me could be related to what is perceived as 'excessive' physical capital. This can indirectly hinder potential clients, as they may wish to avoid the discomfort caused by comparing their bodies with that of the instructor(s). This of course, leaves myself in a paradoxical position, I am required to illustrate through my physical capital, knowledge, quality of service and ability - however extensive or 'excessive' physical capital can prohibit consumption by intimidating possible clients (Harvey, *et al.*, 2014).

What is also interesting is that Becky alternatively explained that instructors who did not fit 'the look', also surprised her through their performance and ability. Becky touched upon her earlier experiences of working out with a 'larger' instructor:

*Becky: 'she [the instructor] was quite a big lady, yeah she was quite a big lady and she used to say to us 'oh don't be surprised if you put more weight on as muscle weighs more than fat', and we were like whoa!'*

Amy: *'so when you said she was a big lady did you assume that because she was an instructor she had to look a certain way?'*

Becky: *'yeah, yeah see that's peer pressure and media again, yeah definitely, but she was dead fit, she was really really fit, she was brilliant this woman, she was all muscle.'*

Becky identified that this particular trainer had capacity through what she called 'dead fit', but Becky initially believed the trainers physique would affect her capacity due to her being a large lady, and not having the appropriate look for a trainer. Personal trainers or instructors are expected to look a certain way; their bodies are inextricably bound with sector work (Wolkowitz, 2006). Aesthetic labour is also generally conceptualised as productive to the company's goals, employees are supposed to be perceived as 'good looking' or to have the 'right look', and in this case, instructing classes, and the embodying the discourses that are attached to this is.

As indicated, aesthetic labour is also concerned with the 'voice' of the employee, I am always careful with the instructions that I shout out during my spin classes. I am aware that certain instructions or phrases within the class can create a more 'gendered space' within the indoor cycling studio, this can be read more insidiously as reinforcing the need for women especially, to adopt masochistic tendencies in order to measure the levels of their success (Newhall, 2010). I only shout to my spinners to turn the resistance up, or down, and that at particular points they should be 'really feeling the resistance on the bike'. Instructors are pivotal in the process of creating an emotionally and a physically healthy environment that has the potential to empower (Newhall, 2010). Additionally, Foucault's (1991) concept of 'bio-power' is evident here. Bio-power relates to having power over bodies, and control of populations. I make sure that as long as the individual is happy and comfortable with their bike position and awareness of the class, the rest is up to them! Instructors need to be aware of the messages they are sending within their comments – all should be intended for encouragement, although some are not always received this way, thus music practises as discussed previously, and behaviour in the class all need to be thought of cautiously.

## **2.5 Disembodying the emotional self:**

The role of emotion within a workplace has been a constant, yet often implicit theme within literature. Emotional labour can be known as the act of expressing socially desired

emotions during service transactions (Hochschild, 1979), or ‘the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display’, (Hochschild, 1983, p.7). These expectations give rise to *feeling rules*, or norms that specify the range, duration, and intensity of emotions that should be experienced (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). On particular days when I feel exhausted, I sometimes prior to the class have to ‘prepare’ myself in order to feel ‘ready’ to instruct a class. Lily, also a spinning instructor implies that she is additionally subjected to emotional labour at times:

*‘...I hate to have to think, and I’d rather go in someone else’s class and listen to their instruction and be told what to do. Coz doing it, giving it all the time, is hard work and mentally draining, because you’ve got to motivate others, yeah its difficult, and, you’ve got to want to do it to be able to instruct for everyone else...’* – Lily.

It is argued that service provider’s/service agents (or myself as the spinning instructor) perform emotional labour in two ways. Firstly, through *surface acting*, which involves simulating emotions that are not actually felt, these can be accomplished by verbal and non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures and voice tone (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). The second means of complying is through *deep learning*, whereby the individual attempts to actually experience or feel the emotions that one wishes to display. This is where the service agent ‘psyches themselves’ into experiencing the desired emotion (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). During times of emotional labour, the individual can wear a ‘public mask’ in order to protect themselves from others, by keeping emotions private and not on display. This is a non-committed, withdrawal of the ‘true self’, where the individual opts out from mutual involvement and intercourse, demonstrating the wish to be alone or to go alone (Bauman, 2000, p. 96). Gender-emotion beliefs can have a great effect on how we see people, and even on how we view ourselves. Emotion is easily open to interpretation due to both the embodied and indescribable (Shields, 2007). As Alice demonstrates, emotions play an important role within the spin room:

*‘yours [classes] are very professional and I think it doesn’t show with you what kind of day you’ve had, you come in and do your session and I think sometimes with other people it’s a case of, they’ll give depending on their mood...’* - Alice.

Grandey (2000) suggests that gender difference in relation to emotional labour is no exception. Women are more likely to manage emotions at work as well as at home, due to engaging in more emotion management situations it can be suggested that they are better at managing their feelings. However, due to engaging in more management of emotions, they would be suppressing their true feelings, therefore stress would be higher (Wharton and Erickson, 1993). One study by Timmers, Fischer and Manstead (1998) suggested that men and women have different motives for the regulation of their emotions, in that women are more concerned with getting along, whereas men are more motivated to stay in control and express powerful emotions such as anger or pride.

Shields (2013) suggests that gender-emotion stereotypes are important with not only how an individual feels about themselves and others, but this is also implicated deeply with regards to how gender itself is understood. There have been many beliefs about emotion, and a long history of this explains gender differences. 'Masculine' emotions are attributed to a passionate force, and a drive to achieve, create and dominate; 'Feminine' emotions are illustrated as ineffectual, and a by-product of female reproductive physiology, and an evolutionary need to be attractive to men. The different emotions between men and women, were believed to be due to behavioural expressions of inevitable and natural physiological facts (Shields, 2013).

Some spinners have suggested that they also experience emotional labour but from their position this is through participating and actually going to the classes when they feel tired and de-motivated:

*'obviously it goes on the mood of your day as well, you know how hard you work, how not hard you work. That's what I needed at the end of the day or that's what I needed after a day at work or something. I find myself harder to motivated myself when I'm off [work], than when I'm back at work it will be like I'll come bang bang bang, but then when I'm off I say, shall I go, shall I go' – Alice.*

*'Yeah if I've been like, really tired at work and I've come along but only half-heartedly, you know really I shouldn't have come but I've come along and sometimes I've done that, pretended I've turned it up, but usually you know. It's more towards what's happened within the day and how I'm feeling rather than the class itself, and where really I shouldn't have come. Erm I'm only like half-heartedly doing it but, yeah not*

*often, you know that's more within me, how I am. I wouldn't say my day has to go well, but you know sometimes when I'm angry and like fed up it will go good, like the spin session will go better than ever sometimes coz you wanna get out all your frustration. But if you're not feeling like, 100%, not feeling well, or like sometimes I've been like headachey and I've come, then I haven't tried as hard, but yeah I'd say like if I'm angry or if it's just a normal every day then yeah its fine' – Penny.*

These extracts can suitably relate to what Goffman (1956) refers to as a 'front'. This is employed and expressed unwittingly or intentionally by the individual during their performance. There are different aspects of 'front', including the 'setting', involving furniture, physical lay-out, décor, and other background items which set-up the scenery and stage props for the series of human action to be played out before, within, or upon it. The setting normally stays put, so that individuals who use a specific setting as part of their performance are unable start their act until they have brought themselves to the relevant place and must adjourn their performance when they leave it. This can be seen throughout Alice and Penny's experiences. Whilst thinking about the scenic aspects of the spin room, the setting consists of the spin bikes arranged in rows, with the instructor's bike at the front. This setting normally remains the same and never changes for consistency so that the spinners (or performers in this case) are able to bring themselves to the relevant place (motivate themselves to spin) in which they are able to participate within the spin class, and of course, this is left behind when they have finished the class and left.

Goffman's (1965) 'setting', can also be referred to as scenic parts of expressive equipment, the term 'personal front' can also be related to other items of expressive equipment. The performer intimately identifies these items and they naturally expect to be followed by the performer wherever they go. This can include clothing, sex, age, racial characteristics, looks and size, posture, speech, bodily gestures and facial expressions. Some of these are relatively fixed and do not vary for the individual. However, some of these are transitional, such as facial expressions, and these can vary during a performance from one moment to the next. 'Appearance', referring to *'those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the individual's temporary state'*; and 'manner' referring to *'those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the on-coming situation'* (Goffman, 1956, p. 15), can also make up a personal front. Often,

consistency between appearance and manner is expected. These are all interwoven and displayed within the spin room, not only through myself as the instructor, but often through the spinners experiences they encounter.

### **3. Summary:**

This chapter started with a detailed account of my own experiences of spinning, and my journey as an instructor. Furthermore, this chapter explored the women's experiences in the spin room; it described how this exercise affects some of the women's views in relation to their food intake and exercise, and their bodily experiences, movements and gestures in conjunction with how music affects their embodied experience. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted how each spinner has an individual spatial preference whilst exercising in the spin room, and how this space unintentionally produces docile, disciplined bodies through the repetition of systematic exercise. It is also evident that the women exercisers who participate within spinning expect a certain 'look' for the instructor who leads the class, and consequently this can cause emotional labour and body capital issues for those who instruct and are more visible.

Following on from this chapter, the next chapter introduces in more depth the female participants within this research, it delves into their reasons and influences for participating within gym activities. Additionally, early insights of their embodied selves and interpretations of their overall gym experiences are highlighted and explored.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Embodied Pathways to the Gym.**

Chapter five discussed the experiences and ‘embodiedness’ that occurs within the spin room for myself and the other women exercisers in this research, it further highlighted my own reflexivity, and how feminist phenomenology can be used with ethnography to fully explore the lived spinning experiences of myself and the other women. In chapter one, through my narratives I attempted to explore how I came to participate in physical activity, and why I started to immerse myself into the gym environment. In posing these self-reflexive questions, I considered it important to explore further the experiences of other women. Although in chapter four I briefly introduced the thirteen women who are incorporated within this study, an important aspect in understanding how they interpret gender and their bodies is revealed through their stories of early experiences of physical activity and entering into the gym environment. It is important to acknowledge and gain a greater understanding of who these women are, as these experiences have potentially shaped and formed their orientation for future physical activity and gym choices. These early insights into an embodied self can be seen as a foundation for their interpretations of their gym experiences throughout this research, and has informed their overall gym experiences, which are revealed further throughout the themes discussed in later chapters.

#### **1. Stigmatisation and the female body:**

It has been suggested that many young women place significant emphasis on their weight or shape, this in turn has been associated with disturbances surrounding body image and higher disordered eating behaviour (Adkins and Keel, 2005; Ingledew and Sullivan, 2002; McDonald and Thompson, 1992; Mond *et al.*, 2006; Silberstein *et al.*, 1988). Prichard and Tiggemann (2008) note that in particular, women who exercise to lose weight, improve body tone and improve attractiveness; focus on these emerged mechanisms and become dissatisfied with their physical selves the more they exercise, regardless of the associated benefits of health and fitness. It therefore seems that motivations women have to exercise may play a fundamental role in the development of body image concerns. However, there is

little known about the potential relationships between different types of exercise, body image and exercise motivation (Brudzynski and Ebben 2010).

Research exploring into the perceived barriers of women and their lack of engagement within sports is extensive. Issues surrounding women's disengagement in sports have become prominent within literary analysis, particularly concerning women's participation rates (Coleman, Cox and Roker, 2007). Distinct barriers that females relate to, include the male-dominated culture of sport, and the visible gender inequality within schools (Scruton and Flintoff, 2002). It has been noted that 51% of females mention a significant reason for them to disengage and dislike sports is due to their experiences within school sports and physical education (WSFF, 2013).

Alternatively, Gottlieb (1981) suggests that women turn to exercise for a variety of reasons, this includes the feminist ideology that features an attitude of physical strength and fitness, and was understood as necessary to counterpart an increase in social empowerment and influence. Fitness and sport also increased through the second wave movement, and few researchers have asked regarding the lived experiences of women, or about the circumstances that shape their exercise-related decisions (Salvatore and Marecek, 2010). Notions of gender are highly influential in the decision-making and behaviours of females and their chosen physical activity and sport. Loy (1996) and Maguire (1993) express that exercise, health and fitness settings reflect and reinforce the dominant patriarchal images of femininity. McGuigan (2011) proposes that sport can be universally viewed as a male-dominated endeavour that ultimately marginalises and restricts females from entering the field, therefore hindering their potential. Furthermore, men's participation within sport is traditionally regarded as a natural phenomenon, whereas female participation in a typically androcentric field can be viewed as anomalous (Pirinen 1997, p. 239). In the midst of two decades of research, this is beginning to change with more females venturing into 'male-regarded' sports; however, the struggle for equality is still at the forefront of debate (Levy *et al.*, 2016).

Taking into consideration the above, these views can arguably be contextualised within a gym culture. The discussion that follows, aims to explore the nuanced pressures women face surrounding the reasons, influences and motivations to participate within physical activity – and explore further the conventional ways in which women overcome potential barriers whilst entering the gyms spaces.

### 1.1. Fat stigmatisation and media:

Feminist scholars have critically scrutinised the information surrounding fat and fit within mass media and other circulating discourses (Scott-Dixon, 2008). The surrounding ways in which the presence and symbolisation of fatness has constrained women's behaviour, either to conform to normative thinness ideals, or to be 'good feminists' by attempting to reject such ideals has been explored (Bordo, 2003; Wolf, 1991). Previous media representations of fit, feminine bodies typically find three interrelated themes: the ideal, fit feminine body, which is characterised as narrowly thin, toned and young; the ideal fit body is intertwined with the notion of health, and the responsibility for obtaining such a body is left to the individual woman (McGannon *et al.*, 2011).

Urbanska (1994) observed that women start to dislike their bodies due to the erroneous belief that the perfect beauty ideal is attainable, and women's magazines continue to connect body hatred with low self-esteem. Markula (2001) highlights how in particular, fitness magazines can enhance body image problems and distortion, and suggests in turn this can be remedied through exercise regimes. Markula also suggests that beauty is now judged mainly on an individual's positive attitudes surrounding themselves, and having a positive attitude towards their body shape provided the individual with overall confidence. The influence of the media through magazine discourses can be viewed through Katie's early experiences and how this affected her views on her body:

*Katie: 'I was probably looking back, when you're younger and you're a size sort of 12, erm, I'm 5ft4 I think I just thought that I, I was too big too, too heavy, and I really wanted to be a size 10.'*

*Amy: 'is there anything that influenced you to think that way?'*

*Katie: 'I used to like the Freemans catalogue! So probably clothes and seeing models wearing clothes and then I'd order them and didn't look like that in them! So yeah ... at secondary school I really wanted to be skinny, like I was envious that someone came in with anorexia, and you know I thought 'oh I'd like to do that, I'll have a go at doing that.'*

Bartky (1988) suggests that the female body should conform to a specific range of gestures, postures, and movements that revolve around constriction, grace and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty. Several feminist researchers have demonstrated that a 'perfect body' is closely connected to fitness and ideal femininity, such as body shape emphasises, thinness and tightly toned muscle (Bordo 2003; Choi 2000; Duncan 1994; Krane et al. 2004; Lloyd 1996; Markula 1995, 2003). Georgina reflects on her experiences of viewing the media and comparing the bodies portrayed to her own:

Georgina: *'I got to probably 18, I started getting body conscious because I started putting weight on, but I noticed it then before anything else that's when I realised I needed to start getting into the gym.'*

Amy: *'So did you compare yourself to other people when you approached 18, you were more aware?'*

Georgina: *'Yeah I started reading magazines and looking at pop stars, oh look she's got a six pack, I haven't, I better ... I want that.'*

Amy: *'Yeah, is physical activity a key aspect between now and when you were 18?'*

Georgina: *'Yeah'*

Amy: *'Why?'*

Georgina: *'Body image again. Everything to do with body image.'*

Georgina and Katie's policing of magazine discourses suggests that from an early age they were aware of the influence of women's magazines on the subjectivity of their bodies. Not only are the previous comments by Markula and Urbanska reinforced here; the cultivation theory is distinctly demonstrated within their experiences. This theory posits that the more media an individual is exposed to, the more they will begin to view the images they see as realistic (Hesse-Biber *et al.*, 2006). Tiggeman and Pickering (1996, pp. 199-200) note that the media 'presents women with constant barrage of idealised images of extremely thin women, that are nearly impossible to achieve'. Through the cultivation theory lens, Georgina and Katie have become barraged with images of thinness and this has led them to believe that the ideal body type is desirable and *realistic* (Holstrom 2004, p. 197). The more they have been exposed to the idealised images, through magazines and catalogues they have read, the

more they have believed they can attain them. Wolf (1990, p. 58) contends that women's magazines offer the closest thing women have ever had to collective subjectivity:

The images women's magazines constitute the only cultural female experience which can begin to gesture at the breadth of solidarity possible among women, a solidarity as wide as half the race. It is a meagre Esperanto, but in the absence of a better language of their own they must make do with one which is man-made and market-driven, and which hurts them.

The anti-fat attitude of magazines are fuelled by the culturally constructed embarrassment of women about their own naked bodies. This embarrassment is heightened by methods of the pornographic camera; where the 'fat' parts, such as the buttocks, hips and breasts are major aesthetic elements within pornography. The thinning of fashion magazine images is part of an attempt to change the meaning of the naked body given by patriarchy. Within contemporary culture, the 'independent' woman has paved the way for many diets, which have been accompanied by thin images in women's magazines (Fallon *et al.*, 1994). Georgina and Katie almost seem to suggest that they hold a certain ambivalence towards their bodies; on one hand, reading through the magazines triggered the negative feelings surrounding their bodies, but they also were happy with how they looked initially before being influenced into losing weight, and shaping their bodies to the anti-fat culturally constructed body.

Mansfield (2011) reports that the tendency of contemporary western culture life is for individuals to perceive that their bodies should be worked on, and worked out as a means of representing and expressing the individual self. The body is central in looking and appearing fit, and this in many ways is as important as actually being fit within a contemporary society. In conjunction with being influenced by the media, Georgina reinforces this by suggesting that she started to work out at the gym purely due to the changed perception of her body image. She wanted to lose weight, and this was her main reason for continuing with physical activity to this present day. Bovey (1989) suggests that for a women, being fat is an around the clock awareness of knowing that a fat body overflows strict boundaries imposed by Western cultural and social norms. A fat woman carries a double burden, she is expected to conform to a more rigorous and stereotypical ideal of the aesthetic female body, and being fat means hatred and contempt can be experienced.

## 2. Negative comments:

Feminist scholars have discussed for a long time how the development of women's bodies, particularly within heterosexist and sociocultural contexts, regulate the ways in which women's bodies will be treated and evaluated (Bartky, 1990; Berger, 1972; de Beauvoir, 1972; Dworkin, 1991; Henley, 1977; Martin, 1987).

The objectification theory (OT) can provide an overarching theoretical framework to enable the understanding of the relationship between the body image concerns and exercise motivations. This theory is based on the suggestion that within Western Cultures women are continuously 'looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified' (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, p. 177). This ubiquitous objectification can promote a process deemed self-objectification, where women come to embody an outsider's perspective of their physical selves. Throughout this process, there is an increased value placed on a women's outward appearance; resulting in high self-surveillance. Consequently, some women experience higher anxiety, body dissatisfaction and body shame (Calogero *et al.*, 2005; Calogero and Pina, 2011; Noll and Fredrickson, 1998; Roberts and Gettman, 2004; Slater and Tiggemann, 2002), as well as lower self and body esteem (Hebl *et al.*, 2004; Strelan *et al.*, 2003), and symptoms of disordered eating and depression can also increase (Tiggemann and Kuring, 2010). There are also different ways for our bodies to exist and different ways for people to live their relationship with their own body. Within society, widely accepted forms of objectifying an individual's body include treating it primarily as an object of accomplishing goals; regarding it as a physical object to be used, viewed and manipulated, and treating it as a material possession to be treated and explored. Individuals require control of their bodies to maintain its suitability as an object (Wendell 1996).

Bordo (2003) suggests that women within our culture are more tyrannised by contemporary ideals of slenderness compared to men, as they have typically also been by beauty ideals in general. It is far more important to men to have slim partners than for women. Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson (1995) suggest that particularly romantic partners play an important role in the on-going re-evaluation of weight, shape and general appearance satisfaction. Fallon *et al.*, (1994) note that since the triumph of patriarchy, men have controlled the means of representing women and their bodies. Due to this, women are set against themselves and made to chase their own tales in a hopeless attempt to escape the

trap patriarchy has built surrounding their own bodies (Fallon *et al.*, 1994). Masculinity literature has identified consumer discourses that place gender emphasis on the 'fit body' for men as well as women, and the notion of the body and youth discourse where the sexual lived body is objectified. Dieting, exercising and starvation are self-imposed controls that reflect changes within women's role, especially through their greater independence from male domination (Hesse-Biber *et al.*, 2006).

Jenny's story reinforces the suggestion that men prefer a slimmer partner, and are willing to pressure women into looking a certain way; these pressures were enforced onto her from a younger age, she reflects:

Jenny: *'I started seeing a Marine, who actually said to me 'if you lose, if you put on any more weight I'll dump you.'*

Amy: *'oh wow, how did that make you feel?!'*

Jenny: *'that was the start of everything [...] so that started my bulimia, um ... I started purging, throwing it up, purging, throwing it up, um.'*

Amy: *'how long did that go on for?'*

Jenny: *'er, that went on for erm, probably, probably about a year ... yeah probably about a year ...'*

Amy: *'can you remember how felt at the time?'*

Jenny: *'er, pretty, well I was just desperate to be thin, absolutely desperate to be thin, erm because I thought I was thin (claps hands together) people would want to be with me. Coz obviously he didn't coz I, you know ... and people would want to be with me, and I felt guilty about it but I hid it very well. I was taking something like er, 30 laxatives a day, 40 laxatives a day, I was in agony all the time, my periods stopped, erm. I didn't want to go out because if I went out, and there was food about I knew that I would just pig out and then I'd panic thinking well I'm in public now I can't, I can't, where can I puke, you know.'*

Jenny's shocking confession of desperately wanting to be thin for her to maintain relationships with men shows that she was willing to go to an extreme length to lose weight. Her partner has objectified her at the time as an object of his desire to lose weight, due to

this, her body dissatisfaction increased, and she self-objectified herself and embodied her partner's preference for a slimmer woman. She therefore spiralled into a radical decline of succumbing to bulimia in order to achieve a slimmer body. Jenny has also demonstrated how she has experienced a form of hostile sexism; women are exposed to this when they strive to maintain the ultra-thin body, purely to receive praise from men (Oswald *et al.*, 2012).

Foucault's (1991) concept of 'docile bodies' (as a discipline of power) suggests that the omnipresent gaze of authority consequently disciplines the subject to monitor their own behaviours in a manner that contributes them as docile: they in effect become their own supervisors. Docile bodies are subjected and practised bodies through disciplined procedures, they are defined through how an individual may have a hold over another's body, not only through doing what someone may wish, but to operate as they wish; this includes the techniques, efficacy and speed that has also been determined (Foucault, 1991).

This is evident through Jenny's experience of being told she was going to be dumped if she did not lose weight, and her actions of starting the gym and going to extreme lengths to lose weight, could imply in this case, that the gaze of authority attributes towards the men in her life who have said this. Consequently, she has re-disciplined her life to learn new techniques to lose weight in the gym, and has somewhat been within a timeframe to do this before being 'dumped'. Due to the construction of a docile body, this in turn creates another discipline of power termed 'self-surveillance' (Foucault, 1991). By commencing with physical activity and exercise after their experiences, the constant working surveillance of exercise practices turns into a technique of discipline, without physical pressure or material constraints, which in turn controls. Power is exercised continuously and with minimal expense, due to an inspecting gaze only being needed that each individual directs into him/herself (Markula and Pringle 2006).

According to Thompson *et al.*, (2003), women report higher levels of interpersonal guilt and body guilt in comparison to men. It has additionally been noted that shame arises from appraisals of one's core self as negative or inadequate, and this leads to unresolved negative effects and avoidance. Alternatively, guilt arises from appraisals of one's specific actions as wrong, leading them to take reparative action (Lewis, 1971; Tangney and Dearing, 2002). Jenny's feeling of guilt as she tried to hide her bulimia served as an indicator as to what she should do in order to attain a positive outcome. Shame and guilt have been consistently correlated with each other within literature (Tangney *et al.*, 1996; Thompson *et*

*al.*, 2003), and scholars have confirmed that they are quite distinct phenomenological experiences (Niedenthal *et al.*, 1994; Tangney, 1993; Wertheim *et al.*, 2001).

Although it is frequently acknowledged that cultural pressures make women particularly vulnerable to eating disorders, it is not necessarily all individuals who are exposed to these pressures that develop eating anorexia or bulimia. It is therefore important to recognise that other 'non-sociocultural' factors contribute to creating circumstances where a disorder in a particular individual may occur. These sociocultural factors (frequently listed as 'deficits' in autonomy perfectionist personality traits, tendency to obesity, defective cognitive patterns, biological factors, perceptual disturbances, emotionally repressed familial interactions) are weighted alongside sociocultural factors as equally conclusive of disorders (Bordo 2003). This same discrepancy can be applied to dieting and body size; women are expected to manage these more stringently than men are. Similarly, the controlling of appetite and weight is considered virtuous, suggesting women must control these more than men must. Women once again are expected to be the custodians and embodiments of virtue for the culture (Seid 1996). Fallon *et al.* (1994, p. 275) also mention that most women who focus on dieting and improving their appearance tend to do this in order to feel more powerful in a world that 'denies them true power'.

Women are additionally more likely to perceive themselves as too fat. Due to this, women and girls are far more vulnerable to succumb to a higher engagement with crash dieting, laxative abuse and compulsive exercising (Cornell and Thurschwell, 1987; Tiggeman and Kuring, 2004). Several studies suggest that 'self-starvation' is not driven by a 'fear of fatness', it is however, a drive to influence the achievement of self-determination when an individual is confronted with conflicting cultural demands (Gordon, 2000). This is evident within Victoria's reflection of her younger self:

*Victoria: 'when I was younger erm, this is true actually, I used to erm, starve myself all week so I was really slim for the weekend to get into a nice tight little number. And then once I had been clubbing on a Saturday night I used to pig out, binge, and then during the week I'd take laxatives and you know diet.'*

*Amy: 'so do you think that was because of pressures of everyone else?'*

Victoria: *'it was purely just to look good at the weekend, god that's mad isn't it [...] I think I had a bit of problem there (laughs) but as I say I grew out of it you know.'*

Researchers have identified body shame, whereby women feel ashamed of their bodies, and hold a perception that they are falling short of feminine beauty ideals (McKinley, 2006). This shame has also been suggested as a key emotional consequence of self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Moradi and Huang, 2008; Tiggemann, 2011). Body shame regularly negotiates the effects of self-objectification on disordered eating (Noll and Fredrickson, 1998; Quinn *et al.*, 2006; Tiggemann and Slater, 2001). Self-objectification in the context of its theory is expected to predict more body shame, which in turn predicts more disordered eating due to habitual body monitoring. This can be recognised within Victoria's reflection; she has compared herself to an impossible internalised appearance standard, and therefore inevitably falls short of this. Her feelings of body shame add to the efforts of avoiding a 'defective' body, and she then manipulates her food intake to meet oppressive social mandates for a thinner and more feminine appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Fredrickson *et al.*, 1998; Swami *et al.*, 2010; Wolf, 1991).

### **3. Negative Physical Education (PE) experiences:**

Not only does it seem that women are self-objectifying due to men preferring a slimmer partner, several women within this study were also told from an early age that they needed to monitor their weight and control their food intake by authority figures such as their PE school teachers. Consequently, this lead to them experiencing self-objectification during their secondary school years.

Within the United Kingdom, traditional sporting structures including PE have been mentioned as inappropriate in relation towards the needs of many girls and young women (Hargreaves, 1994). It has been argued further that ideologies within the sporting and PE cultures alienate and demotivate girls in sport and physical activity in general, and particularly in PE (Leaman, 1986). There are various consequences, but it has been agreed widely that girls and young women are not only missing out on vital parts of their education and experience, but they are also losing out in terms of their rights to access the beneficial areas of sport (Talbot, 1986).

Given this feminist phenomenological research views gender as a social construction, it can be asserted that the centrality of inequalities of access, opportunities and outcomes

potentially oppress and restrict girls and young women throughout their experiences of physical education in schools. Characteristics associated with the stereotypical views of femininity and masculinity strongly reinforce the expectations of what is appropriate for girls and women, boys and men, across all ages. In institutions such as schools, these images are centralised and reinforced ideologies, which form the basis for the political management in a wider society of gender divisions. Definitions of masculinity and femininity may vary, the extent of gender-specific assumptions collectively lend to support powerful dominant ideologies, and these have an abundant impact on cultural and institutional practice. Within physical education, dominant ideologies of femininity and masculinity have consequences, and are reinforced by priorities, policies and practices within schools (Scraton, 1992). Penny's experience reinforces the ideology of girls having to maintain femininity through their weight:

*Penny: 'I was always watching what I ate, I can remember that erm, where like the PE teacher. I remember her commenting to a few of the others like, after the summer holidays how they had put on weight and different things. Yeah she was quite like abrupt and would say you know, you've been eating too many chips or you've put on weight over the summer holidays, so you was always, I was like always aware and trying to like, eat like what was best for you. You know and I used to say to my mum like get her to cook me what I wanted, erm coz I didn't want her pin pointing me. And it would be in front of the whole of the girls so it was quite, yeah, yeah I can always remember her doing it, so, yeah I was always careful about what I ate.'*

*Amy: 'did you find that you compared yourself to a lot of other girls in the changing rooms?'*

*Penny: 'yeah definitely and like, erm, coz I was never like tiny, tiny, but like my best friend was. She was a lot smaller so I'd always look at her and think oh yeah I've, you know I won't eat as much or I'll change things to try and like be her size. Erm, so yeah I think everyone like would do that in the changing rooms, compare themselves and try and get their perfect figure.'*

This experience reinforces the description by Coward (1984) surrounding physical education being concerned with the quest for the 'ideal' feminine appearance. Within Penny's reflection, a central emphasis remains on appearing and presenting the self within

'acceptable' feminine standards. These standards are not only internally reinforced within Penny's experience, but her PE teacher also comments towards other girls on the acceptability of their femininity. The attempt to impose this ideological construction of the 'ideal woman' is clear within the PE teacher's comments, and through the comparison of bodies within the changing rooms. Another example of this is illustrated within Lily's reflection:

*Lily: 'there was always better girls than me, [...], the girls that were all like 'ooo I don't wanna do it' always looked better than I did.. Like they had bigger boobs, and like slimmer waists and I was flat chested and didn't really have anything ... I always used to look at them and think I wish I looked like that, but that wasn't why I done well in it, I don't think, I dunno.'*

*Amy: 'so you think when you were at school you always compared?'*

*Lily: 'Yeah, and like coz obviously there's a massive group of you in the changing rooms, and you have to get changed together you sort of see it don't you, you see like what other people look like and you see what you look like. There was always girls I looked at and thought 'oh I wish I looked like that' [...] I used to really, really wanna look like them.'*

Bradshaw (2002) suggests that physical activity may cause feelings of worthlessness and unhappiness if women participate within physical activity purely for beauty benefits. This can be detected within Lily's reflection, as her focus is surrounding her 'beauty' rather than her health, which reinforces the discourse that exercise is for beauty rather than health.

As seen within Victoria's reflection previously in this chapter, her shame was embodied through other people's perceptions and comments towards her appearance, resulting in self-objectification. Dolezal (2015) describes how shame is an individual and necessary body experience, resulting from intersubjective relations. It is always contained in a nexus of political and socio-cultural norms, and reveals our most personal parts - our hopes and aspirations. In this instance, the experiences of having to use the changing rooms can be recognised as a space that enhances shame, and reveals Lily's and Penny's hopes and aspirations within reflections whilst they were at school – specifically wanting to obtain the 'perfect body' due to comparing their own to other girls. The changing rooms within the gym

environment are a space where certain body practices occur, such as undressing and direct body care. These are usually powerful signs of a private situation, and are exclusively confined within this space (Sassatelli, 1999). Penny and Lily's comparisons whilst in the changing rooms can be similarly related to Probyn's (2005) identification of shame being a competitive drive. It is suggested that shame and the body often go hand in hand, and that competition, or the social value placed on upon competition, creates an environment where a constant need for an individual to contemplate their bodies in relation to other bodies is present (Wellard, 2009). Applying Probyn's notion of shame, an individual constantly directs their contemplation towards their bodies (either consciously or unconsciously), and compares themselves to other bodies, this is particularly evident within Penny and Lily's reflections. This in turn can be directed towards the previously stated gender relations, whereby the ideal feminine appearance is seen as more socially acceptable.

Puhl (2011) suggests that weight stigmatisation begins within youth during early childhood, and is prevalent within the school setting by adolescence. The school setting is a particularly salient environment for weight-based victimisation to occur (Taylor, 2011). Longitudinal studies demonstrate that weight status dramatically predicts the likelihood of victimisation for youths in the future, and the heaviest youths are at the highest risk for future stigmatisation (Griffiths *et al.*, 2006).

A factor that has been identified as a potential risk factor for body image and eating disturbances is appearance-related teasing (Fabian and Thompson, 1989; Thompson *et al.*, 1995). Studies have indicated that this is significantly related to body dissatisfaction, weight concerns, eating disturbances, drive for thinness, depressive symptoms, bulimic behaviours, and suicidal ideation and attempts (Fabian and Thompson, 1989; Eisenberg and Neumark-Sztainer, 2003). Furthermore, recent research has proposed that adolescents report weight-based teasing as the most common form of teasing experienced and observed in sport, with obese youths being targeted by bullies regardless of gender, social skills, race or scholastic achievement (Lumeng *et al.*, 2010). There has also been substantial evidence suggesting that criticism and teasing regarding weight is emotionally harmful for overweight adolescence and children (Striegel *et al.*, 2006). Not only are obese youth vulnerable to stigmatisation from peers, there is also an increase within studies that indicates educators are additional sources of weight stigma in obese youth, and teachers' perceptions and expectations of their students are influenced by youth body weight (Rukavina, 2008; Neumark-Sztainer, 1999; Schwartz and

Puhl, 2003). It has also been suggested that educators report a lower expectation towards overweight students in comparison to normal-weight youth, this is across a range of abilities and performance domains, and they endorse negative weight-related beliefs and stereotypes towards obese individuals. Recent work has highlighted that the negative attitudes are also among physical education (PE) teachers in particular. (Greenleaf and Weiller, 2005; Chambliss *et al.*, 2004). This is further demonstrated within Alice's experience:

*'I can remember my PE teacher [...], pulled me aside and said you know look if you carry on with this, you know coz they were quite blunt in those days, if you carry on like this you will be dropped [from the netball team] and that was a shock. I was devastated, but devastated not obviously to allow myself to go the other way, because there were obviously girls that were at school that were anorexic, that were binge eating and you know things like that.'* – Alice.

Bordo (2003) argued that being fat in contemporary culture is an unbearable weight for women, being fat makes physical education an unbearable lesson for many students, and in Alice's experience, this was through the comments of her PE teacher. Another important aspect to highlight is that team games for girls such a netball allowed for energetic activity, but they were also controlled through restricted direct contact with other players. They were seen as acceptable because there was an agent between the ball and player. For girls, physical contact was not permitted, and netball whilst allowing contact with the ball, was adapted for girls in its restriction of space, decline in speed, and its avoidance of physical contact. Even within PE, girls were responsible for maintaining modesty and connections between femininity, asexuality and childhood.

Within Alice's extract, the gendered stereotypes were accepted, and were viewed by her PE teacher as being 'natural'. This 'naturalism' is defined as either biological or culturally inevitable. Alice (and Penny's) teachers have a clear expectation surrounding girls and young women's notions of femininity. This femininity contains ideas surrounding physical ability (through threatening to drop her from the team due to this diminishing if Alice was overweight), sexuality, motherhood and domesticity. The similar PE experiences shared by Penny and Alice also suggest that they have been under the gaze of authority, in this case, from their PE teachers. Although enduring this experience from a young age, they have always remembered comments made about 'being fat' and being told to 'lose weight', as a

consequence of not wanting to be humiliated or ridiculed, they have monitored their food intake and appearance, thus, rendering them 'docile' (Foucault, 1991).

### **3.1 Showering away the shame:**

An aspect of physical education that was additionally considered an issue within school, was the negativity surrounding the shower facilities and changing rooms that were available and had to be endured after physical activity, this has been importantly identified in other research (Measor, 1984). A reflection from Becky surrounding the compulsory procedures of showering after class illuminates the worry and tension she experienced in relation to her body during her changing room and shower experience:

*'when you get older I remember the PE teachers having to make you go in for showers and I think that is where self-esteem got really bad for girls. Because they force you and when you're going through puberty you're kind change a lot and you kinda, it's not about being confident about yourself, it's about. You don't wanna, you don't want to stick out like a sore thumb and the teachers doing that to you I think was a bit mental cruelty, but that's my personal opinion [...] I think that all starts when, I think it kind of starts between when year nine and going up. Definitely because ... puberty yeah I do think that, if I look back on it now I do think that, and I think we forced to go for showers I think that was just totally wrong I think there should be a choice you either do or you don't, at school I do because it's not private.'* – Becky.

It can be suggested within this reflection that I resonate with Becky's experience. As demonstrated in my reflection in chapter one, the changing rooms were always a negative place for me, where bullying occurred – whilst this did not stop my love for playing and participating in sport, it did conjure up a wealth of negative emotions that I consequently attributed towards the changing room space. For a long duration of time, young women have had anxieties concerning physical education experiences and commonly surrounding the negative memories of showers as shown by Becky. Whilst she reminisces about her former shower experiences, the problems she faced are clearly surrounding 'exposure'; and are grounded in physiology and the physical changes of puberty. There is however, an interaction of physical development and cultural expectation; Becky is not worried and anxious necessarily about the overall actual physical changes of her body, but the culturally

determined response to these changes. It has been suggested that those who meet the average expectations or the desired body shape and development can cope within this situation, however those who deviate from the expected desired shape face embarrassment and often-unkind comments (Scraton, 1992).

Given that there is a societal emphasis on the desired adult physique for adult femininity, it can be suggested that Becky is aware of her differences during adolescence, and this caused anxiety which led her to what to 'hide' or retreat from scrutiny. Traditionally, PE has provided the context in which physical differences have been made public and unmasked. In adulthood, women are not expected to expose their bodies and are encouraged to dislike their body shape unless it conforms to the 'ideal' feminine stereotype. Unfortunately, within PE this involves confronting a culture of femininity that creates embarrassment and concerns, whilst attempting to encourage attitudes that are positive to hygiene and perception of girls' own body image, and the emphasis on this can be distinguished within Becky's extract (Scraton, 1992).

#### **4. Outside of the School Changing Rooms:**

Many of the women in the previous stories above have discussed the negative comments experienced surrounding their bodies, in particular, with Penny, Becky and Alice's experiences; these were imposed on them at school through specifically physical education environments. It seems that many women when they were younger and attending school became aware of the societal pressures surrounding being a girl, and the struggles of how their bodies were portrayed. This reinforced the expectations to remain feminine and have the 'ideal' feminine appearance within the school environment. Hayley's extract illuminates how these pressures surrounded her even outside of the changing rooms at school:

*Hayley: 'I used to enjoy doing sports at school and things like that, where a lot of girls would have notes not to do it, I did get a bit like that when I got like in to year 11. But its coz you start worrying about your hair and things like that don't you it becomes more important.'*

*Amy: 'do you feel there was a difference when you were at school with how you compared yourself to others?'*

Hayley: *'yeah when I was at school but now I don't care. I think I'm a bit of a different person now like, things like I used to worry about my hair, I used to take my straighteners into school and I'd straighten my hair at school and things like that, now I don't even brush my hair when I go out ...'*

It is evident within Hayley's reflection how within her lived reality; she has succumbed to popular discourses surrounding gender and the portrayal of her feminine appearance. These popular discourses refer to a discursive field that proposes dominant ideologies of gender. These can be through popularised media, such as newspapers, magazines, television, advertisements and through the entertainment industries (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002). It has been well documented that discourses reinforce stereotypes for teenage girls and young women. The stereotypes portrayed by these discourses are often given to consumers (in this case Hayley), as highly commercialised and totally packaged cultural commodities through television, magazines and so forth (McRobbie and Garber, 1991). Hayley has normalised the stereotypes she viewed, and has adapted her body in order to adhere to these expectations.

Mead (1934, p. 58) asserts that 'the self has a character which is different from that of the physiological organism with a development all its own. The self is not even present at birth but arises later in the process of social experience and activity'. Young women therefore have to learn how to 'be a body' (Tantleef-Dunn and Gokee, 2004), suggesting that what a woman observes in a cultural mirror is often a way to measure her social worth. The focus of her body comes through interactions with friends, family and peer groups, and the messages received from outside of these circles (Keery *et al.*, 2005; Stice, 1998; Levine *et al.*, 1994; Paxton *et al.*, 1999; Steiger *et al.*, 1996). This can be noted within Charlie's reflection of when she was at secondary school:

*'I was fat at school so, for me sport was a way of, it was losing weight and trying to hide the fact I might have been fat but I am really good at sport, when I did javelin I was quite large. But like started to lose weight in kind of correlation of the more, the better physique I got the better I became at doing javelin and being more competitive [...] in primary school I remember just looking at pictures and being on holiday. I was one of the tallest and really slim, and then I remember a picture from year 7, I looked like I had a perm, I was probably about ten, eleven stone in year 7, and then when I got to kind of year 10/11 like all my friends had boyfriends, girlfriends. All my friends were*

*quite pretty and slim and then there was me who was quite loud and kind of I suppose my loudness took over my insecurities of being the bigger person in the group so. Yeah I suppose again that was just another erm, I can't think of the word, motivational tool for me to do better at sport for me to get slimmer, to be more attractive. I suppose [...] I liked being the centre of attention and the more that happened the more comfortable I felt, and my friends were always really good with me so.'* – Charlie.

The industries surrounding diet, food and fitness, aided by the media, adopt the message that women for independence must have self-improvement, self-control, and that it is her responsibility to achieve the ultra-slender body ideal; while alternatively the opposite of this relates to laziness, indignity, lack of control, moral failure and self-indulgence. The family peer group and school often reflect and enhance these messages, which often take the form of punishments and rewards that motivate women's bodies towards slenderness (Hesse-Biber *et al.*, 2006). This pressure is evident within not only Charlie's reflection above, but also experienced by Joanna too at school:

*Joanna: 'I didn't really care I guess, well I dunno growing, like when I was younger I didn't care, in like secondary it was a bit like 'oh now I care.'*

*Amy: 'so what made you care about your body more in secondary school do you think?'*

*Joanna: 'I was like, well everyone really, everyone was competing to look the best, yeah probably that. I wanted to change all of it, yeah wanted a nice toned stomach, small arms, small legs, boobs, that wasn't going to go anywhere was it. Yeah erm, yeah probably my hair as well. I knew what I wanted I just didn't have the time to go and do what I wanted.'*

Furthermore, within Alex's interview, there was a definite sign of her challenging and resisting masculine superiority with sports and PE:

*'I really wanted to box, and there was a lad that boxed, and um, but I said oh where do you go I wanna box and he said girls don't box, and I said why not, and he said coz they don't, girls do not box. So I went along to the gym and they wouldn't let me in coz I was a girl, so and I tried later as well and yeah no you just didn't do it, and I tried to get into a football teams. I couldn't even play football, in the playground the*

*boys would erm, ostracise me they'd sort of gang up and wouldn't let me in, I tried to get into game, they just kept shouting at me basically, so I learnt not to do it.'* – Alex.

Scraton (1992, p. 124) suggests that PE is not '... a straightforward process of gender ideology and identity reproduction'. Alex's reflection supports the notion that some teenage girls and young women infrequently refuse the choices forced upon them by enthusiastically taking part in sport. Although from an early age, Alex remembers being ostracised for being a girl in school and wanting to play football and box, throughout her life she has resisted against this, and boxing at the gym is now a fundamental aspect of her life. The extension and application of Foucault's work to feminism has highlighted the body as being a central position surrounding the construction of femininity and masculinity (Diamond and Quinby, 1988). This significant development has allowed Alex in this instance, to view her behaviour as firstly taking control of her body, and secondly, changing her body from a site of oppression into a site of resistance. This resistance (or struggle) forms the foundation of potentially empowering 'transformative change' that feminism strives for in order to question the (hetero) sexist status quo that is produced largely by society (Cockburn and Clarke, 2002).

## **5. Empowerment through physical activity:**

An important aspect to highlight from the stories of the women in this research is Stephanie's experiences of physical activity. Interestingly out of the thirteen women, Stephanie was the only female in this research who did not speak of any negative experiences associated with her body, or surrounding her early memories as a reason for her to be physically active and attend the gym. Stephanie reflects:

Amy: *'So when you were at school can you remember how you felt about your body?'*

Stephanie: *'No issues, none what so ever, No.'*

Amy: *'Do you think looking back there is a reason for that?'*

Stephanie: *'No, I just think that I've always been quite fortunate as I didn't have weight issues, if that's ... in today's society everybody is weight conscious about we didn't have that, and I suppose being like. I'm 53 years old now so being bought up 43 years ago when I was 10 erm [...] we were always out playing, and the way our road was situated if we wanted to, if there wasn't much traffic we would play tennis in the road, right in*

*the middle of the road because of the way it was. We used to have bike races round the circle with the boys as well. We was always out, we had a big um, like playing field called the wreck we used to go down there a lot ...'*

Although Stephanie did not experience any negativity as an influence to engage within physical activity, she refers to not having weight problems and how she was fortunate to not be conscious of her body. This suggests that Stephanie relates body dissatisfaction with only being overweight due to how she perceives societies ideal standards to be, therefore conforming to the discourses surrounding this. When I further asked her if physical activity is still a key aspect in her life now, and the reasons for going to the gym she explained:

*'Not only for my health issues, but I enjoy doing it as well [...] I'm ... it makes me feel better, it makes me feel better ... I enjoy the social side of it'. – Stephanie.*

Stephanie's early experiences of socialising whilst playing tennis in the road, and the memories of her playing outside as a group are the much-loved experiences that she gleans from being interested in physical activity when she was younger. This socialisation for Stephanie could be suggested as a tool of empowerment, and hence the reason for why she likes going to the gym now and socialising, as this is for her to remain empowered and confident through her body, and to remain physically active. As Bradshaw (2002) implies, sport and fitness that is organised make women feel good about themselves and their bodies; they liberate, give autonomy and empower them.

Hargreaves (1994) believes that empowerment is a development whereby people gain power over their lives, specifically; empowerment enables women to do things for themselves surrounding their own interests rather than at the command of someone else's benefit. Empowerment therefore involves an ability to resist pressures to conform to gender-stereotyped notions regarding presentation and behaviour; it also allows women to be more socially assertive. Due to this, welcoming empowerment enables women to become more pro-active in terms of what they do within their lives, so they become active agents. Whitson (1995) suggests this could be overcoming oppressive constraints that women face surrounding femininity and cultural normalisation, that is, overcoming 'power-over'. This empowerment type is often thought of in terms of physicality. Empowerment as a concept has a notable association with the essentially contested concept of power (Gallie, 1955). Firstly, suggesting that a woman is empowered signifies that she has power over her life. To

'empower' is often defined in relation 'to enable', or 'to authorise', or to seize or give power. Secondly, beliefs surrounding empowerment imply personal power, or the ability to control others based in characteristics of an individual, such as physical strength (Nash, 1975). These definitions indicate that agency and personal power are identical to a woman having power to her life. 'Power-to' entails autonomy, capability and the potential surrounding an individual (Henderson, 1989). Feminists usually approach power from a 'power-top' position. Although power-to approaches are usually at odds with 'power-over', which is a more traditional approach that connotes power, domination and authority.

Within the experiences discussed, power and empowerment are major themes. Many of the women recognised that power for them was being in control of their exercise choices, taking pride in their physical achievements and having a body that responded to challenges. This power includes physical strength 'as a source of confidence and personal security – the opposite to the vulnerability of patriarchal femininity' (Wright and Dewar, 1997, p. 21). This view refers to more a of 'power-to' approach, which has been neglected by traditional political theorists (Bradshaw, 2002). 'Power-to' in contrast refers to capacity and ability, which relates to some kind of freedom. Feminism emphasises the significance of women (and men) finding their own 'power-to' in the world (Henderson, 1989). This approach views power as something based on the capacity to do things, achieve goals specifically in collaboration with others, rather than domination or subordination (Johnson, 1995).

Bradshaw (2002) notes there are a number of paradoxes and contradictions that can arise from the assertion that sport and physical activity empower women. These contradictions not only involve the discourses and practises that surround physical activity and sport, but they are also inherited within discourses surrounding the female body. Women do not always have the freedom to recognise their 'power-to', due to this sometimes being undermined by 'power-over'. This can specifically be seen within the reflections towards the beginning of this chapter, where the negative comments the women have experienced are from their PE teachers and partners.

The cultural images and imperatives convince women that in order to achieve the ideal female body is to be empowered. The development or quest for the ideal female body through diet and exercise does not necessarily engender empowerment. Alternatively, it can distract women by ensuring that they focus on their presumed flaws (Bradshaw, 2002).

Not only does Stephanie's reflections suggest that she feels empowered whilst exercising as it makes her feel good, but this is explicitly evident throughout the other extracts explored within this chapter too. Many of the women turned their negative experiences into empowerment by choosing to join the gym, and exercise in the form of taking control back of their own bodies. The experiences of the women using the gym as an empowerment tool also suitably aligns with Foucault's process of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988a), whereby the women have chosen to transform their identities by emerging in resistant practices (such as joining the gym). The women have changed the dominant discourses imposed on them, however engaging within 'technologies of the self' does not necessarily lead to transformations power. In these experiences, it is evident that 'power-to' is present, therefore entailing autonomy, capability and the potential surrounding the women and their bodies in the gym (Henderson, 1989).

The gym here can be seen as a site of resistance, where the woman have overcome and ignored the cultural norms, imperatives and images that coerce them into pursuing the ideal female body; this could also be suggested as 'power-to', or empowerment (Grimshaw, 1999). The gym can also be viewed as a space where these women have resisted commonly held notions of female inferiority. Through their involvement within the gym space, the women are able to know their bodies free of patriarchal definitions and control, and cultivate this as a sense of self-respect for their physical capabilities (Kane, 1998).

## **6. Summary:**

This chapter explored women's embodied experiences in relation to their various reasons and influences for exercise participation within the gym. The application of feminist phenomenology implemented both a theoretical and methodological pathway to research the sensuousness of the experiences through the lived, moving body within the gym culture. Moreover, employing this framework in conjunction with ethnography also granted a suitable contribution to the limited but existing literature, indicating that bodies are also lived through cultures, times, locations, and hold social meanings.

Furthermore, this chapter acknowledged how within certain environments, the female body can become docile and controlled. It appears that the rigorous activities to embody the slim and toned female ideology for these women seemed to become a coping strategy, and that dominant discourses imposed on the female body were prevalent from childhood years,

through to adulthood. The coping strategies embodied, appear to offer the female exercisers resilience towards their early experiences surrounding their reasons and influences for exercise participation. This demonstrates a range of physical and emotional sensations are associated with the individual body as well the social context, time and space in which the experiences occur, demonstrating the appropriateness of employing a feminist phenomenology framework.

This chapter additionally highlighted how although most of the women initially experienced negativity in relation to their bodies, they specifically chose physical activity and participation within the gym environment as a site of resistance and empowerment, and this was a key aspect for them to continue and immerse themselves within the gym environment to this present day. The following chapter digresses from the negativity the women within this research experienced towards their bodies; and focuses on the more pleasurable embodied aspects that are experienced through the exercising body within the different gym environments.

## ***Chapter Seven***

### **Embodied Pleasures of Working Out in the Gym.**

I acknowledged in chapter six how the women in this research interpreted gender and their bodies, and how these understandings shaped and formed their initial gym experiences. Chapter six also highlighted the main ways how the women were influenced when they were working out at the gym, and how this affected their embodied self. As shown, many of the experiences discussed were seen to be negative (to varying degrees) and somewhat distressing. However, in relation to their enjoyment despite negative aspects, there was still a strong emphasis upon their enjoyment whilst working out, and how this was expressed as an embodied pleasure. Many women expressed the joy and elation experienced through the gym activities they were immersed in. This relates to the sensual pleasures that I experienced whilst spinning (described in chapter five) and how I attributed sweating and feeling 'the burn' as an achievement of a 'proper workout' and performing at my best, experiences of pain and pleasure can also be further demonstrated through my own narratives explored in chapter one.

Consequently, this chapter explores the fleshy embodied pleasurable aspects experienced by the women exercisers within the gym spaces. Specifically in the research location whilst working out in the main gym, CrossFit box, spin room and within bums, legs and tums. Discussion is provided suggesting that attuning to the euphoric feelings experienced by the exercising body, holds a potential in transgressing mind / body dualisms and liberation from dominant discourses (as discussed in chapter six) that can be imposed on women exercisers.

#### **1. Embodying fun and pleasure:**

Whilst feminist thinking has introduced the notion of women experiencing pleasure through their bodies, much of the focus has been on sexual pleasure in an attempt to challenge heteronormative presumptions about the passive (and unfeeling) role of women in relation to men (Dimen, 2003). It could however be argued, that sport is one area that has remained resistant to the idea that women might experience physical sensation in the same way as men (Hargreaves and Vertinsky 2007).

Wellard (2013) suggests that fun, which includes pleasure and enjoyment, is more complicated than a more instant form of subjective gratification and needs to be considered as not only a significant factor in participation and continued participation, but an 'embodied experience which incorporates a multitude of social, psychological and physiological components' (Wellard, 2013, 4). Thus, it is necessary to understand not only the social context (or discourse) of the gym in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but also the competing factors that might impact upon an individual's experience before during and after an activity at the gym. Such detail includes recognition of the physical and emotional sensations of a specific activity, as it may be the case that an activity in one area of the gym (such as a male dominated weights area) may be enjoyed more in another (such as a functional movement area) or at different times of the day (when specific social groups might attend, such as retired adults during the daytime). Therefore, by taking into account the multiple ways in which an individual might experience their body within the gym space suggests a more complex dynamic. Thus, in the case of interpreting pleasure and pain one needs to recognise the various ways in which an individual's embodiedness is experienced, not only at the time of the activity but also before and after. For instance, within the context of fitness gym discourses, thinking about pain and pleasure generated in elite sport has been presented as a necessary and an essential element in performance progress. This has in turn filtered into amateur sports and broader health and fitness industries where the motivational aspects used within fitness training, such as mantras of 'no pain, no gain' and 'feel the burn' are accepted (and expected) practices.

Even though there have been extensive debates surrounding post-structuralist (Butler, 1993) and Foucauldian accounts about the discursive structures operating upon the body; it can be suggested that there is still room for further discussion relating to embodied experience. Particularly how an individual creates corporeal understandings of their own body and how in turn, they develop understandings of their own and others' physical identities. The concept of feminist phenomenology has unquestionably been a significant influence in how women's embodied pleasures have been interpreted, explored and re-evaluated. However, when thinking about embodied experiences within the gym, it can be suggested that the concept of body-reflexive pleasures (Wellard, 2013) helps to assist in the development of a theoretical orientation that acknowledges the role of the body in shaping external practises, as highlight further within this chapter. By incorporating this concept, the lived, feeling body within social processes is acknowledged through the structurally, culturally

and historically located nature of gendered embodiment (Allen-Collinson, 2010; Wellard, 2013).

According to Wellard (2013) there has been a fresh interest in the public domain surrounding individual 'health' and 'wellbeing'. However, while abstract, thoughts regarding conceptual ideas such as pleasure and happiness have been entered into the discussion. These are more likely mentioned in more opaque terms such as fun. Within the context of sport, the advantages of participation in sport and physical activity are more likely to be examined in relation to positive citizenship and improved health. 'Pleasure' or 'fun' are not particularly easy to assess in terms of the specific outcomes, and are generally only considered as an additional extra. Consequently, while 'fun' is considered a major factor within research about the positive experiences of both adults and children, (MacPhail et al. 2003, Dismore and Bailey 2011) specific expressions of fun are rarely explored, and are often dismissed as just 'fun' (McNamee 2005, Bloodworth et al. 2012). Until relatively recently, the sensory dimensions of bodies at work and play, particularly from a phenomenological perspective have only begun to be addressed (Owton and Allen Collinson, 2014). Wellard (2013, p. 4) suggests 'fun' (with the inclusion of pleasure and enjoyment) can be considered as:

- 1) A significant factor in participation and continued participation
- 2) A major factor in initial experiences of sporting activity
- 3) An objective experience which cannot be fully explained in terms of acts which are intrinsically hedonistic or defined through simplistic binary formulations of pleasure and pain
- 4) An embodied experience which incorporates a multitude of social, psychological and physiological components.

Sociological frameworks have viewed pleasure and fun as socially constructed. Recent work surrounding phenomenological approaches and 'embodied thinking' are now emerging (Allen-Collinson, 2009). In addition to this, work captivating the physiological (Booth, 2009) and psychological explorations of affect and happiness (Ahmed, 2010), and shame (Probyn, 2005), have had a clear influence on how this concept can be further speculated. Within this chapter, the theoretical framework for exploring fun and enjoyment within a sporting context has been incorporated, particularly Connell's (2005) description of 'body reflexive practices' with an additional dimension adapted by Wellard (2013). This theoretical framework in

addition to broader theoretical influences will explore an embodied approach to the sporting body, and includes experiences of the individual taking into account social, psychological and physiological influences.

Training and fitness have recently been constructed as pleasurable experiences, and a way of getting time for one's self to relax and simultaneously improve one's body capital (Featherstone, 1991, 2001; Smith Maguire, 2008). According to Sassatelli (2006), the fitness centre aims to be a place an individual can regenerate, improve their body without submitting to the requirements of competition or imposed goals, and even manage to have fun. Heywood (1998, p.3) advocates that the gym is 'a place of incarnations where our bodies inflate and we shuffle off our out-of-gym bodies like discarded skins and walk about transformed'. Initially all of the women who are working out have an undivided attention, which is focused on their bodies, this is developed through a physical immersion in repeatedly working out (Bunsell and Shilling, 2011), many of the women suggested that coming to the gym was 'their own time to focus on themselves'.

The discussion in this chapter explores the embodied pleasures and the lived experiences of the women exercisers who participate in gym activities, specifically within the main gym, spinning room, CrossFit box and 'bum, legs and tums' classes. The extracts within this chapter capture the core elements of the embodied experiences of the women who participate within this gym. The focus of the discussion is to not only utilise feminist phenomenology, but to further explore the women's body reflexive pleasures (Wellard, 2013) and how these might offer potential mechanisms to transgress mind/body dualisms and resistance from dominant discourses that can be imposed on women exercisers in sport and fitness spaces. These relate to the ways in which the women described their participation as serious and sought ways to find achievement through their activities, in contrast to stereotypical assumptions that women choose to participate in fitness cultures for more superficial, body image based reasons (as highlighted in chapter six). The body reflexive pleasures highlight the shared embodied experiences that transcend conventional descriptions based upon gender difference. I also describe how the sensory aspects of the gym, such as how sweat and smell are incorporated into the women's own understanding of their experiences as both physical sensations and metaphors for personal, positive sense of self.

## 2. Feeling Alive - the 'proper workout':

*'... it was really hard though, like that first one [spinning] erm, and even at the beginning when we first started a couple of tracks, it might have been two or three tracks and you went 'and that's the warm up ending', I was thinking, I can't go, I can't do that 45 minutes, but coz everyone else is doing it you feel you can't stop, you know and it did go pretty quickly, but I remember getting off the bike and I've never ached so much and I felt like my legs were like jelly and I had to learn to walk again and I've never had that feeling with an exercise class ever, you know it was like strange, but felt really good and you knew you'd had a proper work out ...' – Penny.*

*Becky: '... for me, it's like I'm doing a proper workout and you know when you feel that ache and that burn, haha I like the burn!*

*Amy: 'what's the burn for you?'*

*Becky: 'the burn, it's a workout, I'm working out here, yeah, but saying that, when we go into sprints and we are doing our sprints and I'm out of breath I like that feeling coz I think, that's a workout, so there's a, it's a bit of both really yeah'*

The descriptions of Penny and Becky's embodied experiences of working out within the spin room relate to a specific gym activity, and demonstrate a range of emotional and physical sensations that are interwoven with the individual body, in conjunction with the social context where the experience has occurred. Penny illustrates her experiences whilst participating within a spin class; she initially suggests that she can't go on and continue with the 45 minute class, but she doesn't want to give up in front of the other spinners. Probyn (2005) describes the complex relationship of shame to joy and enjoyment, it is suggested that shame emerges after interest of enjoyment has been activated. Dolezal (2014) notes that shame is an individual and necessary body experience, resulting from intersubjective relations, and is always contained in a nexus of political and socio-cultural norms. Probyn also proposes that we need to recognise shame as a factor that explains or describes how something is enjoyed. It could be suggested that Penny recognised the shame felt during her spin class through not wanting to stop in front of the other spinners and let herself down.

However, interestingly she perceives the strange jelly like sensation from her legs, and ‘having to learn to walk again’ as the enjoyment and attribution towards accomplishing a ‘proper workout’.

Alternatively, Becky’s description of the ‘ache’ and ‘burn’, and being out of breath is closely aligned with Allen-Collinson and Owton’s (2014) concept of ‘intense embodiment’, this is described as a period of heightened awareness of corporeal existence and ‘aliveness’, with the senses working at an intense level, she also contributes this experience as a ‘proper workout’. These experiences also resemble Leder’s (1990) concept of the ‘dys-appearing body’, where mainly a heightened awareness of pain, illness or intense pleasure is present and the body is sometimes experienced away or apart from the self. The body ‘dys-appears’ and is sometimes suddenly brought to consciousness. Similarly, intense embodiment requires a greater level of conscious awareness surrounding the body and its processes, but without the negative connotations of ‘dys’, meaning ‘abnormal’ or ‘bad’ (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014). This intense embodiment can also be seen through Charlie’s experience in the CrossFit box:

*‘I hate it when I’m doing it, I absolutely hate it ... like physically trying to move and breath at the same time is hard, but then afterwards you like the results from CrossFit. Like the most extreme is when you are getting sweat in your eyes, you know your eyebrows aren’t doing the job, just like the feeling of being hot, your heart race is racing and your skin is warm, your sweat is dripping, you know you’re working hard. You pick up a bar, you hit it off your thighs and you see your sweat dripping off the floor in front of you, you know you’re working hard, you know you’re achieving something’ – Charlie.*

Wellard (2012) suggests the subjective experience of ‘hating’ something may be more tolerable if the result is considered worthwhile. Charlie’s hate whilst she engages in CrossFit can be seen to be alleviated by the enjoyable embodied pleasures she experiences from her ‘eyebrows not working and the sweat dripping off the floor’. Alice also similarly displays the same experience of hating spinning whilst she first starts to works out:

*Alice: ‘I sort of kept it going and hated it for the first five or six sessions haha, but just kept it going.’*

Amy: 'why did you hate it to begin with?'

Alice: *'I just, just found it hard, it was just so difficult, I just found it really hard and hard to sort of get my stamina, hard to sort of get my breathing right [...] short bursts and I'm fine! Anything where I have to sort of think about it, where I've got to control my body you know, pace myself I find hard.'*

Amy: 'how did your body feel when you are doing it?'

Alice: *'exhausted, yeah exhausted, yeah, but its then when you get and get home you think oh that's was good, that's what I needed at the end of the day or that's what I needed after a day at work or something.'*

It could be suggested that these pleasures to Charlie and Alice are seen as a reward, they both explain in their own words that they know they are achieving something and working hard if these experiences and feelings are present. Alice's comment of 'controlling her body', also suggests that she constructed a constant self-surveillance when she first started to spin. Due to commencing with exercise; Alice has constantly worked on scrutinizing her own exercise practices, which has turned into a technique of discipline, without physical pressure or material constraints, which according to Foucault (1991) ultimately controls her.

Charlie's experience within the CrossFit box whilst she undertakes a workout of the day (WOD) can also be attributed towards a *heightened sense of being alive*; this occurs when pain and pleasure boundaries weaken and produce a 'high', and for Charlie and Alice, an achievement. Pain is usually perceived as shameful, or something foreign to the body (Sparkes, Batey and Owen, 2011). What is previously thought of as uncomfortable is now transformed as something 'beautiful and pleasurable' by pushing the limits (Tate, 1999, p. 38). There is an element of learning how to interpret the feeling of being high, and this develops through a process of symbolic and emotional development by interacting with others. Penny reflection of how she felt after she first started to spin clearly shows her journey to accepting the development of her acknowledging and interpreting the feeling of being high and how body displayed this:

Penny: *'With spin I did feel like exhausted, but really good and like, I ached and soon recovered but came back each time.'*

Amy: 'when you say you felt like you had a good workout, what is that feeling?'

Penny: *'erm, aching, tiredness where other sport like, I used to do step as well where I'd get like a little bit sweaty, erm, and feel tired but nothing like with spin, erm, it was like a different level of like tiredness and aching, it was! But it felt good, and you could tell it was doing something to your body you know, you know, your body was changing say after about 6-8 weeks you know, you could see the effects where with step and that you never really did, you know it was never that high intensity.'*

Amy: 'yeah, so sweating is a good sign for you then?'

Penny: *'yeah, yeah it shows me that I've had a good workout, that I've worked hard, but I used to sweat so much more and like coz I'm more used to it, I don't sweat as much but I, I know that I've had a good workout still you know. I ache, even now you know I still ache after every session and I try and turn it up as hard as I can to get the most out of it.'*

The experience of pain is usually viewed as creating a physiological condition of the body, and is associated with dysfunctional interruption of the body into life world (Leder, 1990). It can be seen that women exercisers in a variety of alternative gym spaces, engage positively with body discomfort and fatigue, this is then transformed into memorable and acceptable experiences. Not only do Charlie and Penny display the acceptance of pain whilst exercising and the affects after; this change of sensual experience is clear in the comments of Becky whilst she is exercising in a legs, bums and tums class:

*'that is more of 'can't wait to get this finished haha!', coz it is, it's a different type of hard work because its more, well its everything is it! And its erm, cause of the stomach, you know when it really really burns and you just got to let go because it really burns so that's, but I also like doing it because it again I feel a sense of achievement once I've done it' – Becky.*

Becky also describes how this exercise is a different type of hard work compared to other activities at the gym she participates in; she explains that it 'really really burns' so she has to let go of her stomach muscles. Becky demonstrates as also highlighted in chapter 5, Merleau-Ponty's [1945] (1997) contact bodily intuition and maturity, which can be acquired

through tying a particular body part with consciousness (or being able to 'isolate the muscle'). By experiencing introspective sensibility, she has recognised her own muscle movement and proprioceptivity; and has shown she has the capability of understanding of being able to feel her body from 'within', this is also demonstrated within chapter five whilst spinning to music. Becky's acknowledgement of being able to make 'contact' with her stomach muscles displays an embodied skill that is hard to articulate or define. As Andreasson (2014) explains, 'contact' is being able to enter one's own corporeality and being able to press the 'right power switch to the light lamp' (p. 9). This primarily sensory input is indicative of an exercise being performed correctly and being proceeded therefore, by a long learning process by the body. The acceptance of feeling the burn and the possible bodily achievement she has gained from this has transferred into a memorable and accepted experience.

### **2.1 Getting Sweaty: Erotic pleasures in the gym:**

*Bodies, in their own right as bodies, do matter. They age, get sick, enjoy, engender, give birth. There is an irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice: the sweat cannot be excluded. (Connell 2005, p. 51).*

Similar to Becky's experiences described above, Jenny's experience of working out in the main gym describes where pleasure and pain boundaries blur, and being able to isolate specifically her leg muscles:

*'...its, its, um, I would say, I would say that's it's a feeling, I can't describe it, it's just erm. You know that rush when you meet somebody for the first time and the chemistry is there and you just wanna be with them for the rest of your life, feels like for me, it's just. You walk out you, you, that's what it and you think 'oh my god' I don't want that feeling to end, and, you hold on to that feeling. Er when you wake up the next morning, you ache, and you can't move properly and you have to roll off the toilet because you can't actually use your thighs and you have to go down the stairs on your backside that. I just, you, you can't describe that feeling to people it's, coz you know that everything is working and its working right and that's how it should be working and you know that its, it's gonna be, if you carry on doing it you're gonna get the results and they're gonna be there and you just can't. It's hard to describe to somebody if*

*they've never experienced that, but I would say it's like a euphoria, it's like a, you can't ... (shrugs shoulders)' – Jenny.*

For Jenny, the feeling of working out is the same feeling as when she meets a romantic partner for the first time, with the chemistry and excitement present and not wanting this feeling to end. She continues and humorously explains how after exercising she has to roll of the toilet because she can't use her legs from working out, and has to go down the stairs on her backside because she cannot walk properly. She attributes this to a feeling of euphoria, similar to my own narrative and experiences expressed in chapter six whilst wiping sweat of my bike after conducting a spin class.

There is a sensuousness to be found in this experience which could be considered an erotic one. This feeling of euphoria and not wanting the feeling to end can extend to a feeling of erotic potency, here the gym is a zone of pleasure, providing challenges and sensual transformation. Mansfield and McGinn (1993) apply the term 'erotics of the gym', whilst referring to the pleasures of experiential and visceral embodiment surrounding gym cultures. A particular illustration given, is Arnold Schwarzenegger's description of his most satisfying feeling experienced, 'the pump'; *'it's as satisfying to me as coming is, you know, as having sex with a woman and coming. So you can believe how much I am in heaven?'* (Arnold Schwarzenegger cited by Wacquant, 1995, p. 176). This strongly resonates with Monaghan's (2001) discussion on the eroticism of the gym, but interestingly contrasts Crossley's (2006) identification of sexual motives for the use of gyms. Some gym users have the motive to meet others, the sensuality described is more of an autoeroticism, whereby Jenny revels in the experience of her own flesh and compares her gym experiences to romantic partner.

Moreover, whilst comparing these findings to other traditional literature focusing on women and pain – pain is often attributed to childbirth and sex, and it is suggested that in relation to pleasure, woman should not be allowed to experience this (Dimen, 2003; Firestone, 1979). Whilst attributing pain and pleasure in relation to gym spaces, Johnston (1998) highlights the feelings of pleasure and pain in relation to the corporeal sensations of how female bodybuilders experience 'the pump', and how they acknowledge this pain as a reward. With the use of psychoanalytic theory, it is claimed that bodies are written and inscribed by signification and desire –at physiological, anatomical and neurological levels. This theory has facilitated feminists to convert bodies from the domains of biology/essential/natural, to

enable the body to be seen as a psycho-social product. Furthermore, McTavish (2015) contends that weight lifting introduces the body to a variety of novel sensations, which are sometimes mistaken as pain due to not falling into the domain of comfort, which is promoted as the only desirable kind of sensation within contemporary consumer culture.

In a similar manner to pleasure, this consideration of 'erotic' is a highly subjective experience for the individual as displayed. Broader definitions depend on individual social interpretations of sexual arousal and desire (Wellard, 2012). Wellard also suggests that sport can provide a variety of erotica because of how the body is a spectacle, and how bodily movements are demonstrated. There has also been a limited exploration of pleasure in sport, as it has tended to focus upon the spectator through an 'erotic gaze' or hedonistic gratification (McNamee, 2005; Bloodworth *et al.*, 2012). The corporeality of fitness can be considered erotic, and narratives of sporting and fitness contests are also open to interpreting erotically. By incorporating embodied experience and the erotic demonstrates, even though these are highly subjective, that broader definitions rely on individual and social interpretations of pleasure and erotica. Many of the women attributed a good or 'proper workout' to the sensuousness of them sweating and feeling exhausted and how they 'associate exercise with sweating' as demonstrated by Charlie:

*'I should be feeling sweaty like if I wear knee sleeves and a belt, if I take my knee sleeves off I should have sweaty knees. I should have a sweat patch where I've had my belt and things like that or under my armpits and things but I do, if I don't sweat it's not really worth it. I think ... just doing that type of training and just being, hanging out of your bum for the whole time just improves fitness, just does everything all in one' – Charlie.*

According to Wellard (2012) certain forms of erotica in sport have been popularised and/or patriarchally imposed, consequently reflecting hegemonic heterosexual male desire. The erotic isn't just about men consuming sexualised images of women within sport, the erotic is about a sense of liberation in regards to sexual expression; and celebrating the sensuality of the pleasures of sexual excitement and desire. Fundamentally, often in the context of sport, the possibilities that are raised to challenge established understandings of gender, sexuality and bodily experience can be lost in the effort to adapt or adopt to (hetero) normative performance within sport. Pronger (2002) discusses the constructions placed upon

the way in which we contemplate the body and hinder the potential, or 'puissances' (2002, p. 66), that are found in bodily pleasures, which exist 'outside' the boundaries of traditional thinking. Jenny demonstrates here the discourses surrounding being a woman and sweating:

Jenny: *'I think I just walk in and train as hard as a man does, and sweat as much as a guy does, I've never seen myself as one of these girls that walks in swishes their hair around and erm, giggles and flirts and that kind of thing ...'*

Amy: *'do you see sweating as like an achievement of a good workout?'*

Jenny: *'yeah, absolutely, I couldn't do, I can't do Pilates, I can't do yoga, one I'm not flexible enough but I can't do that coz I don't sweat.'*

Amy: *'so how does that make you feel when you're really sweaty?'*

Jenny: *'I feel like I can go on forever, I'd, I love that feeling, I absolutely love that feeling, erm, you know, you, you, you train, you train hard, you can barely walk out of here and you just think 'yep' (nods head) that was a good workout.'*

Amy: *'the euphoric feeling again?'*

Jenny: *'yep [...] I just love that feeling.'*

It could be suggested that Jenny feels there is a stigma attached to being a woman who sweats and pushes her body the maximum limits she can. Her comparison to sweating and training 'like a man' seems to make her experiences of sweating more acceptable. Felshin (1974) claims that women athletes often engage in apologetic behaviour. Sport is often associated with masculinity and women are supposed to behave in feminine ways, therefore, women are having to 'apologise' in sport when falling outside the 'norms' of femininity. Apologetic behaviour can also be termed by some scholars as 'stigma management' (Blinde and Taub, 1992), 'compensatory acts' (Crosset, 1995) and 'identity / impression management' (Halpert, 1997). There has been a wide range of discussion on what apologetic behaviours are, including female participation in sport, advocating conservative gender ideas and emphasising the superiority of male athletes (Adams *et al.*, 2005).

Jenny compares herself to 'sweating and training like a man', and although for her this is a very pleasurable experience whilst she trains, she has had to downplay her sweating and hard training by scrutinizing herself and coinciding the stigma attached to women and

sweating to be acceptable through masculine thought and actions. Seid (1994) suggests that more stringent bodily controls are required by a female than a male; animal-like functions such as belching, sweating, urinating, scratching, masturbating, spitting, farting, and even body odour, remain less permissible for women than for men. There is an acceptance in the male-culture, unlike the female culture, for these behaviours to be humorous, which sometimes become the subject of a good natured contest. Simply, men are permitted to become more comfortable about natural functions and to exhibit them, even to a greater extent in public. These functions do not compromise masculinity; they often rather conform it. On the other hand, women compromise their femininity if they are unable to control these behaviours.

Jenny here demonstrates how she is able to perform within the gym environment, particularly through sweating and feeling euphoric. It could be suggested that Jenny (and many of the other women who sweat too) creates a form resistance here. Jenny has overcome and ignored the cultural norms, imperatives and images that surround the discourses of being a woman and sweating. The space within the gym she has created for her to do this, has allowed her to know her own body free of patriarchal definitions and control, thus empowering her and ensuring she self-respects her own physical capabilities (Kane, 1998; Grimshaw, 1999). Consequently, Jenny has defied the discourses that are imposed on her surrounding being a female who sweats and works hard.

Interestingly, without experiencing the sensuousness of sweating, many women believed their gym workouts to be unsuccessful or simply wasted. Sweating signifies physically that the body is becoming warm; in this case, sweating encompasses a whole range of embodied experiences that occur throughout the different gym environments and spaces. For Jenny, sweating and experiencing the differing strains placed upon the body during exercise means that these physical sensations can be understood through a corporeal interpretation, which is described later through body-reflexive pleasures (Wellard, 2013). This can be further seen whilst Hayley reflects on her gym experiences:

Hayley: *'Like coz when you train you don't wanna have to be pretty you wanna like, I, I don't, if I train and I don't sweat, I'll be pissed off.'*

Amy: 'why?'

Hayley: *'coz I'll wanna, wanna be drenched, I wanna be soaked I wanna know I've done something.'*

Amy: *'ok, so how does that make you feel when you're really, really sweaty?'*

Hayley: *'I feel really good, I feel so good, it does that's what you wanna do don't you, you don't wanna come out the gym as dry as anything.'*

Amy: *'ok, so how does that make you feel when you're really, really sweaty?'*

Hayley: *'I feel really good, I feel so good, it does that's what you wanna do don't you, you don't wanna come in the gym as dry as anything.'*

Like Jenny, Hayley unintentionally also reinforces apologetic behaviour by initially stating that she doesn't want to look pretty whilst working out, and that she wants to be 'drenched' when she is working out. It seems that Hayley is already aware of the current stigmas surrounding women and working out, and for her the feeling of being drenched is pleasurable, but also needs to be justified for her to not look 'pretty'. Like many of the women's experiences of pleasure whilst working out, Hayley has achieved her goal of feeling drenched and sweating. As previously suggested Marzano-Parisoli (2001) explains that widely accepted forms of objectifying an individual's body include treating it primarily as an object of accomplishing goals; regarding it as a physical object which can be used, viewed and manipulated; also treating it as a material possession to be traded and exploited. Individuals require control of their bodies to maintain its suitability as an object of that specific type (Wendell, 1996). Hayley is so consumed in her goal of feeling drenched whilst she is working out, so much so, that she unconsciously treats her body as an object to primarily achieve this goal and optimise her progress (Andreason, 2014)

Drawing upon the 'phenomenology of happiness' Ahmed (2010) discusses the random ways in which 'happiness' is used in society. It is seen as a positive goal to achieve, and as an object, making something happy to an individual. Hayley and the other women have identified how the social prescribes the ways in which they are able to construct a sense of ontologically being happy, and subsequently their experiences have allowed happiness. In this case, the different spaces of the gym and the equipment used are the objects, and the women have used these to achieve the goals of pleasure and happiness.

Also evident within these reflections is what Rooney (2005) calls ‘impersonal intimacy’, whereby very few people would choose their sweaty gym self as the one they would regularly present in any other setting within life. Klein (2001) further expands on this unusual relationship:

One has much more intimacy with the strangers at the gym than with almost anyone else, say lovers or spouses. Body fluids, particularly sweat, flow freely at the gym, held in check by little more than the standard issue square towel given out at the front desk. In using the weight lifting machines, one places one’s body upon the ghost of another (p. 125).

Despite the women being potentially exposed and vulnerable in the gym with the presentation of their sweaty bodies. The nature of this semi-private space creates room for comfort and empowerment of their sweaty exercising bodies, thus, shattering and creating a resilience towards the discourses imposed on the exercising female body.

## **2.2 The sweet smell of success: Olfactory pleasures**

As shown, sport is often intimately connected with sweating and the connections individuals recognise when they are working hard. However, one rarely analysed dimension of sporting embodiment are the olfactory receptors (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007, 2009). These odours are corporeally and symbolically associated to obtaining the right environment for working out within gym spaces, it works to affirm an individual’s prominent sporting identity (Stryker, 1987).

Many women within this research suggested that their olfactory senses within certain gym environments were an important part of their pleasurable experience whilst working out. These were generally coded as ‘agreeable smells’ (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009), whereby the senses work to confirm that the self is directly involved in the working present, and more importantly, in the working past through the identification of smells via memory. The odours experienced within the gym were symbolically and corporeally correlated with performing and sweating to the ‘right’ degree of effort, and also suggested that certain smells experienced were ‘the symbol of the self’ (Synott, 1993). Becky describes the reawakening of her memory when experiencing a particular smell attached to her towel whilst she spins:

Becky: *'Sometimes my towel haha. Yeah but that's, and I know it sounds really silly but if I've erm, if it's like just come out of the, the tumble dryer, then I think of when I was younger. Remember that smell you know when I was living with my mum, yeah, yeah no the towel is a smell, I smell the comfort and think of when I was younger, and that used to feel like a fresh towel ...'*

Amy: *'so do you always take your towel in with you when you do a workout?'*

Becky: *'always, coz I always need to wipe the back of my neck [...] I like the sweat haha!'*

Tuan (1993, p. 57) suggests that smells can vividly invoke positive and negative memories: 'Odour has the power to restore the past because, unlike the visual image, it is an encapsulated experience that has been left largely uninterpreted and underdeveloped'. This can be seen within Becky's experience, where the particular aromas of her towel powerfully evoke her working past, this was united with her emergent present. Her memories collided with the here and now whilst her body engaged within exercise. Similar to Becky's smell experience, Alex's reflection describes how smelling the particular gym environment makes her feel comforted, and ready to work out:

Alex: *'The main thing for spin is that it's intense and it's hard and it makes me sweat, and it gets rid of that aggression.'*

Amy: *'so when you sweat is that the crux of you knowing you are working hard?'*

Alex: *'yeah, when I'm sweating and I feel sick! I'm pushing myself to my full potential, I don't like half measures, so I will push myself ... once you get familiar with a certain gym room, or gym that can sometimes, when I'm not in the mood. If I'm really tired, got my period, feel really shit, I train with colds and stuff like that, as soon as you smell, that comfort smell it's like yeah I'm here to do a job. I'm here to work out for an hour, so yeah the smell can have an effect as well as, and certainly when the music goes on and you hear the trainers voice, and then before you know it you've completed an hour coz your just in that mode, that zone aren't you ...'*

Alex's experience is a confirmation of the self's involvement within a sporting present moment; she expresses that her auditory experience contributes towards the gym being

pleasurable, but she also prompts her sporting identity via her memory of smell. According to Classen *et al.*, 1994, p. 97), certain sports have different ‘smellscapes’, a combination of smells that change depending upon the seasonal and temporal conditions, activity and place and space. Further experiences encountered by Jenny also display the different ‘smellscapes’ in a variety of fitness cultures:

*‘you, when you walk into the gym, I love that smell of, sweat, and you can smell, especially over the, then er, weights side, you can smell erm, that fact that people have trained and people have worked hard, erm, and I, that’s, that’s the main thing that stands out for me ...’ – Jenny.*

The particular aromas Alex, Becky and Jenny encounter within the spin room and main gym are used to order their experience and understandings of space (Classen *et al.*, 1994). This in turn impacts upon how they both train, and makes their spinning and gym workouts more pleasurable and thus, perceived as more effective. Not only does Alex refer to being ‘in the zone’ psychologically, but it is important to acknowledge here that the familiarisation of the spin room with the inclusion of her sensory experiences all allude towards her pleasurable experience, which suitably attribute towards the body reflexive pleasures discussed further below.

### **3. Theorising Embodied Pleasures:**

The experiences described within this chapter illuminate a variety of important factors:

- The sensual feelings of the body whilst working out in a particular time and space.
- The embodied feeling of pleasure, and the sense of achievement from having a ‘proper’ workout.
- The embodied pleasures of pain experienced during and after exercising and how this is distinguished.

These factors align similarly to the previous factors of ‘fun’ detailed by Wellard (2013). The sensual feelings experienced in the different spaces of fitness cultures, interestingly played a significant role in the continued participation of why the women wanted to return to the gym and work out again. Attributes such as sweating and feeling exhausted, and in the words of Alice ‘*a total blow out your arse*’, were all symbolised as pleasures, and completing a workout

suitably. This feeling deconstructs the pain and pleasure binary, as many women not only neglected to state this was actually really painful or 'not fun', rather they described these pains and pleasures of working out as enjoyable and a common experience that needs to occur when they are working out. Finally, the embodied experiences incorporated a multitude of social, psychological and physiological components.

### **3.1 Circuit of Body Reflexive Practices:**

Frequent discussions have occurred surrounding how the body has been explored within sport and PE (Evans et al. 2004, Gard and Wright 2005, Maivorsdotter and Lundvall 2009). The corporeal aspects which influence how an individual develops a sense of their own identity is often not always fully accounted for, and extensive debates have appeared surrounding post-structuralist (Butler, 1993) and Foucauldian accounts on the discursive structures operating upon the body that I have discussed earlier on within this thesis.

However, considering the above, it can be suggested that there is still room for further discussions surrounding embodied experience, particularly how an individual creates corporeal understandings of their own bodies and how in turn, this develops understandings of their own and others physical identities. The concept of feminist phenomenology has unquestionably been a significant influence in how I have interpreted and explored the women exercisers embodied pleasures. However, the concept of body-reflexive pleasures draws towards a theoretical position that acknowledges the role of the body in shaping external practises.

Connell's (2005) circuit of body reflexive practices enables a greater understanding as to how social and cultural factors entwine with individual bodily experiences. This theoretical frame includes an embodied approach, particularly relating to the sporting body. Connell efforts to combine the role of the biological (in this case, in the social construction of gender). Sociological readings of the social world, where social factors uncover the restrictions created by social structures are also applied (Wellard, 2013).

Body reflexive practices are created through a circuit of bodily interactions and experiences via socially constructed understandings of the body, which lead to new bodily interactions. Connell (2005) argues the corporeality of the body needs to be accounted for within social theory, and 'through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies... they do not turn into symbols,

signs or positions in discourse' (Connell, 2005, p. 64). This circuit enables a greater understanding as to how social and cultural factors entwine with individual bodily experiences. This approach has traditionally been seen through a somewhat masculine lens, by attributing the circuit of body reflexive pleasures enables an exciting captivation into exploring women's pleasures within a social context.

Wellard (2013) adapted Connell's concept in order to include a circuit of body reflexive pleasures, located in the context of the body, sport and physical activities. Within this context, a range of factors which contribute towards pleasure (or not) are recognised. Applying this concept to a person's experience of sport can show that considerations need to be made surrounding the social, psychological and physiological processes that occur at any level, and with various influence. A central part of this circuit can therefore be pleasure, where the interconnected factors determine an individual's experience. The figure below shows circuit of events that are constantly experienced and negotiated, developing to either a positive or negative direction to sport or physical activity. The three dimensions contribute at all levels to an overall experience of the activity, interpreting them as either positive or negative.

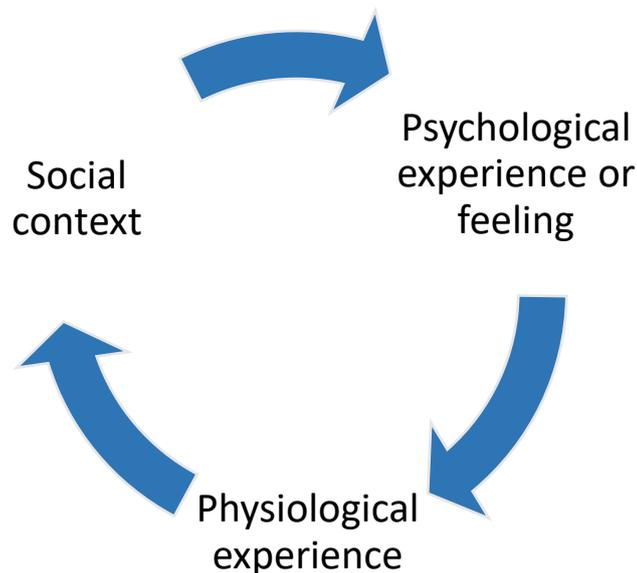


Figure (3): Connell's Circuit of Body Reflexive Practices (2005).

Numerous factors contribute towards this circuit, and resulting experience could include for example, physiological experience (for example, the pleasure of physical sensation), psychological experience or feeling (for example the confidence in one's own ability, the shame of letting the side down, or being on show to others) and the social context (for example the specific exercise of activity).

Research within sport that has acknowledged fun and sport has tended to focus on psychological performance about being in the 'zone', similarly to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) 'flow'. These approaches often however, tend to dissociate elements of pleasure as insignificant to these processes, as they do not fully take into account the contribution of physiological and social elements. Psychological factors also play heavily on an individual's experiences of sport, often whether an activity is considered less pleasurable. Often not wanting to participate within in an activity is due to fear of letting oneself down (Wellard, 2013). In relation to physiological aspects, there is an importance to consider the broader dimensions of pleasure not just relating to biological aspects, but also 'the interactions between its biological and sociological components' (Booth 2009, p.135). Orientation towards thinking about pain and pleasure has often been contextualised as necessary and part of essential performance progress. This orientation towards thinking about the body this way, has filtered amateur sports and broader health and fitness industries; an example of this is the motivational aspects used within fitness training 'no pain, no gain', and 'feel the burn'. Therefore, a more complicated relationship between pleasure and pain is present due to physical pain being rearticulated by an individual so the experience can be re-evaluated as a more pleasurable and positive way. The social context of how an activity (such as those performed in a gym) can be regulated in different social spaces highlights the various ways in which an individual's embodiedness is experienced, particularly within sport and physical activity contexts.

### **3.2 Circuit of body reflexive pleasures:**

In developing his critical circuit of body reflexive pleasure, Wellard (2013) identifies upon a significant fourth aspect, consisting of temporal and spatial aspects, which have varying degrees of influence upon an experience, he claims that different 'times' and 'spaces' impact how a certain activity is experienced as fun. Considering space enables the opportunity to approach space and place as more fluid, and by doing so, the often-immobile

developments of this concept. By taking into account the temporal and spatial dimensions influencing the circuit of body-reflexive pleasure, the initial diagram accommodating the fourth aspect can be seen below.

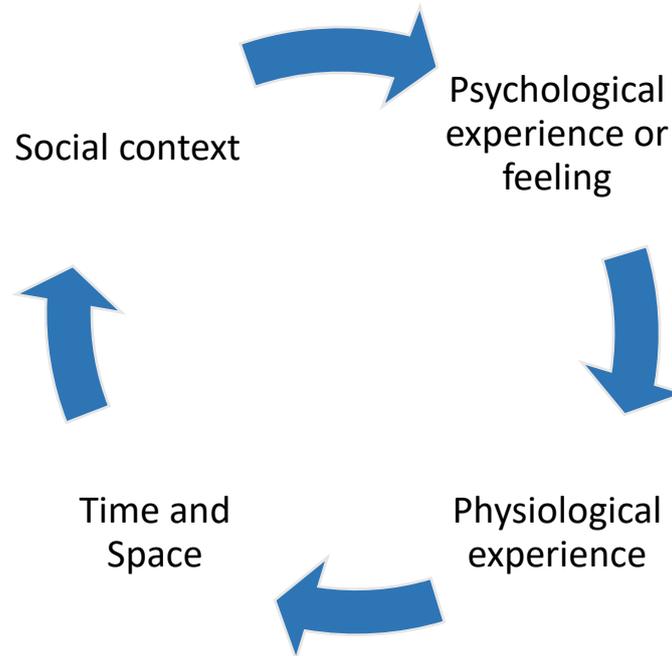


Figure (4): Additional dimension of body reflexive practices adapted by Wellard (2013).

The acknowledgement of the spatial and temporal factors within the circuit allows for a greater understanding of how pleasure isn't an insignificant or 'one off' moment of self-gratification. Pleasure can be seen as a process in terms of how an experience can become pleasurable. Consequently, this circuit describes pleasure as a continually moving process, with the inclusion of anticipation, experience and reflection elements.

### 3.3 Applying the body reflexive circuit:

The different aspects of the circuit of body reflexive pleasures can be seen to shine through the experiences described by all of the women's experiences I have explored above. It also importantly shows that the pleasures and fun captured encompass a variety of sensualities and experiences with the body as demonstrated by Becky:

*'Probably erm, the variety of it I suppose because it's not just about sitting on a bike, it's about and you're kind of using your whole body if you know what I mean rather than. See spinning to me I just, I just like it, it's fun [...] I like the intensity of it, especially when we are climbing and stuff, I like, I like that coz you really feel like you're working*

*don't you. I like the hover, because I'm feeling like my back and my tummy you see so I think of that, and the jumps I'm thinking of my arms, so all the time I'm spinning I'm thinking 'oh what am I doing now!' - Becky.*

Not only do these experiences capture Merleau-Ponty's [1945] (1997) contact bodily intuition and maturity as I have described previously; it demonstrates that the experiences shouldn't be dismissed as just 'fun' (McNamee 2005, Bloodworth et al. 2012). With the addition of the sensory dimensions of bodies at work and play from a phenomenological angle, and with the inclusion of the body reflexive pleasures, this captures the range of versatile pleasures, such as Becky's description of calling spinning 'fun'. She then continues and elucidates what justifies 'fun' for her, with the explanation of it being fun due to the way her body moves and feels whilst she is exercising.

A valuable note to make here is that all of the experiences that have been discussed within this chapter have occurred within a different social context, time and space. The descriptions of the embodied experiences relate to specific activities within the gym. These activities and the specific skills learnt are not only performative (Butler, 1999), but they also demonstrate a range of physical and emotional sensations that are interwoven with the individual body as well the social context, and time and space in which the experiences occur. The contact between the brain and the body appears extremely valuable in many of the experiences and how these are individually processed, thus, it could be considered here that the mind and body dualism is eliminated when pleasures are experienced within certain gym activities. The physiological, psychological and social aspects all entwine to create unique embodied pleasures and can be attributed within the body reflexive circuit. Penny's psychological experience of telling herself she can't go on for the 45 minute spin class; Charlie's physiological experience of the air getting through her lungs as she does a CrossFit session, and furthermore the numerous 'aches' and 'burns' felt whilst being exhausted whilst succumbing to a workout.

The additional temporal and spatial dimensions clearly allies with feminist phenomenology due to its interest in time and space. The feminist phenomenology approach analyses the structural, cultural and historically located nature of gendered embodiment, and address the social structural influences surrounding embodiment (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Gradually as a result of acquiring the experiences in different spaces and times, the learning

process of being aware of one's own 'embodiedness' can be aligned with a heightened body sensitivity. The exercises each woman encountered shifted gradually from being practised in consciousness, to becoming an exercise in the body; hence it is now understandable why certain women struggled to put their experiences into words.

The physical experiences encountered by these women can also be converted to symbolic interpretation. Linguistically all of the women have tried to describe something they have learned to like a lot, thus, they dress the experience in language and thereby recreate the individual and unique experiences into collective social ones. This also shows that bodily sensations and pleasures of these women are culture bound, and negotiated experiences are evident through these extracts.

#### **4. Summary:**

This chapter explored women's embodied pleasurable experiences within the gym. Utilising feminist phenomenology enabled the exploration into the sensuousness of the pain and pleasures experienced through the lived, moving body within a dynamic physical culture.

In particular, the experiences described within this chapter also highlight a variety of important factors, such as the sensual feelings of the body whilst working out in a particular time and space. The embodied feeling of pleasure, and the sense of achievement from having a 'proper' workout, and finally, the embodied pleasures of pain experienced during and after exercising and how this is distinguished. These factors support the complex descriptions of 'fun' detailed by Wellard (2013). The sensual feelings experienced in the different spaces of fitness cultures, interestingly played a significant role in the continued participation of why the women wanted to return to the gym and work out again. Attributes such as the corporeality of sweating and feeling exhausted, were all symbolised as pleasurable. The women's embodied accounts conventional descriptions of a pain and pleasure binary, as many of the women not only neglected to state this was actually really painful or 'not fun', rather they described these pains and pleasures of working out as enjoyable and a common experience that was an essential aspect of their participation. Finally, the embodied experiences incorporated a multitude of social, psychological and physiological components aligned with the body reflexive pleasure circuit to further enhance the embodied approach in this thesis.

The different aspects of the circuit of body reflexive pleasures can be seen to shine through the descriptions of all the women's experiences explored above. It also importantly shows that the way pleasure and fun was interpreted encompasses a variety of sensualities and experiences relating the body. With the addition of the sensory dimensions of bodies at work and play from a feminist phenomenological angle, and with the inclusion of the body reflexive pleasures, this unravels the range of versatile pleasures, such as when Becky called spinning 'fun' but then went on to explain what actually justifies 'fun' for her. In this case her explanation of fun related to the way her body moved and how it felt whilst she was exercising.

An important point made in this chapter is that all of the experiences discussed within this chapter have occurred within a different social context, time and space. The descriptions of the embodied experiences relate to specific activities within the gym. These activities and the specific skills learnt are not only performative (Butler, 1990), but they also demonstrate a range of physical and emotional sensations that are interwoven with the individual body as well the social context, and time and space in which the experiences occur, demonstrating the usefulness of employing a feminist phenomenology framework; in conjunction with this, the use of traditional ethnographic techniques (such as the interview data) have further demonstrated the importance of this approach to fully appreciate and illuminate the lived corporeal experiences of pleasure and pain in the gym. The following chapter continues to explore the embodied experiences that occur within differing gym spaces, particularly in relation to how certain stares and gazes are interpreted within the gym environment. Chapter 8 additionally analyses how the gym can be acknowledged as a sexually objectifying environment.

## ***Chapter Eight***

### **Embodying different gazes and stares within the gym**

The previous chapter highlighted the physical aspects of the women in the gym, explored the embodied pleasures experienced whilst working out in alternative gym spaces, and the euphoric feelings recognised by the exercising body. Within chapter seven, I also highlighted how unique embodied experiences are created through not only physiological, psychological and social aspects, but how these are also entwined through spatial and temporal aspects, which have varying degrees upon experiences within the gym. With the effect of space and time in mind, I reflected to my initial experiences and narratives elucidated within chapter one surrounding the process of myself entering and working in the gym environment and how overtime I understood and learnt to interpret the different looks I encountered by specifically the men who also worked out in the different gym spaces. I also analysed how these made me feel and what they potentially meant, suggesting that within specific gym spaces these looks can be interpreted and embodied differently depending upon the space and time of the experience. However, as noted, the spaces were also important to acknowledge and address how other women embody aspects of looking and observing.

This chapter consequently endeavours to examine further the women's experiences of the gaze in order to reveal in more depth, the varying ways that they engage with their bodies (or learn) ways to enjoy participation and interact within the gym culture. These are often presented in forms that are interpreted insufficiently through simplistic narration, which suggests 'weight loss' or body image as sole motivations (McDonald and Thompson, 1992). Further analysis and discussion is provided on how the gym can be identified as a sexually objectifying environment, and how women make sense and interpret specific 'gazes' encountered within the gym culture.

Women interviewees described how their freedom to use the space of the gym was restricted by the behaviour of male gym members (explored further on within this thesis). Women of all ages in particular recounted being subject to the normalisation of male judgement from gazes within the context of heteronormativity, this disciplinary effect

consequently causes them to self-regulate their bodies and use of space (Foucault, 1977; Bartky, 1990; Johnston, 1996).

### **1. Introducing 'the gaze':**

To date, the focus of feminist research surrounding men looking at women, with the analysis of how women interpret looks between women, remains partial and scattered. Evidence suggests that looking contributes to a critical role in the formation of female subjectivity, as being looked at constructs a 'heightened sense of self-awareness' that is contextualised within gender relations in which the looking exists (Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz, 2015). Feminist and gaze researchers have conducted ongoing discussions relating to the issues surrounding gazes and its impact on female experience (Haelyon and Levy, 2012). According to the Gaze Theory as described by Mulvey; women have the 'to-be-looked-atness' characteristic. The gaze is directed at the female body, commonly by a male and it actively projects the man's fantasy upon the women's body. Within this relationship, women are both an object to be gazed at and a showpiece to be displayed. The 'gaze' can be defined as 'the act of observation on the one hand and internalisation on the other' (Foucault, 1996, p. 232). The 'male gaze' is frequently used among feminists who argue that the role of a female is purely for the sexual objectification of a male spectator (Szymanski, 2011). For Mulvey (1975), gazes can be determined as rational, voyeuristic, sadistic, controlling and controlled. The application of Mulvey's work to the current context of gyms becomes possible due to the influence of gazes in our everyday lives. Within gyms, the gaze has been studied in a variety of ways, for example; how female bodybuilders become erotically constructed by the gaze (Wood, 2004), the embodiment of 'gym bodies' that are put on display in gay spaces in attempt to attract the male gaze (Duggan and McCreary 2004; Yellan and Tiggeman, 2003); and the application of beauty and bodywork encouraged through hyper feminine forms of consumption (McRobbie, 2008). Despite this, it can be argued that there is a relative lack of 'fleshy' perspectives on the body, particularly in relation to how everyday women who immerse themselves in fitness cultures embody the gaze.

Berger (1972, p. 47), suggests that 'men act while women appear' and women internalise a surveyor concept which brings them to a point of surveying themselves on their own. Women for a long time have had to deal with the long predicament of thinking about themselves as objects to be viewed, judged and interpreted, like works of art; Berger suggests

women are born within a narrow space containing the male gaze that allows them to appear as only partial (Berger, 1972). It has been suggested that women are taught that their bodies are always visible and available for judgement by an unknown male watcher and this surveillance is a reflection of sexist social power structures which aim to control and subordinate women (Bartky, 1988; Spitzack, 1990; McKinley, 2011). An adaptation of the gaze theory suggests that there are distinctions between overarching and structuring powers of the gaze, due to such distinguishes, the gaze can be considered as not only an individualised possession, but something deeply rooted within symbolic and patriarchal structures (Silverman, 1992).

## **2. Revealing clothing and presentation of the body:**

Young's (2005) research surrounding a feminist phenomenological approach to embodiment claims that the female body is not experienced as a straightforward communication with the active self; rather it is also experienced as an object. Young suggests that particular manners of behaviour and movement are associated with women. These different approaches in relation to sport, are attributed firstly to the social spaces which women learn to conform themselves, the restriction of space, and acting repeatedly in less assertive and aggressive ways than men. Secondly, Young notes that women are encouraged to see themselves through the gaze of others including the 'male gaze', as previously described by Mulvey (1975), whereby women become more aware of themselves as objects of the scrutiny of others (Woodward, 2008).

*'When I first started coming to the gym, I wore makeup because I didn't like to think people would look at me and I had no makeup on and my hair was a mess. But as times gone on, I've realised I really don't care anymore so now I come down with no makeup on. But I have noticed other girls come down with makeup on, hair all done, hair extensions in, tiny little crop tops and shorts. I don't know if they do it hoping that men will look at them while they're working out. Whereas it's got to the point where I don't care, I've come down because I want to get my body how I want it, so I don't really care about what my appearance is at that time, as long as I look good on a night out!'*  
– Georgina.

Georgina's description of when she first entered the gym and started working out suitably attributes towards the self-objectification theory. As discussed in chapter six, this theory provides a useful framework for understanding the women's experiences within sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body (Fredericks and Robertson, 1997). This theory postulates that many women are objectified and treated as objects to be valued and used by others. It occurs when the body, or parts of it, are singled out and separated from the women as a person, and she is viewed predominantly as the physical object of male sexual desire (Bartky, 1990). In Georgina's description, she initially describes how she applied makeup and made her hair presentable before she worked out, her reasons for this made her feel more confident as she knew at the gym her appearance would be the initial object of viewing. Georgina has not only self-objectified, but she continues to also objectify other women who work out too, by stating that she assumes those who wear a crop top and shorts maybe perceived within the gym environment as being singled out for male sexual desire. As Bartky (1998) suggests, bodily disciplines do not stop with the control of the female flesh; the texture and appearance of the skin also desires thorough attention. 'A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless and smooth; ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought' (Bartky, 1998, p. 68).

*'in my eyes if you come in, in a sports bra, be prepared to be perved on, or put clothes on, so I don't have no sympathy for it [...] they're showing off and they've all for their crop tops on with their tits hanging out. See you don't see like all the ones in crop tops and like short shorts and things like that. They're the ones that all show off, whereas you've got all the other people that will have their bodies covered coz they're embarrassed, and they just wanna get on and train, and then yeah'- Hayley.*

Within this extract, Hayley recognises the naked, or scantily clad female body as always being in danger, or being re-appropriated by dominant masculine discourse, that is, 'assimilated by a male audience, to those images she is seeking to undermine' (Sander, 1989, p. 118). It is a struggle to reclaim the stronger meanings of bodywork and the body, this underlies the determined efforts of women in the gym to police themselves, or at least distance themselves from a predatory gaze (Miller and Penz, 1991). According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) self-objectification can increase anxiety within women surrounding their physical appearance (e.g., the fear of how and when the body will be viewed or evaluated). It

can also reduce peak motivational states or flow and diminish the awareness of internal bodily sensations (e.g., stomach contractions, sexual arousal and hunger). Body shame may increase (e.g., emotions that result from comparing oneself against cultural standards and not reaching these) and an increased anxiety about physical safety (e.g., rape fears), can lead to eating disorders, depression and sexual dysfunction. Not only does Georgina's experience suggest that her anxiety initially increased when she came to the gym and had to wear makeup.

*'I always wear makeup wherever I go because it's like putting on my knickers, it's me. I wouldn't go out coz I wouldn't feel confident, erm, coz I think I'd look horrible and people, I just wanna feel confident, I just, I'm so used to wearing makeup, it wouldn't feel right to go out without it on' – Victoria.*

Similar to Georgina, Victoria's self-objectification and anxiety vastly increases when she compares herself to the cultural standards of beauty on women. Beauty and fashion practises are regarded as indulging and playful; however, they can also produce pressures to conform to certain norms, which therefore makes them a form of arduous work. Bartky (1988, p. 71) suggests that 'a woman's face must be made-up, that is to say, made-over, and so must her body; she is ten pounds overweight; her lips must be made more kissable, her complexion dewier, her eyes more mysterious. The 'art' of makeup is the art of disguise, but this presupposes that a woman's face, unpainted, is defective'. The emphasis of shame has also been associated with this view of the body being deficient. The likelihood of achieving this perfect body and the accompanying requirements to engage within these practices, even as concerns surrounding women's bodies are trivialised, contribute to the sense of shame women bare in relation to their bodies (McKinley, 2011).

Victoria suggests she will look 'horrible' and unconfident without makeup on, even whilst she is working out at the gym. Wolf (2004) proposes that women who join the 'cult of beauty' direct their consciousness to new body practises, which indicates an internalisation of a surveyor discourse, suggesting that the female gaze is 'subordinate' and the male gaze is 'superior.' Victoria displays this by constantly assessing her body and wearing makeup in order for her to believe that the gaze from others would not be similar to her own negative views and reflections she has imposed on herself. She also demonstrates she is conscious of her own body practises by suggesting that for her, the routine of wearing and applying makeup is the same as putting her knickers on. In accordance to the self-objectification

theory, Victoria views her body from a third person perspective instead of a first-person perspective in order to avoid judgments that may be negative. This objectification also moulds the belief about women needing to be attractive in order for acceptance to occur (Frederickson and Roberts, 1997).

### **3. Women looking at women:**

An interesting topic that arose during interviewing the women in this research was the notion of being gazed and stared at by other women who were working out within the gym environment. A relatively neglected aspect of female subject formation is the gazing of women between women. The male gaze theory did not originally theorise a female viewer, but consequently analysts did, and therefore it was largely accepted that there was no female gaze within patriarchal structures (Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz, 2015). Accordingly, women are usually theorised as overly identifying with a female character or taking up the male gaze within a masquerade form (de Laurentis, 1984; Stacey, 1994; Tseelon and Kaiser, 1992; Doane, 1982). Therefore, the male gaze theory cannot be theorised as a homosocial gaze between women, without women understanding themselves as primarily the object of male desire, this male desire is evident within the reflection below:

*‘probably as a girl, probably look at her, looking about her features, and what’s good and what I’m jealous of, or what, that sort of thing. Whereas the men are looking at her thinking, well that’s a bit of meat, I wanna shag it (laughs), and in a man’s gym, it’s quite a man’s gym’ – Lily.*

Due to the theoretical discussion of the gaze more commonly considered in terms of a male gazing upon a female body, this propels readers into a heterosexual position as a non-heterosexual desire, which is normally dismissed. Women as a subject of desire and/ or through an erotic gaze is rarely seen in relation to other women (Kolehmainen, 2010). These theories remain largely ‘male-centric’, with a male usually doing the looking. In comparison to this, Skeggs (2001) considers a framework that captivates female looking through the concept of misrecognition, which is ‘to be denied the status of full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life’ (Fraser, 1995, p. 280). Skeggs (2001) argues that the meaning and value of a women’s appearance is precarious and the achievement of a successful feminine appearance is dependent upon being legitimised (or

recognised) by others. Therefore, women look and evaluate each other, with a dialogical process occurring where women communicate the symbolic value of their appearance and validate their ability to be recognised as women, as demonstrated within Lily's experience above. Skeggs' (2001) highlights the importance of the 'visual economy' of looks through her work, (p. 300) and how the subjectivity of women is predicated on to others, including other women. Becky demonstrates in her reflection how she had to legitimise her gaze through the dialogical process whilst being caught looking at another woman in the gym:

*Amy: 'so you've previously said that if a woman was just staring at you, you would find that intimidating too?'*

*Becky: 'yeah I think so, definitely, because, because I've seen myself do it and it's not only that I'm just thinking, sometimes it could be 'oh I like their trainers' or I like. But women could perceive that as you looking them up and down and you're not sometimes, and sometimes I've even said to people 'oh I really like your bag! Because I'm thinking oh maybe I've looked at them too, but um, sometimes women can be a bit paranoid as well, thinking oh a woman is looking at them up and down and it's not they are actually liking what they are wearing.'*

During this encounter, Becky was guided in the process of analysing bodies, and she found through this her perceptual abilities. Becky developed a new kind of critical gaze and distanced bodily perspective (gaze) she had learnt to objectify herself as well as others. This gaze develops clearly during her meeting with other woman she has found herself gazing at. Using this critical gaze, Becky eyes over her own body and 'interrogates' bodies within the environment she is in, this can suddenly be seen to be scanned through a new perceptual filter (Merleau-Ponty, [1945], 1997; Andreasson, 2014). Johansson (1997, p. 83) refers to a 'logic of discontent', and suggests that a continuous reflection on the efforts needed to achieve certain ideals, are often lead to an overly critical attitude towards the body. According to Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz, (2015), women look at others in judgemental ways that assess and compare their appearance; also termed as a 'postfeminist gaze'. This is consumption orientated, where women evaluate and reproduce hyper-feminine femininity according to their ability. Such looks are normative and almost inescapable, Joanna and Lily's reflection below problematize women's judgemental looking:

*'Erm, I don't think men look down on you, they just, I dunno, I don't really notice anything from men just the girls, they just sit there and you just, you can hear them laughing and you think they are obviously laughing about me, so you turn around and they're just ooo' –Joanna.*

*'women think differently to men, women, from my own experience, that's why I found it really hard at the beginning [starting the gym], coz I was so bothered. Like this girls doing better than me, and I couldn't keep up with her like, it's hard, mentally it's hard when you first start, coz women are more emotional, emotionally attached to things. Erm, men don't they just go train, go home, if it shit, its shit, if it's not, it's not. Whereas we beat ourselves up about it for ages [...] I think they think comments are made, but I don't think, unless a guy is chatting up a woman; I don't think comments are made to them. And girls are bitchy so they do it behind their backs [...], unless it's really bitchy and they're making it obvious or they don't like each other or, something like that' – Lily.*

Joanna and Lily both describe the deeply relational, evaluative dynamic of looking, and account this as a women's desire to compare and judge the appearance of other women. They both foreground 'women looking rather than men' and construct this as problematic by highlighting the ubiquity of judgmental looks coming from women, but rather men. Joanna articulates a preference for a man looking at her, as she perceives this a being less judgemental, and accounts for her understanding of women's judgemental looking in terms of her own behaviour. Interestingly, Lily's experience is similar to Joanna's in that she initially found it hard going to the gym, as she was aware of her performance being judged compared to other women, this similarly aligns with Butler's (1990) notion of performativity causing 'gender trouble'. She also explains that she feels women are more 'emotionally attached to things', reinforcing the stereotypical assumption that women are more emotional than men, this view is pervasive across several different cultures (Timmers, Fischer, and Manstead, 2003). This gender-emotion stereotype not only matters surrounding how an individual thinks about themselves and others, but is also deeply implicated in how gender itself is understood (Shields, 2013).

Brody and Hall (2008) additionally suggest that stereotypes are also emotion-specific, in that emotions such as happiness, embarrassment, guilt, shame and fear occur more in

women, and anger, pride and contempt occur more in men. Shields (2013) mentions that 'masculine' emotions are described as a passionate force to strive for achievement and domination, whereas 'feminine' emotions are portrayed as comparatively ineffectual emotionality, and a by-product of female reproduction and an evolutionary need to attract males. These stereotypes are implicitly reinforced by Lily's comments that men 'just go home if it's shit' and women 'are emotionally attached to things and beat themselves up about it for ages'. Shields (2013) also notes that culturally situated beliefs about emotion encompass accepted insights into the value of emotion, the beliefs about emotion and the body and these expectations are developed surrounding when, where and how emotions should occur, as well as the significance of the emotion. Lily attaches these emotions and demonstrates how the heightened gazes she determines in the gym, particularly by women in this instance, may potentially create the stereotypical emotions that women are portrayed to have due to self-objectifying and worrying about the representation of their bodies.

### **3.1 The passing of gazes:**

As Wellard (2009) notes, the historical legacy of gym cultures and sports has remained as a male preserve. Although the gym within this research is open to both sexes, there is evidence still of gender divisions. Due to this, there continues to be territorial gendered spaces as discussed within chapter 2. The gym as a semi-private space is subject to different territorialising and de-territorialising processes, whereby control over this is fixed, challenged, claimed, privatised and forfeited (Duncan, 1996). As displayed in figure (3), many women have to pass through the main gym or what could be called the 'male territory' (Johansson, 1996) in order to arrive at the spin room and other classes within the gym. Whilst many women walked through this 'male space', they were bombarded with gazes from the men, this led to different reactions from the women:

*'I come in here with my head up like yeah, does anyone wanna take me on! So I come in glaring at everyone then everyone says how aggressive I look then I think, that's because of how it feels like when you enter a weights room. Like the first time I came in with [her friend] she said I'll meet you in reception as I had described where it was, and then I said I'll take you to the spin room. She, I hadn't told her we walk through the weights room bit and she went (freezes body) so she immediately froze and I was like shit sorry I didn't tell you did I. I didn't warn you, but it's coz men, they come in but*

*they actually do any exercise sometimes coz a lot of the time they are just pruning themselves, strutting about showing their biceps and they are so much more vein than women are I find!* – Alex.

It is evident within this reflection that Alex is aware of the gendered spaces that are present in the gym. She has illuminated the tensions that she is aware of whilst walking through the ‘male space’ and how although she is not personally intimidated or put off from entering, her friend needed to be made aware of this beforehand so she would be comfortable walking through to the spin room. Before the spinning room had moved location within the gym premises, the initial room was very near to reception and did not require individuals to walk through the main gym in order to get to their destination, rather they were able to ‘sneak in’ and participate in a class, this was originally located where the ‘resistance machines for legs’ area is in figure (3). Penny and Alex highlight the change in their feelings whilst initially having to walk through this culture before participating within a spin class:

*‘it was nice, because you didn’t have to walk past any of the men doing the weights [...] they look down on women so we’d just come in this room you could quickly sneak in and not have to face any of that [...] I was conscious of it, erm, I think coz I’ve got quite a erm, a bold personality it didn’t bother me that much, but you would see like the men would turn and look at you.’* – Penny.

*‘it didn’t sort of put me off, you sort of have a look don’t you and you see all the beefcakes there and all the men but I just think you know they are all alright, I don’t easily get intimidated by people’* – Alice.

The experiences above highlight their awareness of the gendered space that is present within the gym. They also express how they do not feel intimidated or necessarily conscious of using this space, but attribute this to being confident or having a ‘bold personality,’ similarly aligned with the display of particularly ‘masculine’ emotions (Shields, 2013). In these particular cases, although the men remained silent, the situation could still be understood in terms of a more general gender order. Even within different contexts that are similar in time and place ‘masculinity differs and changes’ Segal (1993). However, men’s relative authority, power and status compared to women is equally clear and seems to stay the same whatever

the masculine diversity. Men are able to change in some respects without apparently undermining the power relations of gender.

The male gaze expresses desire to dominate, the different strategies by the women may be interpreted as a resistance against the men attempting to subordinate them. This aligns with the suggestion that space is subject to different territorialising and de-territorialising processes (Duncan, 1996). These spaces may socially progress in the result of a safe base being provided (a site of resistance), where previously disempowered groups may become empowered. The space where the individuals transition through the main gym into the spin room can ultimately be acknowledged as a safe base, or a site of resistance, due to walking through the male territory and feeling empowered by doing so. The women are aware of the presence of the male gaze, as demonstrated in Penny's comment 'they look down on women,' this almost assumes that the gym culture is a space for men and therefore women are inferior whilst in it. This is simply one example of a number of situations where gender identities are formed throughout the process of domination, subordination and resistance (Johansson, 1996).

### **3.2 Reflective gazes:**

Fitness centres or health clubs are laid out as a large field of visibility, multiple others can observe anything that an individual is doing, these observers are mostly fellow exercisers (Markula and Pringle, 2006). An individual never knows who is observing or what they are observing, but they are definitely exposed to constant, yet visible observations. The inclusion of mirrors typically found adds a further opportunity to gaze and to be gazed upon by others. Within men's weight training, the role of mirrors can be described by Aycock (1992, p. 349) as 'The arrangement of machines, weights, and mirrors demands a supervision of oneself, and that of others, as actions are monitored continuously by users. Persons are not only the objects of gaze, but the subjects of incessant surveillance that constitutes the body as a figure of discipline.' This surveillance can result in rather unusual situations where 'one must see oneself in the mirrors, see others looking at oneself, and not see others who are themselves not being seen; all this while constantly appraising performances even to the extent of imitating the persons who are presumptively invisible.' (Aycock, 1992, p. 354).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that women within the gym can distinguish two alternative ways of looking at their body as a landscape—where the body is realised through

a 'step-by-step achievement as the accomplishment of an undertaking' (Miller and Penz, 1991, p. 156). A contemplative gaze views the terrain as a scenery, or the object of beauty. The other, the privileged one, is a gaze of rationality, which views the terrain as an opportunity for personal achievement and work, the role of mirrors within the gym has invariably brought forth the distinction between these two gazes (Miller and Penz, 1991). The rational gaze is encouraged by bringing the body as a worksite into view and enables the other to be suppressed, such as inappropriate gazes (sadistic, erotic, vain, or curious) (Mulvey, 1975; Markula, 2006). Unlike the open spaces within the weight training area, fitness studios are usually confined from the larger gym floor. It can also be suggested that within the aerobics room (or the spin room in this case) participants exercise effectively alone within a group (Markula, 2006, p. 75). This semi-private room is often seen as a room for individual endeavours and improvement of the self to occur (Markula and Pringle, 2006). It could therefore be argued that within this semi private space, group exercise classes are exposed to a lesser degree of inspecting gazes from other gym users. As displayed within Figure (3) this particular gym where some of the women workout, has glass windows overlooking the main corridor where other gym users can observe. The windows do not have privacy screens or blinds to limit outsiders from seeing in, therefore regardless of the promise of invisibility, the spinners are unveiled to a further gaze from the other exercisers. They are not only from outsiders looking in, but they are also visible from the reflection that is given from the windows to the internal spin room.

Penny a frequent spinner, describes how she felt when the spin room changed location within the gym, and how the spin bikes were once facing the mirrors instead of being on the side of the wall whilst she exercised:

*'There wasn't like the horrible lighting, the windows, there wasn't the big mirrors, don't like to look at yourself. I don't look at the mirrors so, I'm glad we are not facing them anymore! At one time we were which I don't think anyone liked that, erm, except maybe the person that put it that way, erm but no one else did. I don't think anyone wants to be facing a huge set of mirrors ... but yeah this room [old spin room] was a lot more cosy and erm, private I suppose and like you didn't have the open windows' – Penny.*

During this extract, Penny describes how she and the other spinners hated seeing their own reflection during the spin class. This demonstrates a subtle 'inter-corporeality', where 'the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies' (Weiss, 1999, p. 5). Inter-corporeality at the same time foregrounds the social nature of the body, and the bodily nature of social relationships. It also emphasizes the social interactions surrounding the construction of bodily behaviours. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests, through bodies we are able to extend and share our 'bodily experiences'. When the spinning bikes had moved to face the mirrors, many expressed their distain towards seeing themselves and others work out. This shows that inter-corporeality here is contained within a perception-loop between self and other; whereby other people's actions prompt the same actions within oneself (i.e., the disgust of facing the mirrors, as demonstrated within Penny's reflection). It also shows that conversely, the self's action prompts the same action, or its possibility, in another's body (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Tanaka, 2015).

Penny's reflection also similarly aligns with Rooney's (2002) description of 'peculiar intimacies'. Within a semi-private space (such as the spin room in this instance) individuals have a shared intimacy different from that of a lover or sibling. The spin room is an open, or a 'public space' where strangers inevitably interact, but the spin room is also exclusive with obvious constraints to those who enter. Additionally, due to the timing and schedule of classes, it is a constrained environment for protocols and timings for the spinners to adhere. Yet the commonality of the spinners who share this space is at best partial due to the semi-private nature, thus creating a 'peculiar intimacy'.

During the spin sessions, each exerciser is exposed to the controlling gaze of his/her fellow exercisers as well as their own gaze reflected from the windows, along with the mirrors that are situated on one wall to the side of them. In a similar way to weight training sessions, the mirrors and windows in the spin room facilitates the unidentifiable gaze that at the same time, possesses every exerciser. Penny expresses her distain for the heightened gaze which is enhanced dramatically by facing the mirrors, but also suggests that after this initial embodied experience many people felt similar to her. Penny demonstrates this awareness through her own inter-corporeality by recognising the disgust from the other spinners whilst they face the mirrors, without this even being verbalised. Consequently, the spin bikes were changed and the mirrors remained to the side, somewhat suppressing the mirrored gazes. In the presence

of a mirror, there is no need for external, outside supervision. Being subjected to such visibility whilst engaging within spinning means that the exercisers have cast the ever-seeing controlling eye upon themselves. They therefore take on the role of both supervising invisibly outside and internally supervising, similar to the concept of 'panopticism,' whereby power is exercised within closed spaces (Foucault, 1980; 1991)

### **3.3 Acknowledging and interpreting different 'stares':**

Female bodybuilders emphasise the contradictory demands of contemporary femininity. Achieving a muscular physique yet remaining feminine clearly displays a double bind, and this demands for a high level of body maintenance. The systems of surveillance in the gym (such as the gaze, reflections from mirrors, and comments) provides an atmosphere which (self) regulates women and their forms of femininity. Powerful panoptic technologies produce self-monitored 'docile' bodies (Foucault, 1976, p. 135). Feminist theorists have argued that a disciplinary gaze signatures the female body as deficient, and serves to control the behaviour of women (Bartky, 1988; Spitzack, 1990). The women within this research actively seek and are constituted by bio power and discourses that are related to the sexed spaces of the gym. As a female who lifts heavy weights, Charlie uses power through the medium of her body, but certain contradictions emerge. Females who lift heavy weights could be seen as possessing docile feminine bodies, but at the same time, they could also be read as having a transgressive body (Johnston, 1996). Charlie can be partly understood within each regime, she reinforces this double bind where her female body, even if admired, always is subjected to a voyeuristic 'gaze' where the gaze is controlling and oppressive:

*'In here you kind of get left alone a little bit more, especially being a girl lifting the heavier weights, men don't tend to, they just stay away [...] there is definitely stares and you do like. The guys I've known since being in here will like come over and say oh well done and you'll just get the other guys that just kind of look and stare, which if I was a bit younger it would have bothered me but, not really bothered anymore, just kind of get on with it' – Charlie.*

Charlie exemplifies the ambiguity of being a woman who lifts heavy weights. The debate of feminine/masculine weakness and muscle is consistently play out, through and on her corporeality. What's interesting here is that Charlie acknowledges the different stares

given to her by the men and describes what they mean to her and how she feels receiving them. She explains that the men she has known for years will gaze or stare upon her lifting weights with a somewhat appreciative gaze and because she is familiar with knowing them, this is accepted. The men within the gym who do not know her seem to look at Charlie with a somewhat oppressive gaze and this is seen as threatening. The look of appreciation can also be seen within Katie's experience of being a woman and squatting a heavy weight:

*'I did 120kg squat, er and I was, there was literally a few guys watching as well and they was like wow good on you!' – Katie.*

Similarly, Alex also acknowledges that a stare or gaze given by a man whom she has a rapport with, will be interpreted differently than a gaze from a stranger:

*'you notice times when they are looking at your arse or something, so I just stare back, it's that sort of look (pfft, raises eyebrow) yeah come on then, haha they normally back off [...] It's knowing the person but when it's a stranger you definitely have to be very assertive so they know where they stand' – Alex.*

It could be suggested that Charlie's continuous lifting of heavy weights, and Alex W's challenging of the gaze resists a compliance that women face to produce a docile body. According to Foucault (1978) where there is power, there is resistance. The resistance displayed by Alex W and Charlie is important because it challenges the construction that women are passive, and elucidates the nature of power structures (Foucault, 1982), it is also compelling for a productive resistance to occur (Sawicki, 1988). They are aware of particular gazes surrounding them and have determined what they mean, but they have also challenged distinctions of their gender by not conforming to overly supervising their bodies and reducing their actions within the gym to comply with the different gazes. This experience can also relate to my own demonstrated in chapter four whilst I explore the gym spaces – whilst working as an employee in the gym I would lift heavy weights and realise that this was an unexpected from the male members of the gym. The looks and stares I acknowledged were that of approval. Alternatively, Georgina demonstrates in her reflection the obvious discourses attached to the sexed spaces within the gym, and the emphasis on her corporeality of retaining her femininity by staying in a particular gendered space (specifically the cardiovascular area) of the gym:

Georgina: *'I remember the first time I walked in the weights room I realised actually how many more men were here than when I used to go to the sports centre.'*

Amy: *'How did you feel about that?'*

Georgina: *'I wasn't too bad, because the men are obviously on the other side of the gym, if the weights were mixed in amongst the gym equipment I don't think I would have liked it.'*

Amy: *'mm so you think there is quite a separation between the use of space in the gym?'*

Georgina: *'Yeah even now if I wanted to use weights I have to look over at how many people are there before I go over. Because I don't like going over there with the men [...] I get a bit funny with the weights because I always think like. I'm trying to lift a weight and I'm only lifting like 10kgs, and then I look at the blokes who are lifting like 50 and they sort of look and sort of make like a little bit of a giggle. It might not be anything towards me, but it feels like they are laughing at me because I'm not lifting a heavy weight.'*

Georgina's experience of entering the weights area and feeling conscious of only being able to lift a lighter weight compared to a man, can be attributed towards the suggestion that women who seek muscular strength within the weights room, may find their bodily agency limited, not by biology, but the ideologies which are emphasised by femininity (Dworkin, 2001). Georgina has negotiated uniquely the 'glass ceiling' due to avoiding, adjusting or holding back on her weight workouts, by checking firstly whether men are in the area before she attempts to lift a weight. Georgina suggests that the gazes encountered from the men in the weights area are not only surrounding her corporeality as a woman and her femininity, but they are also gazing upon her performativity in the weights area because she is a woman. Charlie and Katie's performance of lifting weights has disrupted the norm where women are seen as passive and weak in relation to men, therefore causing 'gender trouble' (Dimen, 2003; Butler, 1990). The acts are how social agents constitute social reality in this case, lifting weights can be seen as a masculine cultural prescription on sex. Georgina enacts

sex through her body but she has complied with the heterosexual norms surrounding being a woman and lifting weights; her performativity due to being a woman lifting small weights is therefore analysed.

According to Garland-Thomson (2009) staring is a dismemberment that reveals a hidden but seemingly obvious gesture. It is proposed that staring is 'an intense visual exchange that makes meaning' (p. 9). It is more than looking, and is distinctive from the gaze, defined as an oppressive act of disciplinary looking which subordinates its victim. There are several variations of intense looking which starers can be engaged in for example; blank stares, have been suggested as an empty stare which demands no response, initiates not interchange and produces no knowledge (Levin, 1988;1993). Baroque staring is a blatant announcement of being confounded or wonderstruck (Buci-Glucksmann, 1994). Engaged stares are looks that are enlivened with interest. Roche (2008) notes that engaged stares draw the viewer towards the object of stare, rather than fixating or repelling the starer. Finally, dominating stares are nonverbal behaviours that can be used to enforce social hierarchies and regulate access to resources. A stare can also communicate social status, conferring subordinations on a stare and domination on a starer. Staring as a manifestation of dominance often disguises aggression with a restraint that is enabled by a stare of a hierarchy, this is similarly attributed to the male gaze. Becky shares her experiences of how she interprets different stares within the gym, specifically if she catches a man looking at her:

*Becky: 'Really uncomfortable, that's intimidating, yeah definitely, because surely, erm, even a woman doing that to you would be intimidating, but it would be even more intimidating if a bloke did it. Because you'd be thinking 'what are they thinking' that would be my thing 'what are they thinking' [...] they could be thinking 'oh she's doing that wrong' oh you know, or erm, yeah I don't know, it would depend on the look of their stare, sometimes you can see by people's body language their stare. Do you know what I mean so, you could see if it was a disapproving stare, or if it was an inappropriate stare'*

*Amy: 'so what's an inappropriate stare?'*

*Becky: 'just erm, I think the body language would show an inappropriate stare if it was more towards looking at you, rather than looking at what you're doing. So but, with body language I think if you were doing something wrong or something there'd be like*

*'mmm' but I think there are, I think women have got a good um, instinct on stares, do you know what I mean, I do think women do have, yeah, they do have a good instinct on stares.'*

Interestingly within this reflection, Becky details how she recognises different stares that are constructed within the gym. The different variations of stares described previously can be attributed to her experience. Becky acknowledges that a dominating stare from a man is more intimidating to her, but on the other hand, she also doubts her interpretation of what a specific stare means by questioning two different types of 'looks', (specifically an inappropriate and disapproving) she encounters. Within this reflection, an engaged stare also emerges; Becky suggests that if the stare is not dominant, the man staring is drawn into her alternatively as an interesting object; this is through her performance within the gym. Similar to Charlie's reflection, this also suggests that certain stares within the gym can be considered either as appreciative, or oppressive. Gender trouble can also be identified through Katie's reflection as she suggests when a man looking at her, they are only viewing her performativity as a woman at the gym, this in turn makes her question whether she is conducting an exercise or movement properly (Butler, 1990):

*Katie: 'I now realise now, that blokes do watch women down here, they are probably sick of the sight of me so they don't worry about me, but certainly when anyone new comes they look and, that person's probably, where I train people, they are not aware there is blokes actually looking at them, erm, and I'm glad they are not aware they are, but that's human nature. I think in a place where you've got regulars, people notice a strange face as such, and they are going to sort of look and erm, so I just get on with whatever I've got to do now, I don't really take any notice if anyone is watching me or not to be honest, so yeah.'*

*Amy: 'did you initially?'*

*Katie: 'yeah very self-conscious, which only really put me off I think, but again it was partly, I wonder if I'm doing this properly.'*

Within Katie's experience, she acknowledges that a new female member or a 'strange face' will receive certain looks from the male members. Similar to Becky, a dominating stare

is seen to appear by the male gym members, but also in this situation, a possible baroque stare is acknowledged. The male members of the gym blatantly announce within their looks that they are confounded or wonderstruck when they see a new female member working out and also show engagement whilst looking at women when they enter the gym. This collision of interest and confoundment could possibly be acknowledged as an appreciative stare on a woman's performativity

#### **4. The sexually objectifying environment:**

Within the gym, many women also experienced immersed forms of sexual objectification. This occurs when women are part of situations, environments and subcultures where the sexual objectification is often encouraged and promoted. Research on immersed forms of sexual objectification is scant and little attention has been paid to increase the understanding of the specific environments where sexual objectification has been promoted or to understand women's experiences within these contexts. It is important to understand and identify the specific attributes within an environment that deepen and encourage sexual objectification. Therefore, a *sexually objectifying environment* is an important step to begin the understanding of immersed forms of sexual objectification, and how these differ from everyday forms of sexual objectification (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011).

Core criteria for sexually objectifying environments are asserted by Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011, p.20). It is important to acknowledge that these core criteria's do not stand alone, but rather interact with one another:

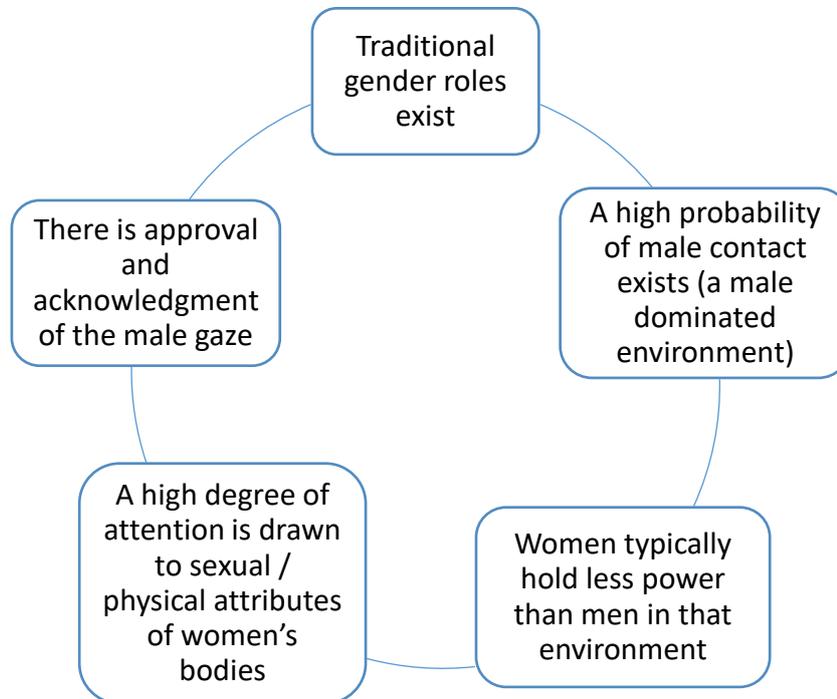


Figure (5): Core criterions of a sexually objectifying environment by Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011)

Skzymenski *et al.*, (2011) also identify supplementary factors in addition to the core criteria, these can include the presence of alcohol (or in this case, pre workout supplements at the gym), the regulated encouragement of sexualisation (e.g. flirting, smiling) and/ or the promotion of competition between women (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011, p.21).

#### 4.1 The core criterions of a sexually objectifying environment:

The first criteria of the sexually objectifying environment is the existence of traditional gender roles. Gender roles are a set of behaviours, self-concepts, personality attributes and expectations which are organised according to cultural definitions and prescriptions of femininity and masculinity (Guttek, 1985; Worell and Remer, 2003). Traditionally, men's gender roles are orientated towards competency, achievement and agency, and also include traits such as independence, aggression and objectivity (Bakan, 1966; Parsons and Bales, 1955). Many men are also encouraged to be powerful, controlling and dominant, and view women as sex objects and their property (Worell and Remer, 2003).

Alternatively, women traditionally tend to be expressively and relationally orientated, and include characteristics such as nurturance, emotionality, dependence, harmony and positivity (Bem, 1993). Women are also encouraged to be submissive to men and fulfil their needs and wants, seek protection from them, and accept responsibility controlling and limiting men's sexual behaviour (Worell and Remer, 2003).

Another contribution towards the sexually objectifying environment is the disproportionately greater number of men than women present. Male dominated environments have been shown to be more sexualised than female-dominated environments (Gutek, 1985).

The third criterion for a sexually objectifying environment is an extensive lack of power. Power within an environmental or organisational level has been conceptualised as an extension of societal power into the workplace (Ragins and Sundstorm, 1989). At a societal level, the mainstream culture is patriarchal, meaning that it is male-identified, male-dominated and male-centered (Johnson, 2005). Patriarchy as a system is inescapable, fixed, invisible and all-encompassing, therefore our experiences are powerfully constructed by this. Due to patriarchy, women are clearly in positions of less power, and if a woman attempts to effect some sort of change, others may react negatively, which serves to maintain the status quo (known as 'backlash'). Sexually objectifying environments are thus, where women occupy relatively low-status positions, and have a relatively small amount of influence and do not have access to particular organisational or environmental resources (Szymanski *et al.*, 2011).

The fourth circumstantial element is women's bodies being 'on display'. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) suggest in their proposal of the sexual objectification theory that women may wear baggy clothing as a strategy to avoid being sexually objectified as this conceals their physique. Loose fitting clothes obscure the body and enable the women to 'opt out of the objectification limelight'. Wearing tight and revealing clothing that shows off the body, serves to place the women squarely within the 'objectification limelight'. Environments where women are required to wear certain clothing which emphasises their body, are clearly sexually objectifying (Szymanski *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, wearing the tight clothing and constantly reviewing appearance may facilitate sexual objectification due to constant surveillance of the body in surrounding mirrors (Prichard and Tiggemann, 2005).

Similar to this, Prichard and Tiggemann (2005) found within their study of women in fitness centres, that those who wore tight and fitted exercise clothing placed greater emphasis on

their appearance attributes and engaged in more habitual body monitoring than those who wore looser clothing. Strelan, Mehaffey and Tiggeman (2003) also found that attention focused on women's bodies in fitness centres lead to women being more sexually objectified.

The final core criterion for a sexually objectifying environment is the approval and acknowledgement of the male gaze within that setting. Frederickson and Roberts (1977, p. 175) suggested that 'the most subtle and deniable way sexualised evaluation is enacted – and arguably the most ubiquitous – is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body'. Quinn (2002) also termed the sexual gaze as 'girl watching', a subtle yet specific form of sexual harassment which cannot be avoided and is not under the control of the woman. According to Quinn, this is a 'targeted tactic of power' where men use gaze to show their right to sexually and physically assess women. Two other expressions of objectifying gaze in the sexually objectifying environment may also include visual media displays (men looking at women in advertisements) and visual media portraying women's bodies and body parts. This is displayed throughout the gym environment; mainly within the gym reception, where a soft pornographic calendar advertising protein supplements can clearly be visualised above the till, and further advertisements containing soft pornographic images of women are further displayed to advertise protein and supplements (Frederickson and Roberts, 1970).

The situations may have not been explicitly body-focused (such as wearing tight clothing) to create negative affective experiences. Rather, self-objectification seemingly occurs in innocuous environments where the mere anticipation of being the object of an observer's gaze may trigger negative consequences which are associated with self-objectification. The anticipation of being gazed at, and the evaluation of this, is a defining feature of self-objectification and how it makes use of its effects. According to the objectification theory, internalising the sexually objectifying male gaze is a result from self-objectification (Calogero, 2004).

#### **4.2 Applying the core criterions: The gym as a sexually objectifying environment:**

There are a large number of environments that meet the previous criteria for a sexually objectifying environment; however to fully illustrate this phenomenon, attributing the core criterions to the gym environment provides a clear example of how an environment can be considered sexually objectifying. It is important to firstly note that although the gym can be considered as a form of 'doing gender' and often involves interactions which may lead

to objectification (Hall, 1996); not all gyms may be considered as an objectifying environment. Working out in the gym may involve little to no objectification depending on the context (in this case as I will explain, aspects such as time and space will heavily influence this). The gym used for this particular research clearly upholds the traditional gender roles as the majority of the gym members are mainly men. This is supported by Stephanie's initial comments of her entering the gym:

*'this particular gym ... erm it's pretty masculine, very masculine, I think it's more set up for the male side of things really'. – Stephanie.*

Not only does the gym environment enforce traditional gender roles and provide in some cases, less power to women. There is also a heavy emphasis on women's physical appearance. In this unique environment, women's bodies are openly viewed as objects. Georgina recognises this whilst she is working out in the main gym: *'it's just when I'm trying to do weights and you've got them looking, that aggravates me so I've come here to do what I want, I don't need you staring while I'm doing it, if they didn't do that I probably wouldn't mind'.*

The gym also provides an excellent example of an environment that acknowledges the approval of the male gaze, which is evident throughout the experiences shared and described in this chapter. The most obvious form of male gaze is the direct interpersonal staring or looking at the women in the gym. The acknowledgment of the male gaze is evident though Jenny's experience whilst she is in the main gym:

*Jenny: 'I know, I've seen guys look at women, and you know, check women out and I've actually gone up to them and gone, you know gone up to these guys and gone 'you wanna stick your eyeballs back in mate!'*

*Amy: 'have you! What did they do?!'*

*Jenny: 'they've just gone (wrrwrrr, pulls face, and shrugs shoulders) it's not very pleasant, you know. Erm that kind of thing because I just think well, there is a women who has finally made it into the weights area, you know'*

Additionally, the gym as explained previously, displays posters and calendars, a line may be crossed here if the men who stare at these images of women feel as though women

at the gym are simply coming to life, rather than real women. The gym also creates other products such as t-shirt and crop tops, the sole focus of this is to stare and evaluate women; consequently, this can also enable men to interpret women as solely objects of desire.

Applying the core criterions to the gym environment enables for a greater understanding as to how the gym can be considered as a sexually objectifying environment. Many aspects contribute towards the sexually objectifying environment, and these are illuminated greatly when analysing the gym environment. As previously suggested, not all gyms may be considered as sexually objectifying environments. Alternative emerging criterions may need to be addressed further in order to obtain a greater understanding of particular gym environments outside of the gym used within this research.

#### **4.3 Time and Space as an additional criterion:**

While attempting to draw together the different aspects of the sexually objectifying environment, I became aware of the significance of the temporal and spatial aspects that have varying degrees of influence upon experience, particularly given the nature of the semi-private gym space (Duncan, 1996). In particular, it can be seen through many of the women's reflections that the different 'times' and 'spaces' impact the way self-objectification occurs in a particular sexually objectifying environments. Within the context of leisure and urban studies, theoretical thinking has been disputed in terms of a 'spatial turn' or 'spatial triad' (Lefebvre, 1999; Soja, 1999) through the idea of 'third space'. The space in these cases have been contemplated by attempting to contend the material and conceived categories of space. The third space is seen as lived space, one that is more literal and has multiple uses, but also is a space of friction caused by tensions and resistance between perceived and conceived. The consideration for a third space enables the opportunity to access space and place as additionally fluid, and by doing so, escapes the frequently motionless formulations of the concept. Due to this, it allows for the incorporation of time within space/place in the criterion (Wellard, 2013). An essential element in the way in which spaces and places are approached is time, and this has usually been given priority within philosophical discourses. It is important to recognise how time affects the understanding of space. Massey (2005, p 18) suggests:

The excavation of these problematical conceptualisations of space (as static, closed, immobile, as the opposite of time) brings to light other sets of connections, to science to writing and representation, to issues of subjectivity and its conception, in all of

which implicit imaginations of space have played an important role. And these entwining are in turn related to the fact that space has so often been excluded from, or inadequately conceptualised in relation to, and has thereby debilitated our conceptions of politics and the political.

Massey highlights the tensions that are seen between the notions of space, and the idea of taking less time to travel to a greater distance. There is an issue however with the implication that space can be considered less important due to technological progression, which has overcome distance; whilst on the other hand, space has become more of a commodity in terms of economic factors (Tomlinson, 1990; Urry, 1995). The increase in commodification of time and space within contemporary society has impacted upon the way in which individuals approach activities within sport, and how they develop a sense of their own 'belonging' within a particular sporting space at a particular time in their lives. By taking into account the temporal and spatial aspects that influence a sexual objectifying environment, I have revised the initial diagram so that it contains the new aspect:

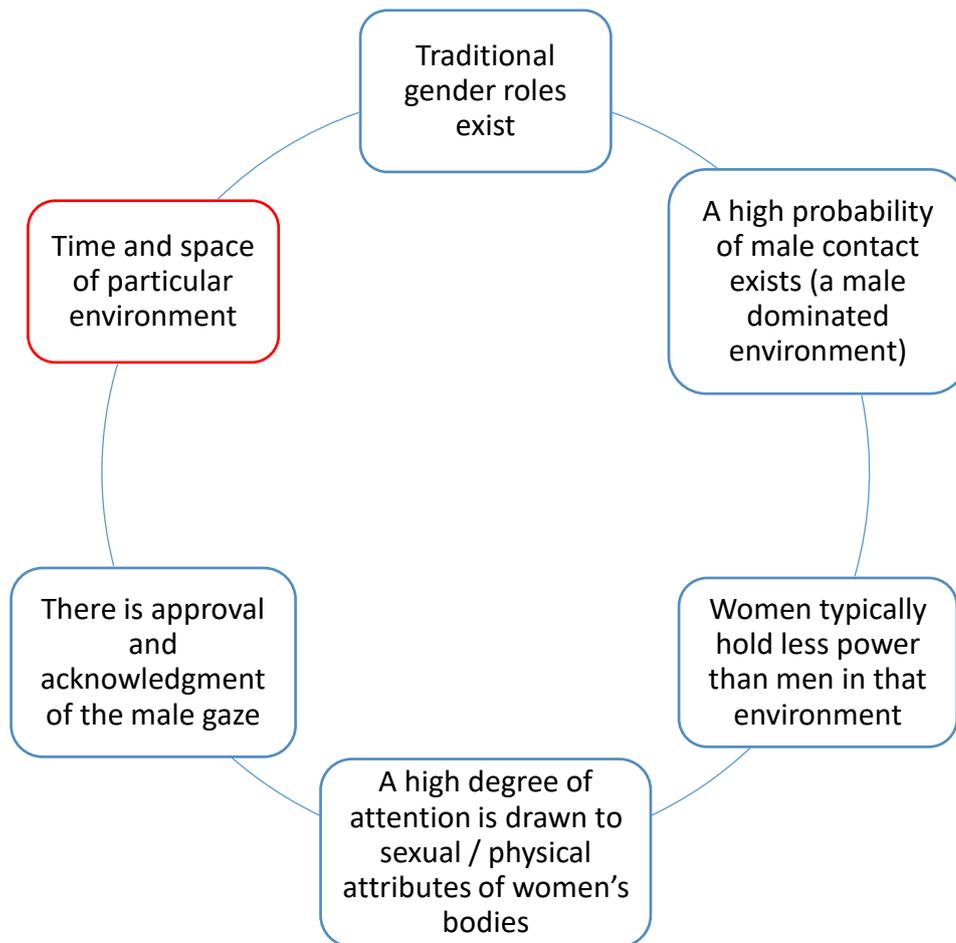


Figure (6): Adaptation of the core criteria of a sexually objectifying environment, with the additional criteria of time and space.

Acknowledging the importance of the additional dimensions of spatial and temporal criteria allows for a clearer understanding how time and space significantly influences what a sexually objectifying environment consists of. Recognising time and space within the environment can be seen to be part of a process in terms of how an experience can become sexually objectifying. An example of how time and space effects the gym environment can explicitly be seen within Hayley's recollection of when she is at the gym:

Hayley: *'4/5 o clock, they're all people that like, I'd probably say that judge, they're the ones that stare at girls in the gym. Erm men, staring, that's what they do they stare at ya, like if I'm on cardio or whatever, they'll look over like see who it is, that's it, if I'm in the gym and I'll be squatting or something they'll stand there and watch. They won't do what they're doing, they'll stand there and watch.'*

Amy: *'and how does that make you feel?'*

Hayley: *'it depends because a couple of times yeah, like the they have watched me, but it hasn't been in the way that you'd think it was. It was in the way of they was watching me like, oh good on her, kind of thing, but then you get other people that you catch like staring over and it's not in a nice way they are just being a bit pervy.'*

Not only does Hayley interpret the different stares she has acknowledged, and provides a detailed explanation as to how important it is to acknowledge time and space within the sexually objectifying environment. She has recognised a specific time whereby most of the men will stare at women and girls within the gym, and has drawn attention to the specific movements such as squatting to be sexualised even further. Similar to Bunsell (2013), Hayley has explained that the gym environment is organised through conditions of time and space. There are peak training hours, which occur during lunch periods, and after gym members have usually finished work. Sassatelli (1999, p.4) notes that 'gym crowds can rarely be reduced to one socio-demographic at any time', there is a disposition for different groups of people to attend the gym at different times of the day, this is also evident within my descriptions of the gym in previous chapters. Interestingly, Hayley continues and suggests that the stares displayed by the men, can also be interpreted differently. She suggests that the majority of the time, stares given are mostly sexualising and objectifying, but she also suggests that occasionally, these stares could be given as a look of appreciation towards the efforts of her workout within the main gym.

The environment may be experienced several times before it is considered sexually objectifying, or may be experienced in a space that shifts dynamically throughout the different criterions. In a way, the additional recognition of time and space highlights how the sexually objectifying environment can be seen to connect with geographical aspects of personal and social encounters of an individual's experience. Therefore, this additional aspect can be viewed as a continuously moving process; they do not stand along, but rather interact with one another as initially suggested for the previous criterions of a sexually objectifying environment by Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr (2011).

## **5. Summary:**

This chapter has continued to describe the women's embodied experiences that are personal in various contexts of the gym space. It can be seen that certain gazes and stares are embodied and experienced within multiple gym spaces, and reflections reveal that individual gazes and stares can be interpreted differently, depending upon particular temporal and spatial aspects of the physical culture. Also considered, are the numerous core criteria that can be attributed towards the gym within this research, and how this can be perceived as a sexually objectifying environment. As suggested previously, it should be noted that not all gym cultures may be considered as an objectifying environment.

The different aspects of the sexually objectifying environment can be seen to shine through the women's experiences explored above. It also importantly shows that the way gazes are interpreted encompass a variety of sensualities and experiences relating to the body within a different social context, time and space; and the descriptions of the embodied experiences relate to specific activities and spaces within the gym, demonstrating the suitability of employing a feminist phenomenological framework; furthermore in conjunction with this framework, the ethnographic data captured in this chapter (through the interview data, and the observations of the gym environment) further enhances the distinct feminist phenomenological approach utilised in this thesis to fully appreciate and capture the 'essences' of the lived body.

The following chapter continues with uncovering the essential aspects that are embodied and experienced within alternative fitness environments. Chapter nine (which is also the final chapter of this thesis) portrays how within the gym environment, tensions may be created which considers humour to be interpreted as sexism or disguised as a joke or 'banter'.

## ***Chapter Nine***

### **(Negotiating) Sexism and Banter in the Gym.**

While the primary aim has been to reveal the fleshy aspects of gym participation – an embodied approach still requires the acknowledgement of how current discourses of knowledge affects experience. Moving beyond mind/body dualisms, consideration is needed of the various mechanisms through which experiences are formed. The aspects of the gaze, as detailed in chapter eight, can be interpreted in an embodied way. Similarly, existing forms of knowledge about sporting behaviours need to be explored. One aspect of traditional sports culture is that of behaviour and banter.

Throughout the previous chapter, women within this research interpreted different gazes and stares within differing gym spaces, and acknowledged how these could be considered in a dichotomous nature. They were shown to be potentially threatening and/or considered appreciative. I also discussed in chapter eight how the specific gym researched in this thesis can be perceived as a sexually objectifying environment, and delved into the core criterions that can be attributed towards this. Interestingly whilst further analysing the data in chapter eight, I discovered that within the adapted core criterions and throughout the process of considering the gym as sexually objectifying; I expected to experience or acknowledge the presence of sexism disguised as humour or ‘banter’, and accepted that this would be potentially heightened within particular gym spaces and times. Similar to interpreting stares or gazes described in chapter eight, these comments could also be considered within a dichotomous nature (Dynel, 2008), i.e., that of benevolence or harm on one hand, or alternatively whether the comments were or could be deemed as a joke or ‘banter’.

Within my narrative explored in chapter once, and also within my access and phases section in chapter three, I described the troublesome comments and behaviour that I had experienced throughout my employment and research at the gym. Examples of this consisted of being wolf whistled, having sexually explicit comments shouted at me, and being touched inappropriately, which have consequently been considered as ‘just banter’ by those who have conducted such actions. There have been many cases of everyday sexism that have been well documented (Bates, 2014). Similarly, there has also been work recognising the public and

occupational space women use to shape routine experiences of verbal abuse, sexual harassment and the threat of male violence, yet over the last decade these have declined in attention (Valentine, 1989, 1992; Pain, 1991). This chapter aims to explore these tensions within differing gym spaces and explore whether specific spaces within the gym heighten this 'sexist humour'.

## **1. Contextualising sexism and banter:**

*'A woman wants to be taken seriously in a male-dominated society. She finally feels like she's achieving that. Then they make a joke about her going back to the kitchen where she belongs—and now what? If she doesn't laugh, she's obviously just an overly sensitive woman who can't be taken seriously.... But if she does laugh, she's saying that oppression of women is somehow funny. Whether she realizes it or not, she's discrediting the feminist movement: she is submitting to the masculine ideology that women's rights are not important enough to be taken seriously' – (Ford et al., 2013, p. 65).*

Firstly, in order to gain a greater understanding of sexism and banter and how this attributes to the gym environment, it is important to acknowledge the definitions and context of which I will be using them. Sexism can be experienced and interpreted in abundant forms; Gurney (1985, p.46) suggests two categories can be established from gender-related problems: *sexual hustling* and *sexist treatment*. Experiences with sexual hustling range from flirtatious behaviour and sexually suggestive remarks to overt sexual propositioning. Sexist treatment involves statements or actions which place women in an inferior or devalued position. Glick and Fiske (1996) also suggest *hostile* and *benevolent* forms of sexism, which are stemmed from sexist ambivalence. They refer to hostile sexism as Allport's (1954, p. 9) definition of prejudice, as an 'antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalisation'. The ambivalent sexism theory as Glick and Fiske (1997) argue is sexism that involves two forms of benevolence, overt hostility and paternalistic benevolence. Hostile sexism involves negative attitudes which are directed towards women in non-traditional gender roles, and the hostility that sexist men express serves to show their dominance and punish women who 'step out of place' with regards to their gender roles. In addition, heterosexual intimate relations result in men idealising women within traditional feminine role, they adore, cherish, and act benevolently towards women due to the traditional relationships that are supposed to fulfil

their dual desire for social intimacy and dominance. Therefore, benevolent sexism reflects apparently encouraging responses to women who are in these traditional gender roles (Oswald, Franzoi and Frost, 2012).

Benevolent sexism is suggested to be a 'set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling and tone, and also tend to elicit behaviours typically categorised as prosocial' (Glick and Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Although Allport (1954) observed misogynists to regard women as inferior, he claimed that sexism was rare and that sex was not a ground for prejudice. However, cross-culturally and historically women have been regarded as subordinate to men, and are perceived as less intelligent, competitive and strong in comparison (Longhurst, 1995; Rose, 1993). While the emergence of women's rights movements in western countries has led to a gradual (although uneven) development in gender equality legislation, sexism is nonetheless still a form of prejudice that persists (Valentine et al. 2014).

According to Watt (2007, p. 259), humour has been theorised as 'a significant discursive mode by many writers'. The public judgement over the use of derogative humour (e.g. racist and sexist humour) has become increasingly critical within public domains (Apte, 1987; Barker, 1994). As Ford, Wentzel and Lorion (2001, p. 676) note, humour can provide a 'socially acceptable' mechanism for demeaning, harassing and oppressing disadvantaged groups. Humour is frequently conjured to police, expose, and create gender sexual hierarchies, and is a technique for the impersonation of masculine identities and can be seen to produce distinctive heterosexuality's (Kehily and Nayak, 1997). Humour is produced differently, with 'leg pulling' and sarcasm as the most common forms. These are more subtle forms of humour; they signal resistance but do not transgress the 'social order of politeness' (Billig, 2001, p. 24). Generally, the term 'teasing' disregards the factor of the length and the number of turns within a humorous exchange. In essence, it is any verbalisation whose meaning is not to be treated with entire seriousness, and regularly carries humorous force to be appreciated by both interactions (Dyrel, 2008).

A development of further exchange of conversation can be termed *banter*. Norrick (1993, p. 29) defines banter as 'This rapid exchange of humorous lines orientated toward a common theme, though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than topical talk, typifies what we generally call "banter"'. An important aspect of banter is that consecutive retorts are added

very rapidly, which gives rise to what could be attributed to a verbal ping-pong played by the two (or more) individuals with joking manner (Raskin, 1985; Zajdman, 1992; Kotthoff, 1996; 2006). Banter essentially coincides with a joint humorous sequence of what could be termed as *conjoint humour* (Holmes, 2002). Ford et al. (2001) found that the gender of the joke teller served as a sign for defining how sexist jokes would be interpreted.

Many of the women in this research used the term 'banter' or 'bants' whilst sharing their experiences. Jackie explained that banter for her is:

*'quick wit (clicks fingers) you know, they'll say something [the men] and you'll come back with something, you know, er, it could be filthy, it could be you know smutty, it could be just er, quick wit, it could be taking the micky out of it'. – Jackie.*

Other women similarly acknowledge banter in the same way. They reported that they enjoyed banter, whether this be from a joke or a 'one over' specifically whilst interacting with a man, but they also suggested that this can sometimes be used to 'cover up' more sinister actions or intentions which is explored further within this chapter.

I have previously elucidated towards my experiences of sexism and banter within the gym environment within chapter one. Gurney (1985) notes that women report other difficulties establishing a role as a researcher in settings where men predominate or exert control. Easter-Day *et al.*, (1977) reports that female researchers often find themselves assigned to play subordinate roles as 'gofers', as ascots or surrogate daughters of paternalistic male administrators. Gurney (1985) suggests that female researchers may be forced to tolerate, or not be able to openly object to sexist behaviour and remarks in order to maintain a rapport. It has also been suggested that female researchers have often discussed problems in male dominated settings, but the reaction to the treatment (inwardly or outwardly) has yet to be explored. My intention therefore, is not to re-define any existent terminology or definitions as such which are used within this chapter surrounding sexism and banter; moreover, it is to explore the embodied experiences from these situations.

## **1.2 Banter and 'Laddism' within British society:**

According to Nichols (2016), lad culture and behaviours that are deemed laddish have become almost synonymous with British culture. They are associated to specific historical sociocultural traditions and divisions in society. The understanding of lads has currently been

informed by specifically the British historical context and contemporary depictions within the media surrounding 'lads on tour' and the commodification of laddishness within popular magazines and television programmes (Willis, 1977). Previous research has displayed particular environments in society where lad culture is assumed to be more conspicuous than others, such as leisure sites and the workplace being key spaces where lad cultures are regularly constructed and reproduced (Dempster, 2009; Kidd, 2013; Schacht, 1996). There has also been a recognition of the understanding of place enabling lad cultures to be practiced, with many men feeling more 'able' to behave in particular ways which are dependent upon the spatial context (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Lads and lad cultures have now been examined across the social sciences, and are implied by earlier writers such as Becky Francis (1999) as having specific characteristics and features such as:

'A young exclusively male, group; and the hedonistic practices popularly associated with such groups (e.g. 'having a laugh', alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviours, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine' (p. 357)

Since the construction of such definitions within academia, laddism and lads have arguably evolved into equivalent types of practices and behaviours. These are frequently aligned with men having fun and behaving in ways presumed to align with hegemonic and historical notions of masculinity (Nichols, 2016). The displaying of masculine characteristics such as aggression, strength, wit, physicality and heterosexuality are also included (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Schacht, 1996). More recently, features such as wit and the capability to banter within groups has also been viewed as a meaningful aspect within the definition of laddish behaviours (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). Coates (2003) argues being able to 'have a laugh' and taking a joke is central to male identity. Within a male dominated environment, this is an important feature, but not the case within a female-dominated one (Hay, 2000). Women appear to be uncomfortable with the joke culture, and can find it difficult to handle and be part of. Nichols (2016) suggests that sporting sites are the most visible areas where the notion of lads and lad cultures originated. These are where discussions regarding the relationship between everyday sexism and lad culture are continuously growing.

Everyday sexism is becoming widely recognised and understood to have become so embedded within many of our daily lives that it tends to go unnoticed, therefore becoming normalised through society (Ronai, Zsembik, and Feagin, 2013). Everyday sexism and laddish behaviour is problematically often passed off as ‘just a bit of banter’, with the effects and implications diminished. There has been an identification between masculinity and verbal sparring (Hewitt, 1986), and recently, work has begun to critique humour in society examining whether the framing of sexist comments as jokes alter the way in which we evaluate and understands its meaning (Bishop, 2015; Greenwood and Isbell, 2002; Mills, 2008; Ryan and Kanjorski, 1998). Within British society, banter is a fast growing form of interaction; it is becoming synonymous with laddish behaviours and lads, and commonly acts as a way for men to transmit discourses of gender relations and sexist ideas. However, despite this developing body of research; it can be argued that there still a lack of research acknowledging the broader embodied aspects of women’s experiences of the body and their interpretations of humour and banter within fitness cultures.

## **2. The attached or un-attached female:**

Gurney (1985) suggests that sexual hustling is more likely to occur when females are perceived as single or unattached to a male. Women who are perceived to have inferior power and status, whether due to lower age, being divorced or single, or existing within a marginal position within an organisation, are more likely to be harassed (Fain and Anderton, 1987; LaFontaine and Tredeau, 1986; Robinson and Reid, 1985). Lily, who works as a gym instructor, explains her experiences of when she used to be with her boyfriend, who also at the time trained at the same gym:

*‘I started coming to this gym with a boyfriend, I know them all as me not being single, so the banter is sort of like, it’s not tried on as much, but, if that make sense ... so like, when I joke back with them I feel, unless they are new and obviously most people don’t really joke when they’re new, but I feel comfortable around them anyway. Whereas if I wasn’t used to people here, and then I’d probably wouldn’t like it as much coz I’m not really, not like that confident ... at first I didn’t really like it, and then like I just joked back and I found that joking back actually made me more not on edge and I didn’t feel threatened by them’ – Lily.*

What is interesting here is that the men who perceived Lily as attached, or those who knew of Lily's attached status, reduced the amount of sexual hustling they gave to her, although this was not eliminated entirely (Gurney, 1985). Lily initially felt threatened by the hostile sexist behaviour and language by suggesting that she felt on edge, meaning that she knew the behaviour towards her was not potentially a joke or banter. Many times the sexist behaviour or language used by the men was subtle or not as obvious, and overtime as Lily's confidence grew within the gym space. She realised that joking back and replying to the comments and behaviour with humour or 'banter', made her feel more comfortable in that situation.

Riger (1991) conveys that some women may recognise sexual harassment as normative. It can be suggested that within Lily's experience, she believes that these sort of behaviours are simply routine and are commonplace in her everyday gym life, and therefore she does not challenge it. Lily softly consents to a shared understanding and social norm that is acceptable within this context to make light of the sexism she experiences (Emerson, 1969; Francis, 1988; Khoury, 1985). Lily's acceptance of the sexist and banter 'jokes' therefore contributes to the construction of implicit norms of tolerating sexism. Furthermore, due to the result of its prominence in the immediate situation, the local norm of tolerating sexism may essentially replace broader norms surrounding the appropriateness of conduct (Bodenhausen and Macrae, 1998; Cialdini, Kallgren and Reno, 1991). Consequently, the instances of sexism are likely to seem less socially inappropriate, in the context of sexist humour, and specifically within certain gym spaces.

Due to Lily being in her twenties, it is more likely she will be a victim of harassment, as older women are viewed as being more tolerant to it (Reilly et al. 1986). Lott et al. (1982, p.318) concluded that 'younger women in particular have accepted the idea that prowling men are a 'fact of life''. This can be viewed within Lily's reflection, and due to this, her attitude may prevent her from labelling a negative experience as harassment. Within the gym environment, there is a lower perceived equality within the gym space, and due to this, more frequent incidents of harassment are likely to occur (Riger, 1991). This reinforces the suggestion that sexual harassment both reinforces and reflects underlying sexual inequalities, which produces a sex-segregated and sex-stratified structure (Hoffman, 1986). It has been repeatedly documented within research that unwanted sexual attention may possibly be the most widespread occupational hazard in the workplace (Garvey, 1986). Women than men

face this experience much more commonly. Whilst following on from Lily's conversation about her 'attached' status, I asked her what she understood of the term banter:

*'Erm, as in like if he whistles at me, I stick my fingers up! haha! But then he'll laugh, or like, once before he was blowing me a kiss and I've gone like 'ugh!' and he's laughed coz, but or like he'll go (gestures blowing a kiss) and do it again and I'll go like (gestures pulling body away and pulls a grimaced face' – Lily.*

It can be seen that in relation to the definition of banter discussed previously, although there is no obvious use of words verbally 'Ping-Ponged' (Raskin, 1985; Zajdman, 1992; Kotthoff, 2006) as such, there is more of a 'body language Ping-Pong'. The man performs sexist actions; Lily then displays submissiveness from this through the retaliation of her own body language and gestures.

Lily's experience of banter shows that it is heavily laden with explicit sexual undertones. These actions are arguably performed by the man to re-assert his masculinity, and are performed in order to benefit those around him (Gutterman 2008; Hearn, 1994; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). Through the presentation of himself as 'manly', he is using banter and the positioning of Lily as inferior through the insinuation relating to sexual gratification (Curry, 1991; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). Kanter (1977) notes it is easier for women to welcome the roles that they are appointed to, rather than fight them. It is easier to keep quiet when one is insulted or offended than to confront the offender and risk an argument. Women may express the intent to confront gender discrimination, however in reality they remain silent for fear of being treated negatively by others (Good *et al.*, 2012; Shelton and Stewart, 2004). The sexist behaviour expressed by the man Lily encountered was verbal through the obvious noise of a wolf whistle, but also subtle through the blow of a kiss that many others may not have noticed.

As Gutek (1985) suggests, men tend to find sexual signals from women to be flattering, whereas women find similar approaches from men to be insulting. It is agreed between both men and women that certain obvious behaviours, such as sexual bribery or assault are seen as harassment; however, women are more likely to see harassment as more subtle behaviours such as teasing, and certain looks or gestures (Adams *et al.* 1983; Collins and Blodgett, 1981; Kenig and Ryan, 1986). Instances of 'physical' humour are can also occur (Watt, 2007). Even when behaviours are identified as sexual harassment, men are more likely

to think that women will be flattered by it (Kirk, 1988). Men are also more likely to blame women for being sexually harassed (Kenig and Ryan, 1986; Jenson and Gutek, 1982). It has been noted in previous research that men tend to misinterpret friendliness received from a woman as an indication of sexual interest (Abbey, 1982; Abbey and Melby, 1986; Saal, Johnson and Weber, 1989; Shotland and Craig, 1988). This is illuminated within Hayley's reflection whilst she works on reception within the gym:

*'When you're stood behind the counter and they [the men] like come up to you and start a conversation with you and then all of a sudden they drop in 'so where does your boyfriend work?'. Well I don't have a boyfriend and no one mentioned anything about having a boyfriend, and they're just really creepy like, way to do it like. You talk to everyone and most of the time I. I will have like really long conversations with people coz I'm so bored coz it will be like a really quiet night so I'll talk to people to kill time and entertain myself and then the next minute, I think they think that you've just spoke to them coz you fancy them.'* – Hayley.

McIntyre and Renick (1982) propose that professionals who work within secretarial – clerical positions are more likely to experience and report subtle behaviours as harassment, this is particularly evident within Hayley's experience whilst she works on reception as the conversation between herself and man is usually perceived by the man as a sign of flirting. Gurney (1985) explains that if a female is sexually propositioned or harassed, it is evident that people in the particular setting are relating to her partly in terms of her sexual identity. However, other reactions to women, such as the inclination to view them as inferior and place them in devalued roles, may be expressed in more subtle or indirect ways. Charlie's reflection reinforces this by explaining how she experienced subtle sexist behaviour within the CrossFit environment:

*'CrossFit I have though, which is why we don't go anymore, erm [...] it's not shouted, it's more snide in there'* – Charlie.

The experiences by Hayley and Charlie also importantly highlight how this sexist 'banter' can occur within differing gym environments, demonstrating the importance of utilising a feminist phenomenological lens (Allen-Collinson, 2010). Interestingly, in relation to

these particular spaces in the gym environment, the sexism experienced by each of the women can be interpreted differently, depending on the areas of the gym they engage in.

### **3. Uninvited touch and confronting sexist behaviour:**

Women are exposed to sexist treatment and prejudice attitudes across a variety of contexts and situations (Swim, Cohen, and Hyers, 1998; Swim et al. 2001). Byers and Price (1986, p.371) note that sexual harassment includes either or both of the following: 1) the power or authority during an attempt to coerce another individual to tolerate or engage within sexual activity; the inclusion of implicit or explicit threats or retaliations for non-compliance, or promises for compliance. 2) Deliberately and/or repeatedly engaging within unsolicited sexually orientated comments, gestures, anecdotes, or touching, if said behaviours are (a) offensive and unwelcome; (b) an offensive, hostile or intimidating behaviour within a work environment is created; or (c) the behaviour can be expected to be harmful to the recipient.

There is a large body of literature on whether, and with what effects women make attributions to discrimination (Major et al. 2002). When faced with blatant discrimination, women often do not confront the perpetrators of the discrimination, or tell members of a higher status that they have been discriminated against (Swim and Hyers, 1999; Stangor, Swim, Van Allen and Sechrist, 2002). Research has focused on relatively non-confrontational cognitive coping strategies for regulating ones emotions after sexism has occurred (Major, Quinton and McCoy, 2002). Kaiser and Miller (2004, p.168) define confronting discrimination as a 'volitional process aimed at expressing one's dissatisfaction with discriminatory treatment to a person or group of people who are responsible for engaging in a discriminatory event'. Responding to inappropriate remarks is considered as a 'risky behaviour', in terms of reacting to a perpetrator, rather than ignoring. Commenting of the inappropriate remarks of sexist behaviours or comments is perceived as equally risky as being physically aggressive towards the perpetrator (Swim and Hyers, 1999). Coping strategies for females who are identified within a 'lower' power order are often shared through an inferior status, this produces a different group dynamic imitative from a position of respective weakness (Watt, 2007).

Whilst interviewing Alex, she reflects deeply surrounding the discrimination she experienced within a circuit class, and how she confronted this:

Alex: *'Sometimes they [the men] do try to touch you up and things like that, don't they, I've had that in the past'*

Amy: *'have you?'*

Alex: *'yeah so you think, you know, normally, I had that once in a circuit thing, and I just turned on the bloke and said, if you fucking do that again I'm gonna smash your face.'*

Amy: *'what happened there then?'*

Alex: *'we were just doing squats and he did that with his foot (lifts foot and points toes) in my crotch area, so I just went, fuck off, and I did, I literally got up and said you fucking do that again I'll smash you one ...'*

Amy: *'what did he say?'*

Alex: *'ohhh calm down, calm down, it's only a joke mate, it's only a joke (in a mocking voice) but they can do it in a way that it's not picked up by anyone else can't they, they can touch you and say sorry mate sorry. But that's why it's hard for men as well coz sometimes you can tell whether it's an accident, sometimes they do catch you accidentally and that's fair enough'*

This extract reinforces the suggestion that 'humour is accompanied by discriminative cues, which indicate that what is happening, or is going to happen, should be taken as a joke. I also demonstrate this experience through my narrative in chapter one. The ways in which we might react to the same events in the absence of these cues becomes inappropriate and must be withheld' (Berlyne, 1972, p. 56). Within this situation, Alex had succumbed to a more sinister banter experience, whereby the man who acted had considered the sexual harassment as 'just a joke'. By making light of the expression of sexism, the sexist humour communicated here as a 'meta-message' (Attardo, 1993), or approved as normative within this context; this reflection also demonstrates that sexism should not be taken seriously or investigated in a critical way. Walker and Goodson (1977) suggest that oppression is a rich ground for humour, and it's emergence within unbalanced relationships is evident through multiple positions that subjects can occupy within discourse.

Alex's illustration of her 'risky behaviour' (Swim and Hyers, 1999) through confronting the discrimination, began with an attribution that the specific event outcome she had experienced was due to prejudice (because she was a woman). Furthermore, the tone of voice from the man involved, and being told to 'calm down' in a patronising manner, reinforces the perception that women who confront sexist behaviour are perceived as hypersensitive (Czopp and Monteith, 2003; Weiner *et al.*, 2010). Ford *et al.* (2001) note that when a joke teller knows the receiver has rejected the humour, he or she is likely to 'take it back' and likewise oppose to a noncritical interpretation of the underlying emotion. This can be noticed within Alex's experience, the man realises she did not welcome his sexist humour, and therefore tried to 'take his actions back', by commenting that it was just a joke. By Alex opposing to the sexist humour she experienced, she prevented the construction of normative standards of tolerating sexism.

It could be suggested that the confrontational response conducted by Alex was an attempt to directly change the situation of her being a target of prejudice (Kaiser and Miler, 2004). The retaliation by the man of his behaviour being 'just a joke', meant that although responded and confronted this behaviour, she had been silenced by his flippant comment. In this circumstance, the tone of banter that was implemented to frame the actions as light-hearted and just a joke, can arguably be considered as holding a more sinister and sexist meaning. It could be noted that the man in Alex's experience was acting to sustain and protect the masculine ideals valued within the gym setting (Barrett, 2008; Kiesling, 2005). Bates (2014) notes that banter has become principal to a culture that encourages young men to revel in the sexual pursuit, objectification, and ridicule of their female peers – it is used as a cloak of irony and humour, which is used to excuse mainstream sexism and the normalisation and belittling of women. Through pretending that something is 'just a joke' is a powerful silencing tool, and makes those who stand up to it seem isolated and staid. Another widespread silencing tool is known as 'the defence of humour'. The backlash against feminism has played a meaningful role through its portrayal of all criticism as 'humourlessness', and its reeling of harassment and as use under the protective shield of banter. Alex describes the use of male sexual power and her reaction to it. The harassment induced in this passage ranges from bullying behaviour such as 'telling her to calm down', and blatant sexual harassment after he has touched an intimate area of her body. Continuing with this discussion, I then asked Alex how she felt when she had purposely been touched intimately whilst working out:

Alex: *'I'm not having it, I've had that in oh, I'm trying to think now, you know just putting a hand on your knee and stuff like that, and years ago again it was more acceptable [...] but it was much more acceptable that men could touch you and get away with it or think they could. I don't mind a bloke slapping my arse, if it's a joke, then I'll smack them back sort of thing. I've had that at work as well but it's when you, it's different if you know somebody you know, and I've also told my husband and he said well you invite that sometimes, he said you know.'*

Amy: *'what does he mean by invite?!'*

Alex: *'coz of the way I am, that you are winding someone up on purpose.'*

Amy: *'so its banter?'*

Alex: *'yeah, yeah, and so he says oh well they obviously didn't hit you hard enough did they, that sort of thing so he is like that as well, so I'd always tell him if something like that's happened coz I don't want someone to say, you know, say they've been flirting and it's certainly not flirting, erm. But so that is different than a fondle innit, basically, yeah erm, but in the past I've had it done a few times and yeah no I just turn very aggressive. Yeah and I've had someone touch my arse and I'm like, I don't think so and just put their hand back, and then if say you are assertive enough they are normally alright aren't they'.*

A continued presence within a setting may be dependent upon passing certain loyalty tests, including ignoring derogatory remarks or allowing a women's' gender to provide a source of humour for a group (Kanter, 1977). This can be observed through Alex's experience above, and many of the experiences discussed. It has been indicated that women who identified within their gender group, or those who hold a more liberal attitude towards women and women's rights, tend to dismiss sexism and participate within gender-related collective action to a greater extent than those who are traditionally identified or low-identified women (Becker and Wagner, 2009; Page *et al*, 2016). Likewise, research suggests that women who classify themselves as a feminist, or express a commitment to fighting sexism are more likely to confront sexism (Ayres *et al*. 2009). Although women may not explicitly express an activist or feminist identity; identifying with a group that is being targeted with discrimination predicts an advocacy of collective action (Liss, Crawford and Popp, 2004;

Wright and Tropp, 2002). Interestingly, within the interview conducted with Alex, she had discussed her stance on feminism, and identified herself as a feminist; she also stated she had participated within numerous women's marches and rights movements, reinforcing the comment from Ayres et al. (2009).

The confrontation described above by Alex could suggest an involvement within the 'backlash effect'. Backlash effects are defined 'as social and economic reprisals for behaving counter stereotypically' (Rudman, 1998, p. 629). In this instance, Alex disconfirms her feminine stereotype; she swears, is aggressive and is assertive towards the sexism she has experienced. These actions are recognised normally as masculine stereotypes, by confronting this sexist behaviour and 'backlashing', these actions can be socially deficient and unlikable. Alex faces a double bind here, she has to either behave in a way that conforms to sex stereotypes, or act competently and aggressively (Rudman and Phelan, 2008). A discussion of humour as a resistance has focused on the ways in which women engage within humour as a particular response to male hegemony (Watts, 2007). Alex displays resistance and 'power-to' by confronting and acknowledging that this sexist behaviour is not acceptable (Bradshaw, 2002). Watt (2007, p. 259) suggests that humour can also be a resistance to dominant power structures, where small 'sites of resistance' occur within minority groups that possess limited agency. Due to humours ambiguous interpretations, disrespect, insult, ridicule and slur are able to enter the dialogue 'in a disguised and deniable form (Crawford, 2003, p. 1420). Due to this, a resistance or challenge is difficult. This display of empowerment and confrontation is also evident within Jenny's experience of sexism whilst she specifically workouts in the weights area of the gym:

Jenny: *'Erm, er, I've been at the weights area and been pushed aside.'*

Amy: *'really?'*

Jenny: *'yeah I've been stood in front of, erm, I've been erm, had weights taken away from me when I've been using them when they're down my side.'*

Amy: *'is this from men and women?'*

Jenny: *'by men, erm, I've had er, somebody come up to me and be quite rude to me about wanting to use a piece of er, equipment. Erm, when I've actually been training somebody, not when I'm training, but when I've been training somebody else, and*

*when I've actually said I'm actually training this man, and er, we're not gonna be long, you're just gonna have to wait. I've got the hurrumph, tut, er, stomp off type thing, erm, so yeah I have experienced it.'*

Amy: *'mm, how does that make you feel?'*

Jenny: *'umm, well, it makes me er, I get angry but, I'm not scared to say anything, and I will say something to them, you know, erm, I will, I'm not rude but I will you know, make my feelings known.'*

The gym can be referred to as the 'male territory' (Johanson, 1996); within the weights area of the gym, it seems that there is a heightened awareness of the sexism towards women in relation to specifically weight lifting. The extract below by Georgina suggest that men become somewhat possessive towards the weights, and expect women not to use them or 'own' them for a workout. The extracts below further illuminates these tensions:

*'there was one (laughs) there was one bloke, erm, he was a bit possessive over the weights, he'd, he thought coz he'd used them once that he owned them, and he walked off I didn't know. Unbeknown to me that he was coming back so I started to use them, and he got quite arsey because I had gone to his weights and he thought they were. Well, anyway they just get a bit possessive over their weights and basically think that they have main priority over a woman using them, coz they probably think we just faff around with them.'* – Georgina.

Throughout the extracts above, Butler's (1999) 'gender trouble' is evident. It appears the men within these experiences are particularly sexist in relation to Jenny and Georgina's performativity as women, with the weights area as a heightened space for the excuse of sexism to be conducted. Through this perception of the weights area deemed as a 'male territory' or a hyper-masculine space (Johanson, 1996), Jenny and Georgina entering this has disrupted the norm causing 'gender trouble'. The idea of masculinity and femininity can be criticised as an expression of a corporeal fact, namely due to this situation as gender can be seen as a performative one (Butler, 1990). The weights area has specifically developed the notion of gender as a performative one. In this situation, the men within Jenny and Georgina's experiences have deemed a women's performativity as inferior in comparison to their own.

#### 4. Conforming to sexist language and humour:

Certain sporting studies have conceptualised banter traditionally as a male linguistic insult, considered to function as a 'regulatory or policing tool' in order to sustain masculine identities (Kiesling, 2005; Kotthoff, 2005; McDowell and Schaffner, 2011; Thurnall Read, 2012). Certain women feel that they feel the need to conform with banter or sexist language whilst interacting with particular men who display more 'laddishness' or banter tones, as detected in Victoria's reflection:

*Victoria: 'if anything a little bit more manly because there are a lot of blokes here and they all swear and rude and that so I probably go down to their level a little bit [...] sort of you know to fit in a little, well not to fit in but you just change a little bit. It's like if you're hanging around with some people very well spoken and they don't swear obviously that's how you would behave you know [...] There is one guy, erm, he is very tall [...] and I, I honestly think he is a prat and you'd have to sort of talk differently if you were speaking to him.'*

*Amy: 'how would you talk differently to him?'*

*Victoria: (sighs) oh, (laughs) 'I dunno just, well if you had to speak to him you'd just be a bit crude, vulgar, yeah. That's if I had to speak to someone like that you know.'*

Swiss (2004) suggests that once a female accepts this kind of behavior, because no other choice seems available, it becomes impossible to introduce alternative standards of conduct. As previously mentioned, the gym can be viewed as a space for men who attend to re-assert masculinity. It could be suggested in this case, that there is an element of performativity asserted by this man in an attempt to humour and benefit those around him (Gutterman 2008; Hearn, 1994; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). Within Victoria's reflection, gender troubling (Butler, 1990) might be more apparent because she is 'talking differently' and linguistically acting to conform to masculine and laddish ideologies, subsequently changing her usual presentation of femininity. Victoria's use of crude and vulgar language also ensures that she is not seen as 'humourless' (Evetts, 1996). Being 'a good bloke' (and not a typical woman) resists the expectation of wanting to be 'outside' of male power,

and resists as a woman, being an 'outsider'. (Watts, 2007). This is also palpable in Alex's reflection:

Amy: *'when you first came into this gym what was your initial perception of it?'*

Alex: *'oh yeah, quite intimidating, just men pumping yeah, yeah and coz I'm not a girly girl I've never had much um, I've had, even if men have said something nice about me I've come back with some sort of bantery talk so then I can, so I'm not very good, yeah.'*

Amy: *'what's the meaning of banter for you?'*

Alex: *'erm, haha, oh anything really, yeah winding people up trainers especially, yeah that's my banter, get them back, trying to get a quick one back in, yeah before they hurt me if you like so I'm gonna make sure I'm tough enough verbally. It wasn't that long ago a few months ago one of the lads we were doing that. I said look if I paid you 10 quid will you tell him [the instructor] that we did 80 [reps]. Coz we normally only get as far as 70, and if you get 80 you get 3 months membership. So I said to this bloke, right just tell him we've done 80 coz he always checks with your partner how many you've done, and he [the instructor] went, what she say?! And he went oh she just said erm, if I give her a tenner she'll give me a blowjob, haha. So I was just like in your dreams mate, I said it costs £45 normally! I walked away so that is me thinking I've got him, coz he didn't come back with another answer.'*

What appears to be significant here is the subjective experiences of interpreting the tone of delivery, and framing of comments made as banter by men. Here, masculine humour is employed to sexualise this interaction between Alex and the man. The men within the gym environment seem to be able to make the comments freely (Garde, 2008). This aligns with Lakoff's (1990) work on language and power; she asserts that:

*'Saying serious things in jest both creates camaraderie and allows the speaker to avoid responsibility for anything controversial in the message. It's just a joke, after all-can't you take a joke? In a lite and camaraderie society worse than being racist or mean-spirited is not getting a joke or being unable to take one' (p.270)*

Lakoff suggests here that the inability to be able to take a joke is criticised and viewed within society as a harmless pursuit. Extending this idea is Mill's (2008, p. 12) idea of 'indirect

sexism', this is described as 'sexism which is undercut by humour or irony, signalled by exaggerated or marked intonation or stress'. This can be recognised within Alex's experience, whereby the banterous comments within the context of sexism is permitted in the gym under the guise of humour, and she makes sure that she reciprocates with banter as an emotional shield so that she does not get hurt. Benevolent sexism is easily identified in this situation, Alex welcomes this sexist humour by interacting and complying with the banter, this decreases her efforts for seeking social change (Becker and Wright, 2011). In this case, benevolent sexism seduced Alex into accepting the male dominance, and this was through the verbal 'ping-pong' of banter (Raskin, 1985; Zajdman, 1992; Kotthoff, 2006).

According to Bou-Franch (2014), language aggression against women is ubiquitous in social life. Discourses surrounding violence against women proliferate in contemporary societies. Aggression against women may create forms of social control, as language choices are never innocent or neutral, but ideologically loaded. Therefore, they reveal the attitudes and worldviews that dominate specific social practices within particular cultures (Gee, 1999; Trinch, 2007; Pain, 1991). This experience also unveils a number of linguistic and discursive strategies of aggression against women, which is cloaked as humour and banter. The social identities and actions of (non) dominant individuals and groups are recreated and managed across a range of social practices, in ways that maintain particular social meanings that underlie gender inequality and social injustice (Bou-Franch, 2014).

## **5. 'Safe' spaces for banter:**

As previously explored throughout this thesis, within the gym different spaces are subject to different territorialising and de-territorialising processes, whereby control over this is fixed, challenged, claimed, privatised and forfeited (Duncan, 1996). Within some cases, this may socially progress in the result of a safe base developing, or a site of resistance, where previously disempowered groups may become empowered.

Brody (2013, p. 40) notes that "safe" refers not only to the absence of trauma, excessive stress, violence (or fear of violence) and abuse, it also includes 'emotional and psychological safety'. The characteristics of the environment particularly matter, rather than the physical attributes. A safe space is considered one that is culturally acceptable, conveniently located, and not subjected to an intrusion of males. Most importantly, this space should not put women at risk of emotional or physical harm and must offer the promise of

some degree of confidentiality and privacy (Brody, 2013). This 'safe space' is evident within Becky's reflection, particularly surrounding the banter and humour she experiences within the spin room:

*Becky: 'I mean, you know it's not like they are like my friends that I've got out of here, but it is like just the banter of it as well yeah.'*

*Amy: 'what do you mean by banter?'*

*Becky: 'you know like haha, when you sort of like erm, kind of 'oh god not again' and stuff like that sort of that sort of banter and 'oh here we go again' it's that sort of nice sort of ... we are having a joke about it but we all love it really [...] do you know what I mean. It's like we are complaining but we actually really love it! That sort of banter is, yeah'*

Within this particular incidence, Becky deeply describes the inter-corporeality of sharing and enjoying non-benevolent banter and humour, and she and others embody this humour whilst spinning. The feeling of experiencing non-benevolent banter could be perceived as an embodied pleasure whilst spinning; but what is important here is the gendered nature of the spatial segregation, and the gendered division of this space. Due to the aerobic nature of the spin room, this space could be viewed as a non 'male territory' (Dworkin, 2001; Johansson, 1996). This semi-private space creates room for comfort and empowerment of their sweaty exercising bodies, thus, shattering and creating a resilience towards the usual discourses imposed on the exercising female body (Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991). Therefore, the by the heightened nature of this semi-private space, the humour is experienced and interpreted in a joking manner, and is not interpreted as hostile or benevolent banter in relation to sexism occurring.

Additionally, the space where the spinners transition through the main gym into the spin room can ultimately be acknowledged as a safe base, or a site of resistance, due to walking through the male territory and feeling empowered by doing so, the women exercisers use this as a site of empowerment. In some instances, without this 'safe' space or banter, some women will go as far as to not even engage within certain gym spaces and attend exercise classes if they feel it will be threatening or harmful :

*'erm, god it's really hard, you feel lonely when you are in it, you don't get that bants [banter] in there [CrossFit room], but it is like a family so I can't quite explain why I feel quite isolated when I done it [...] I just didn't like it but I can see the benefit from it. When I work out I like the bants, I want to be fun and not just serious all the time.'* - Alex.

Alex's further description of how certain gym spaces provide a safe space additionally reinforces the feminist phenomenological approach used within this thesis, by specifying the location and gendered nature of her embodiment. Not only does this extract reinforce how time and space significantly affects an experience, but it also details precisely how and why certain environments are considered 'safe' or empowering. The increase in commodification of time and space within contemporary society has impacted upon the way in which individuals approach activities within sport, and how they develop a sense of their own 'belonging' within a particular sporting space at a particular time in their lives (Tomlinson, 1990; Urry, 1995). Alex's reflection supports this, as she suggests she feels isolated in the CrossFit room, and that she did not like it due to banter not being present. The 'safe' banter that Alex experiences within the alternative fitness environments she chooses to work out in, is ultimately one of the key reasons for her to exercise, and through this she develops a sense of her own 'belonging' in the gym.

Additionally, the similarity-attraction effect (Byrne, 1997) is subtly displayed within Alex's interactions and experiences of banter. This effect refers to the widespread tendency of individuals being attracted to those who are similar to themselves in important respects. This attraction is not necessarily physical, but rather wanting to be around someone or liking them. Similarity effects are the strongest and most consistent surrounding values, attitudes, activity preferences and attractiveness (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Newcomb, 1961). The need for Alex to experience banter and surround herself with people who have 'bants' is an important aspect of her gym experience, she therefore looks for similar attributes of humour in others that are similar to her own sense of humour.

## **6. Summary:**

This final chapter of my thesis explored the embodied experiences of women exercisers in relation to banter and sexist humour encountered within differing gym spaces. This chapter

also continued to utilise a feminist phenomenological approach to explore the sensuousness of humour and sexism experienced through the lived, moving body within the gym culture.

Furthermore, this chapter also reveals the dichotomous nature of how humour can be interpreted and explored; and how specific spaces such as the spinning room in the gym can be perceived as a 'safe base' for women to enjoy banter and humour without the prevalence of sexism. It appears that alternative spaces, specifically the main gym, offer a heightened display of sexist humour and banter, and the tensions experienced within this environment promote women to construct mechanisms / strategies in order to cope with the sexism experienced. The coping strategies embodied, appear to offer the women resilience towards the sexist humour they experience; this demonstrates a range of physical and emotional emotions that are associated with the individual body as well the social context, time and space in which the experiences occur, demonstrating the suitability of employing a feminist phenomenology framework; furthermore the ethnographic data captured in this chapter further reveals the corporeal, sentient realities that the women encounter within the gym. What follows in the concluding chapter is not only a summarisation of the key aspects from each findings chapter presented in this thesis, but a deeper exploration of the overarching concluding comments and findings of this thesis.

## ***Chapter Ten***

### **Conclusion**

I initiated this thesis by revealing what I considered to be the significant moments that impacted upon my early experiences of sport and physical activity. These significant moments highlighted the complex relationship(s) I developed with my body, and revealed how this was not always necessarily a straight-forward process and invariably generated an array of emotions. I questioned whether my experiences from my reflections were similar to other women who participated regularly in gym spaces, and began to explain the complex and competing ways that are offered to understand the experiences of women through an embodied approach. Although this thesis was prompted by subjective personal recollections, in acknowledging these I was able to develop an understanding of the factors that operate upon the ways that other women develop understandings of their bodies, and one that moves in sporting spaces. Consequently, I recognised how my reflections influenced my ontological position and provided an opportunity to consider the competing theoretical explanations that are offered in relation to women who participate in sport. By acknowledging these, it enabled me to clarify the research topic and its direction, particularly how incorporating an embodied approach and utilising feminist phenomenology would provide a useful direction for this research.

The reflexive, empirically driven, inductive approach offered in this thesis allowed me to explore the embodied experiences of the women in the gym, and revealed their corporeal, enfolded and sentient realities within the differing spaces. It facilitated the expression of raw emotion and reflections from the women; and enabled me to give them a voice and elucidate their stories. As a neophyte researcher, I became more conscious and critical of my surroundings. I made reflections upon and made adaptations about how I viewed and analysed the research location, whilst attempting to avoid oversimplifying the observations and conversations I overheard and conducted. The impact of this was not only visible through my own in-depth interpretations and findings, but through the other women's experiences and stories too. Overtime, my views of the gym phenomenon altered. I found my initial early recollections and experiences of the gym were in some way refreshingly similar to the other women, and that I was not alone in feeling and embodying certain emotions and senses whilst

immersed in the gym space. The shared intimacies and personal experiences demonstrate the importance of acknowledging the tensions and nuances that occur within the gym environment. Indeed the utilisation of a feminist phenomenological lens paid dividends in the way that it provided opportunities to highlight how experiences can be heightened in specific temporal and spatial circumstances. It also raises important political questions surrounding women's rights, and feminist movements outlined in chapter two. The embodied research in this thesis highlights the importance of the second wave feminist movement, and brought women's bodies to the forefront of discussion - however it also demonstrates that there are still unequal relationships of power, and tensions that still exist to this day, even though it can be considered the 'wave of feminism' has moved on from the second.

Taking into consideration the above, the intention of this conclusion chapter is to summarise the arguments developed throughout this thesis. The aim is to recognise and evaluate the principal methodological and theoretical issues that have been explored. Additionally, the purpose is to explain the significance of the findings, and its contribution to existing literature surrounding gendered bodies, lived experience and feminist phenomenology. The first part of this chapter re-addresses the main objectives of the research, and considers the scope of the overall study as set out in chapter one. Secondly, the methodological strategies and feminist phenomenology is evaluated in terms of its potential for enhancing the understanding of the female body and lived experience. Following on from this, I acknowledge the unexpected themes and findings that emerged in this thesis, whilst recognising the significant impact of time and space on women's lived experiences in the gym.

## **1. (Re) addressing the Research Questions and Methodological Strategies:**

Contemplative of the women's unique experiences, the purpose of this study was to describe the phenomenon of women's embodied experiences within a UK gym based in the South-East of England. The study was guided by one overarching research question that sought to describe the women's lived experiences of fitness cultures:

- ↔ What are the lived embodied experiences that women negotiate within a fitness environment?

To give this question more clarification, and to enable further focus (without also restricting myself); a number of theoretical approaches were considered to help illuminate

the importance of the lived realities of the women's exercising bodies. In addition to the above question, the following sub-questions were identified:

- ↔ How can the women's descriptions of their gym experiences be interpreted?
- ↔ How do these embodied experiences affect their participation in the gym, and throughout their everyday lives?

To ensure that the women's lived realities were given justice in this research, it was imperative to incorporate an embodied approach as it enabled a further focus to the research questions above. Chapter four illustrated the theoretical and methodological links between feminism and feminist phenomenology. In conjunction with ethnography, feminist phenomenology was used as the guiding methodological framework in order to address the research questions and findings above. It is important to acknowledge that the aims of phenomenological research are not necessarily to provide straightforward answers (Neilson, 2000), but rather to clarify the phenomena, explanations and descriptions and to enhance understandings these (Hycner, 1985). By incorporating feminist phenomenology, a more focused gendered lens was required in order to explore the dominant influences and pressures of social structures upon the lived experiences of the participants in this research. This, in turn, allowed for more clear-cut description of the specific corporeality of their bodies located within certain cultural spaces and times within the gym environment (Allen-Collinson, 2009; 2010).

Feminist phenomenology has recently been adopted as a legitimate method (Fisher, 2000), particularly within the context of women's lived experiences in gyms. This study showed that feminist phenomenology was valuable in the exploration of the lived experiences of women where an in-depth understanding is sought. Additionally, it was particularly important as it allowed for a more meaningful representation of the women's voices whilst exploring their experiences (Fendt et al., 2014; Reinharz, 1992). This study highlighted the implications of feminist phenomenology whilst examining and understanding the meaning of women's gym experiences, and the specific corporeality of bodies located within certain cultural spaces and times. Through my own personal immersion in the gym spaces, the emergence of corporeal and lived experiences were elucidated to reveal the women's sentient realities – realities that would not have emerged, or could not be analysed or

rationalised (in such a meaningful way) if alternative qualitative (or quantitative) approaches had been adopted.

Whilst notable research incorporating feminist phenomenology has explored personal researcher experience through tools such as auto-phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2010), in comparison to this, this research adds a fresh insight into the sociological study of embodiment in sport and exercise, and offers an alternative way to bring the 'essences' surrounding the sensuousness of the lived other female bodies to the forefront of discussion, by embracing the physiological with the psychological and social to fully appreciate and explore the lived female experience (Wellard, 2015). Furthermore, not only does this research capture the psychological, sociological and physiological experience as one; this research also allowed for a range of alternative theoretical approaches to be explored, thus demonstrating the distinctiveness of feminist phenomenology and embodiment as a collective way of approaching the study of corporeal experience. This umbrella brings experiences together instead of marginalising and restricting embodied differences. By providing this, it allows for such differences (as noted previously) to emerge freely, rather than being directed by specific theory. Therefore, considering this, this research has captured the other women's experiences to fully demonstrate and explore the corporeal, sentient and en fleshed realities that they encounter within the gym. In addition to this, through combining ethnography with feminist phenomenology, my own experiences as the researcher are woven into the thesis to further represent my ontological position, and apply further meaning to the embodied experiences of the women exercisers – demonstrating the suitability and distinctiveness of feminist phenomenology in comparison to other forms of qualitative research.

## **2. Acknowledging the unexpected:**

With my own personal reflections in mind, and through the utilisation of the methods discussed above, there were five emerging themes revealed in this thesis. All of the themes confronted the simplistic foundation that women are not always necessarily in equal power relationships with men. Additionally, in an effort to fully engage with the study's research questions readdressed above, the findings were presented in five closely linked and interrelated chapters. Each chapter incorporated rich and corporeal descriptions from the women in differing gym spaces and times, which gave life to the phenomenon and breathed further life into the data.

Chapter five included evocative descriptions of my own personal spinning experiences, and highlighted the sensuousness of the spinning room. Furthermore, by analysing my own experiences, this enabled me to develop questions to ask the other women in this research, and to illuminate the senses that are heightened within the spinning space. Additionally, this chapter explored the women's views surrounding their relationships with food and exercise, and the bodily experiences that occur within the spinning room. Furthermore, this chapter explored how the spinning space unintentionally creates and reproduces 'docile bodies' through the repetition of systematic exercise and spatial choices. Finally, this chapter also elucidated the nature in which the women expect their instructors to embody a certain 'look', and how this consequently causes emotional labour and body capital issues for instructors.

Following on from the above chapter five, chapter six explored the various explanations and influences that the women provided for their exercise participation, and their embodied pathways into the gym space. Within this chapter, it became evident that the rigorous activities to embody the slim and toned female ideology for the female exercisers seemed to become a coping strategy. The dominant discourses imposed on the female body were prevalent both in childhood and into adulthood too. Furthermore, this chapter highlighted how although most women experienced negativity relating to their bodies, they specifically chose physical activity and gym practises as a place of resistance and empowerment, and for these reasons, they continued to immerse themselves within the gym environment.

Chapter seven acknowledged the women's embodied pleasurable experiences within the gym, and the sensual feelings and achievement of the exercising body in different social contexts, times and spaces. The descriptions of the embodied experiences relate to specific activities within the gym. The activities and the specific skills learnt were not only performative, but they also demonstrated a range of physical and emotional sensations that are interwoven with the individual body as well the social context, and time and space in which the experiences occur. Additionally, this chapter also elucidated the sense of achievement that the women in this research experienced from having a 'proper workout', and deconstructed the pain and pleasure binary by revealing the embodied pain and pleasures distinguished during and after exercising.

Chapter eight continued to describe the women's embodied experiences that are personal in various contexts of the gym space. One of the main themes to emerge from this chapter was how certain gazes and stares are embodied and experienced in multiple gym spaces; the women's reflections reveal that these can be interpreted differently depending upon particular temporal and spatial aspects of the gym. An important aspect that emerged in this chapter was the relatively neglected area of women looking and objectifying other women. The women highlighted these particular stares and gazes as problematic, and highlighted the ubiquity of judgmental looks coming from women rather than men. Although the stares and gazes from men were considered more sexual, they were distinguished as less judgemental than a woman's stare in the gym space. Additionally, this chapter also revealed how the gym could be considered as a sexually objectifying environment. There are multiple aspects that can be included for an environment to be sexually objectifying, and these aspects became noticeable through the women's embodied experiences explored within this chapter. It is also important to acknowledge, that within this sexually objectifying environment the different gazes and stares acknowledged encompass a variety of sensualities and experiences relating to the body within different social contexts, times and spaces.

As the final findings chapter of this thesis, chapter nine highlighted the embodied experiences of the women in relation to how they interpret sexism and banter encountered within specific spaces and times in the gym environment. The dichotomous nature of how humour can be interpreted was disclosed, and how women utilise the spinning room within the gym as a 'safe base' to enjoy humour and banter without the prevalence of sexism. In addition to this, the chapter revealed that alternative spaces in the gym (such as the main gym space) offer a heightened display of sexist humour, and the tensions experienced in this environment promote the women to construct mechanisms to cope with the sexism experienced.

Together, the chapters above highlight the importance of the feminist phenomenological approach utilised within this thesis. The differing spaces within the gym described throughout provides an insight into the areas the women negotiated, experienced and transitioned through, and revealed clear evidence of the gendered spaces that operate within the broader context of 'a gym'. Furthermore, it can be seen that the embodied experiences the women encounter are not only affected by the spaces they engage in, but also the temporal aspects of the gym environment. Consequently, the time and space of the

gym environment dramatically affects the range of embodied sensual experiences the women encountered, and the empirical data elucidated throughout certainly demonstrates the nuances regarding the impact of this.

Furthermore, by revealing my own epochal moments and divulging into the relationships I have formed with my body and other bodies, the self-reflexive, empirically driven, and inductive approach used to explore the other women's bodies in this thesis revealed the lived embodied experiences that the women negotiate within the fitness environment, interpreted their gym experiences, and finally, described how the women's embodied experiences affect their participation in the gym and throughout their everyday lives; therefore fulfilling of the research questions addressed in this thesis.

The findings are broadly in line with previous research explored within the initial literature in this thesis, and adopt a similar sociological approach (rather than a traditional philosophical one) to that of notable research using a feminist phenomenological approach to explore the women exercisers. The knowledge structures surrounding 'the gym' and the 'sporting body' provide ways in which the women learn to act in the spaces. Furthermore, emulating experienced embodied performances can be seen to both empower women and reinforce dominant discourses of the gendered body. However, it should be made clear that the experiences encountered are specific to the research location used within this thesis, therefore creating unique encounters that may not occur in alternative gyms and fitness cultures / environments.

### **3. Was this 'good research'?**

From the above reflections, I have highlighted the theoretical, methodological and empirical findings and strengths of this study. I acknowledge ethnography with the inclusion of feminist phenomenology as a unique, rich and sensual method of data collection that reveals the embodied, corporeal, temporal and cultural experiences of the women who exercise in the gym. As Sparkes and Smith (2014) mention, making choices and providing a justification surrounding data collection, analysis and representation as the study emerges is essential to good qualitative research. In order to be aware of these choices, it is worth referring back to the list of principles given in chapter three regarding how this research can

be evaluated and reflected upon, and whether this research can be considered as 'good research':

- **Contributory** (*significant contribution*) (Tracy, 2010) – the research has provided deep and meaningful descriptions of the women's experiences in the gym across specific temporal and spatial spaces. All of the themes confronted the simplistic foundation that women are not always necessarily in equal power relationships with men, and consequently produce coping strategies whilst immersed in the gym. The usefulness of utilising a feminist phenomenological approach has also been elucidated. Through my own personal significant reflections, it can be seen that my own sense of self and embodiment are presented and interwoven throughout that encourage the women to question assumed gender epistemologies that structure knowledge. Therefore, this research provides a significant contribution theoretically, practically, morally, methodically and heuristically.
- **Rigorous** (*openness and clarity*) (Cohen and Crabtree, 2008) – the research conducted elucidated the women's embodied experiences, and revealed the sentient realities faced in the gym. These were analysed through a feminist phenomenological lens and incorporated reflections of their embodiment in the gym. The inductive nature of the data was selected and presented clearly and logically, and demonstrates the importance of utilising an embodied approach, placing further importance on developing rapport, intimacy and compassion with the women. Theoretical coherence is made through the lived body, and realities of the women capture significance of the temporal and spatial aspects of their embodied experiences. By using sufficient, appropriate, abundant and complex theory, sample, and data from the field, and additionally utilising a thematic analysis – this research suitably demonstrates rich rigour.
- **Defensible** (*goodness, integrity, fittingness / consistency and reflexivity*) (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Smith, 1993; Garman, 1994;1996; Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). – I acknowledged my significant reflections at the start of this thesis and revealed the relationship(s) I developed with my body. I include powerful embodied reflections and draw attention to how my position in the field changed, and how I became more conscious and aware of my surroundings whilst being a neophyte researcher. This

reflexivity enabled me to fully delve into the research questions posed, and to ensure that a suitable approach and research design was incorporated to fully engage with the research questions. By incorporating the above, this research has achieved what it purports to be about, and the meaningful interconnections of methods, literature, findings, research questions and interpretations all provide a meaningful coherence to the study.

- **Credible** (*consensus and meaningful coherence, interpretive adequacy*) (Cohen and Crabtree, 2008; Eisner, 1991; Tracey, 2010; Shank and Villella, 2004) – the evocative data revealed from the women in this thesis surrounding their embodied experiences in the gym were sentient and corporeal – the credibility of this research is additionally marked by rich, thick descriptions, and includes evocative demonstrations of the lived experience by showing rather than telling through the data displayed. Furthermore, the multi-vocality further reinforces the suitability and credibility of the triangulation practised in this research.
- **Affective** (*sincerity*) (Tracey, 2010) – the deep and rich descriptions provided by the women in this thesis reveal their lived and emotional experiences in the gym. The reflexive, empirically driven, inductive approach offered in this thesis allowed for an exciting array of research to be acknowledged, and my enthusiasm to give these justice as the researcher emerges throughout. The sincerity of this research is further characterised by the awareness of the self-reflexivity of my subjective biases, values and inclinations, and the transparency of challenges surrounding the methods used in the study.

I have also addressed the ‘crisis of legitimation’ by emphasising the strengths of this research and acknowledging the principles above. By incorporating this, I have additionally crystallised that this research was not ‘sloppy research’ (Guba, 1981, p. 90), and that the research data captured was adequately assessed, meaningfully extracted, and provided support for legitimation (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2004).

In addition to the above, a further quality of on-going criteria for judging the goodness of qualitative research can also relate to *generalisability* (Schinke *et al.*, 2013; Sparkes and Smith, 2014; Smith and McGannon, 2017). As Smith (2018) states, a greater awareness surrounding the *generalisability* of qualitative research needs further exploration; and furthermore, a

noticeable lack of discussion encompassing the meaning of generalisability in relation to qualitative research is evident. It is important to note that whilst qualitative research can be generalizable, good qualitative research does not always display this. Consequently, it is important to acknowledge the potential generalisability of the research in relation to this thesis. The small number of participants were purposefully chosen due to their uniqueness, which can therefore be seen as a strength of qualitative research, and not a weakness. As Lewis *et al.*, (2014, p. 351) note: '*Qualitative research cannot be generalised on a statistical basis – it is not the prevalence of particular views or experiences, not the extent of their location within part of the sample, about which inferences can be drawn. Nor, of course, is this the objective of qualitative research. Rather, the value of qualitative research is in revealing the breadth and nature of the phenomena under study*'.

Taking into consideration the above, generalisation should therefore be a valid concern for qualitative researchers. Whilst there are multiple and different types of generalisability for qualitative researchers to consider (Green and Thorogood, 2009, there are two types of generalisability I have considered that are applicable to this thesis and strengthen the generalisability of the research. *Naturalistic generalisability* (Stake, 1978; 2005) is attained on the basis of recognising the similarities and differences of the results to which the reader is familiar with. Naturalistic generalisability occurs when the research echoes the reader's personal engagement in life's events, or vicariously felt through experiences (Smith, 2018). Naturalistic generalisability relates to this thesis due to the research bearing a familiar resemblance to my own experiences, and furthermore through the setting (gym) the women moved in, and events they observed and overheard. In order to provide a naturalistic generalisability, I provided details of the women's lives and experiences through 'evidence', of rich descriptions, observations and expressions of reality to enable me to reflect and make connections of these experiences to my own life (Smith, 2018). This generalisability also provokes the reader to reflect upon similar experiences that may have occurred in their own lives.

Another type of generalisability is termed *provocative generalisability*; which links and recognises theoretical generalisability. This identifies how research can extract theoretical lessons surrounding social oppression and forms of resistance from one context to another – in this case, the differing spaces utilised within the gym (Barone and Eisner, 2012). Additionally, this generalisability incites the reader to rethink 'the possible', and questions

the researcher to 'move their findings toward that which is not yet imagined, not yet in practice, and not yet in sight' (Fine *et al.*, 2008, p. 169).

The combination of generalisability types identified above has been constructed on the basis that this research is meaningful, presented in depth and contains interpretive richness (Smith, 2018, p. 142). However, the burden of generalisations is additionally placed on the audience to engage with the research, and evaluate whether the research is generalisable to them. With this outlook, the reader and researcher 'both share a responsibility when it comes to assessing the value of a particular set of qualitative research findings beyond the context and particulars of the original study (Chenail, 2010, p. 6).

#### **4. Ways forward:**

Taking into consideration the findings and insights of this thesis outlined above, it can be noted that this research only applies to a small demographic of women who were part of the investigation. The flexibility of utilising a feminist phenomenological approach enabled me to explore many aspects of the women's gym experiences and uncovered possibilities for further study, the findings highlighted significant corporeal experiences of female gym participants within differing gym spaces in general. This research also highlights the subjectivity within a small group, which suggests a complexity that may be applied at a broader level. Subsequently this demonstrates the problems associated with simple descriptions of 'all women' (or attempting to compartmentalise 'women's experiences' in sport and fitness). Therefore, this study presented an 'insider' view surrounding the women's gym experiences as they were lived and described by the thirteen women, and delved into the various contexts and meanings of these. It is crucial to acknowledge that the narrative of the feminine ideal described in this study is Eurocentric, heteronormative and cisgender. I should stress that my study (not deliberately) only explored white women, and those who identified as this; therefore, the lack of intersectionality displayed in this research proves to suggest that the inclusion of alternative key sociological factors may be a possible area for further research to be conducted. Furthermore, research focusing on the lived experiences of transgender individuals, and those who identify as non-binary would enhance current literature exploring embodied experiences within gym cultures. Given this, acknowledging seminal critical feminists who discuss the body as 'othered' (e.g black, transgendered,

disabled and so on), would also be an important addition to the diversification of literary understanding towards the female body.

It is also important to recognise the potential of using alternative theoretical approaches and methodological techniques in conjunction with the feminist phenomenological approach used. Whilst reflecting on the theory and methods adopted in this thesis, the representation of the women may have been further enhanced by using alternative approaches such as participant diaries, life histories, and auto-phenomenological accounts (Allen-Collinson, 2010; Sparkes and Smith, 2014) to give further life to the findings. Whilst this research is inductive and empirical nature, additional theoretical positions could be identified and extended to consider other emerging ideas, such as affect theory (Tomkins, 1962), and practice theory (Ortner, 2006) for further potential to divulge towards a deep, aesthetically satisfying and freewheeling interpretation of the data (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). Furthermore, there is room for further exploration surrounding theoretical developments whilst unpacking the academic shift from the female body occupying broad social and political spaces, to the more provincial considerations of theoretical development within physical cultural spaces.

Additional possible follow up studies to emerge from this thesis include exploring embodied experiences from individuals who specifically attend women only gyms. Given the findings of this thesis, it can be suggested that research delving into women only gym environments (without the presence of male dominance displayed in this thesis) may acknowledge alternative nuances and tensions surrounding the lived body, and may enhance the understandings of where these tensions are played out in women only gym spaces. In addition to women only gyms, research conducted in alternative physical cultures and gyms, such as leisure centres and gyms that do not embody the spit and saw dust ethos, would also prove beneficial toward the understanding of the female body and lived experience in these spaces - all of the studies suggested above would raise questions in relation to how the body is negated in specific physical cultures, and the possible impact of space and time on the lived experience, further strengthening and reinforcing the need for a feminist phenomenological approach to be adopted and continued.

In addition to the above, further research possibilities may incorporate the inclusion of recent feminist high profile movements such as the #metoo movement by exploring how these may further reinforce dominant discourses rather than confront them in alternative

spaces. Furthermore, there is also potential for this research to be directed towards recognising women's bodies in various waves of feminism, particularly the radical aspects towards the body, and how the emergence of feminism isn't always necessarily a linear process.

Given my emphasis on generalisability in the previous section, it can be suggested that this research is also useful both academically and practically. As Smith (2018, p. 139) articulates, individuals need to engage with generalisability to enable other researchers, organisations, government, and so on to make appropriate and fair judgements about qualitative research. As this thesis has created an additional awareness of women's lived experiences in gyms, it could be suggested that going forwards these findings can help governing bodies in sport, and those who create and update sports and fitness courses (such as personal training and fitness instructor qualifications) to be mindful of why women choose to participate within sport, physical activity and exercise, and the importance of how and why these specific environments may impact experiences – both positively and negatively as demonstrated throughout this thesis. Furthermore, academically, this thesis significantly contributes towards the notable lack of analytic attention to socio-cultural and structural influences on lived-body experience and embodiment, therefore this research is useful to those who wish to explore further the impact of alternative fitness cultures on embodiment and experience, the ways that women negate space, and finally, how women construct relationships with their own bodies. The specific fields this research contributes to include studies in sport, sociology, leisure, humanities, cultural studies and women and gender studies. In addition to these fields, this research also contributes towards the emerging literature surrounding gym cultures and the exploration of bodies in fitness cultures. It is also hoped that this research will appeal to broader fields, such as those who are interested in social and philosophical debates.

## **5. Final words:**

This thesis explored the embodied experiences of women in fitness cultures. It was found in relation to the feminist phenomenological approach utilised, that time and space was a major influence on the embodied experiences the women exercisers encountered. Furthermore as displayed in the ethnographic findings, there was a tendency for the women

to produce coping strategies in order to demonstrate resilience and create emerging areas to feel empowered within the differing gym spaces they engaged in.

On a personal note, this research has helped me to understand and acknowledge the relationships I have formed and shaped with my own body. Additionally, it has enabled me to interpret and make sense of my own experiences within the gym environment, and how these contribute towards the everyday understanding of my own life. In July 2018 the gym changed premises again, this new location and environment was not only an ironic closure to my research, but it also enabled me to fully appreciate the journey I have experienced whilst conducting this research.

## **Appendices**

The appendices presented in this thesis contains interview extracts conducted with two of the female exercisers, these were subsequently transcribed verbatim and in accordance with the interview conventions applied by Tilley and Powick (2002, p. 310). Furthermore, an outline of the informed consent is presented, and the 'notice of research' advertisement in the gym is also displayed (as referred to in chapter four).

## 1. Appendix One – Interview extract: Jenny

A: can you tell me if you were physically active as a child and what you did?

J: Yes, um, when I was a child I was brought up in Papa New Guinea, and erm, I went to boarding school in Australia ...

A: oh really!

J: so it was sport orientated and I was the captain of the basketball team, the volleyball team, netball team, softball team.

A: wow!

J: erm, vigero, which was like a ladies cricket, um, the tennis team, um, the only thing that I wasn't captain or took part in was the swimming coz I was really bad at swimming.

A: yeah.

J: um, so I went to boarding school from the ages of ten, till thirteen, um, no nine, two months before my tenth birthday, at the age of thirteen and a half, um, so always very active, um, then we moved back to England in '78 when I was thirteen, and that was my first experience of a, um, comprehensive school.

A: was it same gendered at boarding school?

J: it, it, was mixed ... yeah it was mixed, the girls school um, the girls and the boys school were separate ...

A: mmhmm

J: but we got transported to the boys school every day coz that's were the classrooms were and the teachers were and what have you.

A: so why do you think that you were attracted to physical activity at school from such an early age?

J: my dad was very sporty, um, my dad was very athletic and I think I just took after him, plus the fact you, you, that, in, in, New Guinea, um, you and especially in those days in the 70s,

you were um, you were encouraged and you played outdoors all the time, you know you, and they encouraged, um, at a very early age competition.

A: mmhmm

J: athletics, that kind of thing, so it was just something that you were brought up with ...

A: yeah.

J: and luckily I had the ability plus my dad was into it so ...

A: that's amazing it must have been such a difference coming back to here to a comprehensive school, what was the transition like?

J: it was horrible.

A: why?

J: I, well for one, the education that I got in Australia was for more superior, um, and I came back, um coz obviously in Papa New Guinea as well there was no television so you couldn't stay in and watch television, you had to read ...

A: mhmm

J: so I was, er, my sister and I were well above par when it came to reading and you, we came back in to this country and people our age, they couldn't you know, although at thirteen, they couldn't even read properly without stumbling over words or whatever plus I had a very broad Australian accent so I got bullied, um, I didn't understand how the comprehensive system worked, um, I was used to staying in one classroom and that was it, with the same people, um, I learnt, er, it was bloody cold!

A: haha! Typical British weather! (laughter)

J: it was really really cold, I wasn't used to snow because there is no snow in New Guinea, and when we lived in Australia there was no snow because we lived in Brisbane, um, so that winter '78 was the worst winter coz it was just horrible and it was up north so it was it was, awful. Um so, I got introduced to hockey, which I'd only ever read in Enid Blighton books!

A: (laughing)

J: um, and I hated it, hated hockey

A: why?

J: um, because it was always played in winter ... and um, because people had been playing it from such an early age in this country, I didn't know anything about it, um, and er I was always getting told off because I was too aggressive!

A: (laughing)

J: um so that was that, so really all they had in this country at the schools were, hockey, cross country running, or gymnastics I think ...

A: mmhmm ...

J: and I tried doing that gymnastics thing that they used to have in the 70s and I was just so bad at that, er, the cross country running I was ok at, it wasn't anything special, so really and truly ...

A: so you didn't captain any teams when you came over to the UK?

J: no, no ...

A: how did it feel going from that transition from obviously being a captain of quite a few different sports, and then to coming to England not doing that?

J: I lost a lot of confidence ...

A: yeah?

J: and also because when I was in Australia I was top of the class and coming back into this country I hadn't done French or anything like that, and coming back into this country my grades slipped, and I wasn't top of the class, in fact I wasn't even in the top class, I was sort of third and fourth class. Um, and I found that very difficult, I found that um, I couldn't get to grips with a lot of, a lot of thing, I became quite um, introverted, um, I lost my accent because obviously I was being bullied because of my accent, um, and then, when we went to high school, I, um, excelled again in athletics ...

A: mhmm

J: you know I used to do everything and once again I excelled, but um, I never really got back into it 100% ...

A: yeah, can you remember how you felt about your body when you were younger?

J: erm, In Australia, I mean I was just so young I mean, um, I always can remember at about eleven years old, looking at the older girls and looking down and think 'oh I've got a little bit of belly', but not thinking anything of it because you know you're ten years old you don't, in those days, well it's no big deal you know, um, and I don't think you had a chance to get fat at boarding school coz the food was so bad! (laughter)

A: nice and nutritious then!

J: oh it was bad! ... it was really bad! Um, and then, I think my body issues started, they didn't start until I was in the Navy ...

A: when did you join the Navy?

J: I joined the Navy in 1984, I was seventeen...

A: ok

J: yeah I was seventeen, um, I, I hadn't really done much, although, the only thing I did at school was basically what we had to do, every now and then I'd go out for a run with a friend but it was just a, you know in those days it was more of a jog, as opposed to, to a run, um, then I joined the Navy, failed the swimming test, had to do that again, um ...

A: how did that make you feel failing that?

J: well I always knew I was crap at swimming, um, my dad taught me to swim by saying 'jump in I'll catch you' when I was about five years old, um, and then swam away, so yeah. Obviously being in New Guinea, you've got the beaches, you've got swimming pools and stuff like that.

A: yeah ...

J: so I could play in the pool, I could jump in a pool, I could dive down to the bottom, but when it came to actual competition swimming, I was absolutely useless, I just panicked, didn't, couldn't do it. Um, so yeah, so in the Navy I failed the swimming test, er, so I had to do it again, that wasn't problem, passed the second time, erm, and then again, you, you know you

did your physical activities, which again I was good at, erm, in training school, erm, and then I went on to my first posting which was HMS Collingwood and I actually won sports colours, um, there coz I was running, squash, I was part of the um, HMS Collingwood high box team, I was the only female in that, the high box team. Erm, and I represented, yeah, oh did I represent HMS Collingwood at running? No that was Deal! Erm, yeah so, so I was back on par again.

A: mmm ...

J: erm, so that was that, but that, I went on the pill, um because obviously when I joined the navy I was pure ... (pulls a funny face) ...

A: (laughing)

J: innocent little me, um and then you know as you grow older and being in the Navy, and men ... boys, whatever um I thought I better go on the pill – I started putting on weight ... um, bam, um I put on probably a couple of stone, plus although I'd, I'd er, found alcohol before I joined the Navy, obviously in the forces you're away from home, you haven't got your local police officer Dad looking down ya neck, you know breathing down your neck when you're sitting in a pub at sixteen trying to drink a shandy!

A: (laughing)

J: um, so yeah, so obviously with that, the food again wasn't exactly brilliant you know, I knew nothing about nutrition, it was, you had breakfast, dinner, tea, you know you had the naffy where you'd go and get your chocolate and stuff like that ...

A: yeah

J: so you just ate, um and drank, um, and I went on the pill so yeah I did turn into a bit of a bloater, um ...

A: so when you said that you were the only female in your group when you were doing the activity – was it really heavily male dominated in the Navy?

J: yeah I mean, HMS Collingwood, um, you probably had, how many wrens, you probably had a contingency of about forty wrens compared to thousands ...

A: really? Wow, so you were quite kind of outnumbered with the male to female!

J: yeah, yeah ...

A: so did that affect how you became aware of what your body was like?

J: um, I don't think I, I became aware of it, and I knew that I was getting a bit podgy, but it didn't stop, I didn't kind of look at myself and go 'oh my god I'm getting fat' ...

A: yeah

J: you know I didn't feel disgusted with myself because, it, I still fitted in sort of my size ten clothes but I was, when I joined the Navy I was between a six and an eight. So I, I wasn't, when you look at photographs of me it was more puppy fat, it was more you know, it was fat, but it wasn't as in like twenty stone type of fat coz I was still doing my physical exercise and stuff so, and then, god I started smoking (pulls a face) ...

A: (laughing)

J: um, yeah, I was eighteen and I was seeing a chap, oh he was so, my first love and he was so um, sophisticated! And he smoked um, even his name was sophisticated you know he smoked, and um, er everyone went on leave the same time and in those days erm, I lived in Berwick Upon Tweed up North, and in those days it was just like a two hour, three hour train journey it was a good six hour train journey from kings cross on the intercity 125, and, erm, because all the forces went on leave at the same time, um, you could never get a seat, so erm, I was coming back er from leave, and I'm in the carriage. I'm in the um, I didn't even have a seat I was in the um, oh what do you call it! Between the carriages ... the ...

A: like the walk way thing ...

J: yeah yeah, um, where the doors are, and I thought 'mmm' go to the buffet carriage and see if they've got any cigarettes, I bought 20 B&H and er I started smoking ...

A: ok

J: there and then, um, and within a month or two, (clicks her fingers) the weight had gone.

A: ok

J: and I'm like (pulls face and nods head) ok! Erm, and then I moved, I got posted in 1986 to er the Royal Marines School of Music, at Deal in the catering office, erm, and I was still only a

size 10, you now I wasn't a, wasn't huge. I'm probably, I was probably smaller than I am now, but, erm, I started seeing a Marine, who actually said to me 'if you lose, if you put on any more weight I'll dump you' ...

A: oh wow, how did that make you feel?!

J: that was the start of everything ...

A: yeah ... I was going to say that's not a nice thing at all ...

J: yeah, and he was (whispers married) um, yeah erm, so that started my bulimia, um ... so, but when I was at Deal, again I came into my own with the running, um , I was the fit Wren apparently, you know, I was the runner, I did er all the athletics I just wiped the board.

A: mmm

J: um, I've still got all the medals up in my loft. I represented Deal for cross country and came second, erm, so my mojo had come back again.

A: yeah ...

J: still, I hadn't been in a gym, to me, I, you know, I was the runner, the sprinter, the long distance, the you name it, whatever it was I could do it.

A: would you have considered yourself to be a girly girl or a tomboy when you were younger, like the stereotypes we have when we are younger?

J: I was always the sporty one, yeah, yeah, I was always the sporty one, erm I was always the one that cracked the dirtiest jokes, yeah I was always the one that, dressed a bit different to everyone else, I was always the one that was a bit cheekier than everybody else, um, but underneath all that there was no confidence, at all, and then obviously this guy said this, and, er I went to Woolwich to get my Wisdom teeth out, and um, when I got back all my skirts were loose and stuff like that so I thought 'oh' obviously I'd not been able to eat for a couple of days so this is what it does, so I started purging, throwing it up, purging, throwing it up, um ...

A: how long did that go on for?

J: er, that went on for erm, probably, probably about a year ... yeah probably about a year ...

A: can you remember how felt at the time?

J: er, pretty, well I was just desperate to be thin, absolutely desperate to be thin, erm because I thought I was thin (claps hands together) people would want to be with me, coz obviously he didn't coz I, you know ...

A: mmm ...

J: and people would want to be with me, and I felt guilty about it but I hid it very well, I was taking something like er, 30 laxatives a day, 40 laxatives a day, I was in agony all the time, my periods stopped, erm, I didn't want to go out because if I went out, and there was food about I knew that I would just pig out and then I'd panic thinking well I'm in public now I can't, I can't, where can I puke, you know ...

A: yeah, did that have a dramatic effect on your body over the duration of that year?

J: um, do you know, I didn't, I don't actually think I lost any weight, do you know I think, I know that all of my sports stopped because I was so busy concentrating on that, erm, I stopped running, which you would of thought that I'd have done more of, um, then I met my, the chap that was going to be, that I eventually, that I ended up marrying, um, and it didn't really stop with him, I kind of hid it from him, and I wasn't so bad because obviously somebody fell in love with me and whatever so, that wasn't so bad ...

A: yeah ...

J: um, I don't even, I think I definitely stopped when I got married, yeah I definitely definitely stopped before I got married. But yeah I just lost all my mojo for, for training or, running or doing anything at all.

A: so how did you eventually get that back then? How did you go from that transition of really losing your mojo to being really active?

J: ok so I got married, um, and then, do you know I didn't actually really do anything, for the three years that, between me leaving the Navy and joining the police, erm, I did, I played a bit of squash, or I did circuit training, erm but the circuit training I started when erm, I was, I'd applied for the police so I could pass the um, fitness test, and then I got into the police in December '92, er joined the police December '92 er, and I can remember at training school

we had to run a mile and a half in thirteen minutes, and I couldn't do it, and I was devastated because I just thought you know, to me this should be nothing and I can remember I couldn't do it and I was absolutely gutted, erm. And then, even then I wasn't, I didn't do anything you know, I didn't run or the only PE I did was at training school ...

A: yeah ...

J: when I was out of training school and on area I was too busy learning the job, and my marriage was going downhill so trying to sort that out, to really do anything erm, and then er my marriage did break down, er, and in '95 I met a chap who er, was into the gym and the used to have a multi gym in the police station so he would take me there, but I didn't know the difference between a bicep and a tricep or anything like that I was completely 'oh really' I was always running and that kind of thing I wasn't really into working out in the gym, that really really wasn't my thing at all ...

A: yeah ...

J: you know you've got bike and we went out on the bikes or you know he'd come for a run with me, but again it was half arsed kind of stuff, erm, so then we moved, we moved in '99 to Ramsgate to Thanet and we bought house in Ramsgate, and then that's when my running really really started.

A: mmhmm ...

J: um ...

A: can you remember how you felt about your body through the transition of recovering from Bulimia to that process right up until your running got really really serious?

J: I have always had body issues from, from then, I've had self-esteem issues form a very young age but body issues I've had from that moment, um, and I have them to this day, um, you know you, you could ask anyone of my ex partners they will all tell you that there wasn't a day that went by that I wasn't going 'I feel fat'.

A: mmm ...

J: look at this, grabbing a bit, you know, that kind of thing, you know how can you, how can you be with me look at me it's disgusting type of thing. Um, so, I think what made things

worse is um, like partners who cheated on me as well that makes you kind of think is it me, is it because of this, is it because of that ..

A: yeah ...

J: you know, erm, so no I never really had, always always had issues it didn't matter how, when I look back at how thin I was at times and still thinking oh my god, you know still remembering in those days I felt fat. You know compared to the way I am now I was wish I was as fat now as I am then you know!

A: mmm ...

J: but at the time you don't realise it ...

A: yeah ...

J: I used to just look I the mirror and you see ... huge ... um and it never ever ever goes away, it's always there no matter how er how much you try and hide it and come over as very confident or what have you it's, it's constant, erm, so, yeah so my running really started then, because that relationship was going down the pan as well so I started running, and I started off round the block, and then it was every other day I'd go for a run and it got quicker and quicker and quicker, um, my best friend used to come and stay and watch me as I went running and come back, um, it didn't even occur to me to do any races or anything like that it was just I'm just gonna go for a run, I'd run around with Suzy Quatro in my, you know on my little tape recorder thing (laughing)

A: (laughing)

J: erm, the days before MP3s and iPhones and iPod and stuff, um, and the one day my mate said that she wanted to run ...

A: mmmm ...

J: erm, so I said 'well just run then' ...

A: haha yeah ...

J: just run, there's no secret to it, you just run, and she rang me up in tears and went 'I've only been able to do a mile and I've had to walk half of it' and I'm like 'well yeah, and so? Big deal',

she's now doing like, she's done triathlons and stuff like that and marathons and this kind of thing. Anyway one day she range me, she said 'I'm going to do a race do you fancy doing one?' and I'm like no! Well she said there's one up London it's a 10k, six miles do you fancy doing it? I'm like 'no not really'

A: (laughin)

J: but she persuaded me, and we did the race, got the medal and it was like (nods and smiles) Oh Em Gee! You know, erm, then um, when left my partner in 2001 I moved to a flat in Westgate and again I just carried on running and I got quite, my times were getting better and stuff like that so I started entering races and er, what have you. And then, did I just stop? Erm, nope all the time I was in Westgate I ran and then I moved to Dover in 2003/2002 the running stopped, but I joined the Leisure Centre so I'd do step classes, I'd do um, not body pump, body combat but erm, circuit training boxercise, that kind of thing, and I always remember saying to one of the girls who did step, one of the women who took the step class, how do you get into doing this, and I can't remember what she told me but she said something I went 'oh right ok, I'll look into it' and I never did. I just left it at that, I carried on going to the classes, erm and still running but doing a few races here and there ...

A: mmm ...

J: erm, and then in, I met another guy D in 2004 and he was really into the gym. Um, and still then I was (pulls a face) bicep, tricep, ab, erm and he'd talk about creatine and he'd talk about this and he'd talk about amino acids and that kind of thing and I'm like (pulls a confused face) really?!

A: (laughing)

J: you know and he'd talk about quads and pecs and I would just be like 'yeah whatever!'

A: (laughing)

J: um, and then he persuaded me to join The Weights Room when it was up at erm (clicks fingers) the old flour mill, and that's when I first met S ...

A: mmmhmm ...

J: and um, I think I kind of stopped running for a little, for about a year or something and I wanted to get back into it and, so S did me a programme and she actually came with me ...

A: did she ...

J: one of my first races when I got back into it, and that was the Ashford 10k, and I think that was 2006 ... 2005, March 2005 / 2006 ...

A: mmhmm ...

J: um, and then she took me on as kind of a guinea pig ...

A: yeah she has little projects doesn't she! (laughter)

J: yeah! She did, did I pay her or did she take me on as a guinea pig ... I'm not quite sure, I'm not quite sure but she was like, doing all of the stretching and you know stuff like that, we'd be behind the counter and she'd be like 'hi!' (Lifts leg up to imitate stretch!) (Laughter)

J: I'd have sweat all over me, you know, um, er, and that's when I really kind of started thinking (nods head) yeah, I'm liking this because I had structure, um, and somebody was telling me what to do, was showing me what to do as opposed to me just saying, you know just doing what I'd normally do and the easiest thing to do for somebody is run isn't it.

A: yeah ...

J: because you just put one leg in front of the other, and the way it made me feel as well, it made me feel strong and it made me feel as if my body was toning up and it gave me confidence and I started knowing what D was talking about and um, you know whenever he mentioned a quad I knew what he meant ...

A: (laughing)

J: you know from, you know I could flex my guns as well as he could it was that kind of thing and I loved the feeling of, of um, walking out of the gym and you've really really worked hard but you know you've done everything right because somebody has actually been there with you and has made sure you have done everything right ...

## 2. Appendix Two – Interview extract: Lily

A: can you remember when you were younger what your earliest experiences of physical activity were?

L: in the gym, or at school?

A: when you were younger, what did you do?

L: erm, well yeah, I used to PE, like rounders and stuff like that, I was quite good at football at one point (laughing) didn't follow that through, was quite good at rounders, erm.

A: what attracted or didn't attract you to doing them, is there anything that particularly stuck out for you?

L: because, in a class, I mean I was never, I wasn't a tomboy and I wasn't really a girly girl, but I was always better because most of the girls were girly girls, so I'd do really well because everyone else in the class was like girly and more, weren't really bothered. My best friend at the time was a bit of a tomboy ...

A: mmhmm

L: so we actually done really well, where as everyone else would be like 'ohhh no I can't' (hand gestures) like that so.

A: Do you think that is to do with your age, or do you think that kind of happened throughout?

L: I think it happens quite often, I dunno unless you really want to do it, most girls are a bit fussy about things, like a lot of girly girls for instance, that come to the gym, aren't in it to as much as I am, because I've gained from it, whereas they're doing it because they know they probably have to, but I don't really get the gains because they're not really that focused into it.

A: do you think it's to do with knowledge as well, because you know a little bit more about the body?

L: yeah, I think so, well I didn't at first but I've learnt it as I've gone along ...

A: mmhmm

L: So, but its coz I've wanted to, whereas some people don't do they ...

A: mmm.

L: like B (her friend) for instance, she ... she wants to lose weight but its hard work so she just does what I tell her, but I don't think she learns from it because we always go back to square one, erm, and she's like 'oh what can I do', and then I'm like 'oh do this, do this' and we are always going back over, back round in circles, and the only way she gains is if I basically make her do stuff from my knowledge, if that makes sense ...

A: yeah ... So when you were at school and you were doing PE and rounders can you remember how you felt about your body at the time?

L: erm, there was always better girls than me, like girls that didn't, the girls that were all like 'ooo I don't wanna do it' always looked better than I did, like they had bigger boobs, and like slimmer waists and I was flat chested and didn't really have anything ... I always used to look at them and think I wish I looked like that, but that wasn't why I done well in it, I don't think, I dunno.

A: so you think when you were at school you always had a comparison?

L: yeah, and like coz obviously there's a massive group of you in the changing rooms, and you have to get changed together you sort of see it don't you, you see like what other people look like and you see what you look like.

A: yeah

L: there was always girls I looked at and thought 'oh I wish I looked like that' now we've left school they're fat and ugly and got kids, and I used to really, really wanna look like them ...

A: how does it make you feel now?

L: laugh!

A: why?

L: because I, like some of them girls would be like, bitchy, or you didn't get in there clique, and stuff like that and now you look at them and actually, probably because I work here,

they're coming to me now, and you see them doing one off gym sessions and they don't stick to it but then I look at them and I think yeah you used to laugh, but now it's so funny ...

A: (laughing)

L: it's so funny ain't it! And like you'd always, like I was never in a clique, like hung round with boys or like my tomboy mate, but I was friends with them all, even though like they was in there cliques so they'd still be alright with me, but I never, never hang round with them, or never would want to.

A: was there a particular reason why you hung round with boys when you were younger?

L: because they weren't bitchy ...

A: was it easier?

L: yeah, they're different ain't they.

A : in what way?

L: like, girls are bitchy, and look at other girls and stuff like that whereas boys are just black and white, know what they like.

A: so when did you first come here? (Weights room)

L: when I first went out with A (her ex boyfriend)

A: ok, so how long ago was that?

L: six years ago.

A: what was your perception of the gym when you first came in?

L: well I was fat then, that was when I put on weight, coz I'd left school and started driving so I didn't walk anywhere, whereas like before I was walking to school like every day ...

A: mmm

L: erm, so yeah when I got with him and when I turned eighteen so I started driving, I started drinking as well a lot, and that puts on the weight, so when I, and he was really into it and I was really into him and I thought, I didn't understand the gym and I couldn't understand why he'd always go for like two hours a night, and I'd be like, I couldn't understand why he was

there so long, it's probably insecurity thing as they boyfriend before cheated on me, but I was like 'why are you going there for'

A: yeah, mhmm ...

L: what are protein shakes?! He would have them and I thought they were steroids, so that's how much I've changed because, and like when blokes come in with their girlfriends, and they're like 'oh shes giving me a hard time coz im at the gym', I was that girl, and I'm not now because I can see a different world to it, but yeah when I first started coming, I didn't understand it, he had to actually get me into it, he paid me to come (laughing).

A: yeah ...

L: bribed me with money, coz I didn't, I was a student at the time so I didn't have any money, and I'd wanna go out at the weekend and he'd go 'right if you do, if you do an hours really good workout on the CV, I'll give you like 250' so then I started like doing it like every day, just so that I'd get money! And then in the end it got to the point where I went every single day, because I wanted to and I felt really good for it and then he went to give me the money and I was like 'no its ok', coz I feel like I achieved that without the money.

A: how did you feel about that when you realised?

L: I think I started to lose weight quite a lot and I felt, I felt more toned, and like I enjoyed it.

A: yeah

L: whereas when I first started, coz I was fat and it was hard work, it was hard to like have a good workout and I think, C (her ex friend) used to come in, because A and I were best friends, and that's when she used to start coming. She was already into it, and it made me feel like shit because she'd be smashing it out, and I'd be struggling so hard on the same machine next to her, and it used to ... there was times when I cried next to her ...

A: mmm ...

L: and I was like 'I've got to go home', so I don't know whether it was like a hormone thing while I was crying but it, it destroyed me so then I started coming on my own when she weren't there, because I had a better workout and I didn't have anyone next to me making me feel crap because they were doing better ...

A: yeah

L: and that, now that's why I like, like if B doesn't want to train, I have a really really good workout coz I'm not holding back coz I never wanna make her feel like I did with C, so sometimes when I'm on my own I like have a really good workout because I've got no one there, no one to go next to or anything so it just makes you feel, makes me feel better now.

A: So is that what makes you keep coming back to the gym or there other reasons as well?

L: obviously that's hard work for two weeks, but I've learnt it, and like some days I'll be like, ten stone and if I wanna go out or something I'll work really hard so I'm like nine a half, just, I can do that now whereas I wouldn't without dieting, just eating proper, cut, I mean I, at the minute I've been eating like costa cakes every day! But I know if I wanna lose weight that I can just cut that out ...

A: yeah

L: so I can work it how I want, or do an extra hour in the gym or something like that.

A: yeah, so when you come to the gym now, in this present day, when you walk down and you enter the gym, do you get a particular feeling, when you walk in?

L: Yeah, on a .. lately I've been a bit depressed so I haven't had that, but I've, I feel, in the last week or so I've been better, erm, regardless of the depressed bit, now I will go in and I'm like 'yeah I'm really excited to do it' like I love it now, and I want to and its only B or if I'm depressed that's why I don't, or I'm held back.

A: So do you feel other people sometimes in the gym environment, make you not want to train?

L: yeah, not, probably because I work here no, and I feel like this is mine, like this is my home ...

A: yeah

L: erm, I know the machines, I know everybody that comes here, but if I didn't work here then yeah it would put me off I think. It would be harder ...

A: why do you think that?

L: confidence thing probably, like knowing people, wondering what they're thinking about you, whereas when I go in there now, I don't think that because I think, I dunno I think differently. I think maybe like, this is my home, I'm gonna use a machines and people need to see me use the gym, coz I'm here every day ...

A: so you think you have to represent the gym in a particular way?

L: yeah, gotta be really, and like sometimes I think, erm, like sometimes people see me train at a different time than what I normally do, they'll go 'oh you training?!' and I'm like 'yeah you just don't see me train twice a day!' like, coz they come in at a different time and I'm on the desk, they're like, they don't realise so I think sometimes it's good because people, that's how they should see me, they should, people shouldn't just think that I'm the size whether I'm big or small or the size I am because I sit on the desk all day, they, I think that in the gym I need to be that person that is active and sometimes it is good because people say, 'oh what, what did you do on there?', and then like I can tell them what I did, and then some people benefit from it and some don't ...

A: yeah, do you find that because you didn't start here initially as an instructor, when you were working on reception and as soon as you got more qualifications and started helping people that you changed a little bit in how you came across to people?

L: yeah, I got more confident, erm, and that was always my problem before, before I wasn't like a gym instructor, I was really like not confident and people would say 'oh what's this, what's this, what can I do?' and then I'd be straight on the phone to A or, and be like 'oh what shall I say for this' erm, and that was my biggest thing I'd go 'I'm so sorry but I don't really know, let me ask, and then I'd always be forever asking someone else, or like you (me) or like someone like A, S and S. All the time, erm but now, now I've gained experience from all this time, I can, I have my own things to say ...

A: and how does that make you feel being able to say that?

L: a lot better, like before I felt stupid, because I was in a gym and I didn't know what I was saying, erm whereas now I feel, feel like I know what works for me so I'll say 'you can try this, but it works for me, but it might not work for you, if it doesn't work for you then we can think of something else to do', I like to be able to give, like say that to people ...

A: yeah that's nice, so when you're in the gym, how do you feel about your body now?

L: what do you mean?

A: how do you feel about your body now in comparison to when you were younger?

L: yeah I've totally changed, like, coz like when you say about boobs, I was, I'm quite flat chested, but when I was younger I'd wear like double padded bras, like those ones that make them look two sizes bigger! Because I was so insecure about them and always thought that they needed to be bigger to make me look in shape, because I'm quite heavy on the bottom, I wanted to look proper, like a nice shape, when actually now I like, as long as I've eaten well, and my stomach is flat, my small boobs look fine, and for years and years I wanted a boob job and its only like the last couple, last two years where I'm actually confident and I don't even wear padded bras anymore ...

A: yeah

L: like, I've never done that, and, so, I've gained a lot as in self-confidence with my body than I did when I first started, and I'm, your never what you wanna be because you always wanna be better than, when you get to where you want there's always further you wanna go so you're never 100% happy with what you've got, but, but, you learn to be happy and be confident with it.

A: yeah, so does your feelings on your body affect how you perform in the gym now?

L: erm, no, unless I'm really fat and depressed ...

A: so do you think you go through stages of feeling like that?

L: yeah, that time of the month, haha. Yeah so like when I'm due on, or, like my hormones if there are miserable, obviously I'm eating crap, obviously I know what I need to do, but sometimes I think fuck it I'll just, I don't care, but then like, then there comes a point where I'm like, right I need to stop now, or if I'm going out, I need something to make me look nice, I need to train, whereas before I'd give up, whereas now I can just be focused and just do it ...

A: yeah .... So do you think there is an ideal body type?

L: er, the perfect body I'd look for, I used to, but now, now I work in a gym, and its, it's more of like a bodybuilding weight gym, rather than a fitness model gym, I've like, on Instagram

and facebook I follow erm, bikini models, bodybuilding models, and I look at them and really like, what I like is not what normal girls would like ...

A: so what do you think normal girls would like?

L: normal girls like, erm, skinny, like, whereas I'd prefer like, they like skinny, big boobs, and stuff like that, whereas I look at them now, and look at them toned, and like sort of seeing muscle, like seeing the muscle definition, not really bad like they do when they're on their competition day, but when they're dieting and you see like the sort of tone there (gesturing towards her thighs) I mean that's what I like now, rather than, whereas before, I used to wanna be skinny and have big boobs. Whereas now I think a lot of the models I understand that they've got fake boobs so if I, if I wanted to look like them then obviously I'd have to diet really well and have fake boobs, but fake boobs don't interest me now, but I just like the tone and seeing tone, not ripped to shreds but just like, that's all I want now, coz obviously they're my biggest part that's, like my arms, and my abs can get like that, but my legs cant but that's the only thing what I think that's left what I wanna get like.

A: so does your ideological body impact upon how you feel now about your body?

L: yeah, as in like, when I go and train that's what I think about, that's like what I like, but I know that's no just training that's mostly diet, and obviously unless I eat really well or go on a strict diet then I'm never gonna get it which I can accept, and I think the day I wanna do that I'd have to be really serious about dieting, but at the moment I'm not bothered, and I like eating what I eat. It doesn't bother me ...

A: yeah

L: and I think coz I, as long as I do the fitness side of things and burn the calories, regularly then I don't really mind what I eat.

### 3. Appendix Three – Informed Consent Form



#### Informed Consent

Dear Gym User,

I am inviting you to participate in this research study because of your active involvement in the gym. My research explores what it is like to be a woman in the gym. The study's aim is to explore women's experiences of the gym, and how these experiences impact on women's lives. Your contribution is very much appreciated and will be of great value to this project. A period of approximately 45-60 minutes is requested for a conversation in which we will talk about you as a gym user. If you agree, the interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone. All your responses will be kept confidential throughout the entirety of the project.

#### Possible Risks and Discomforts

There are no foreseen risks or discomforts under this mode of research.

#### Responsibility of the Researcher

The information gathered throughout this study will remain confidential. Original records and interview notes will be securely stored at the university. A copy of these materials will be securely kept at the researcher's residence. You may request access to materials and tape recording. This access will be subject to privacy requirements regarding the identification of third parties. You have the right to withdraw your participation in the project at any time without the need to give reason for this decision. In this case, all materials collected up until your withdrawal will be returned to you and not used in the thesis if you wish so. Should any data from the interview be published, you will only be referred to by a pseudonym. A copy of the transcript derived from the interview can be forwarded to you for accuracy and your personal records. It is your right to make adjustments to the transcript if you do not agree with it. You are entitled to receive a summary of the results of the study once completed.

#### Responsibilities of the Participant

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have no obligation to be interviewed, but your participation is greatly appreciated.

#### Inquiries

Should you have any further questions regarding this study please do not hesitate to contact the researcher. (Amy Clark - email: [amy.clark@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:amy.clark@canterbury.ac.uk))

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Canterbury Christ Church University Ethics Committee. The reference number is Ref: 15/SAS/235C.

All information is confidential.

Thank you for participating in this study; your effort is much appreciated.

Please confirm your consent by signing and dating below.

Kind Regards

Amy Clark

Name: .....

Date: .....

#### 4. Appendix Four – Notice of Research



### **'Notice of Research'**

Dear Gym Users,

Just to make you aware that I am conducting research (interviews and observations) in these premises for the foreseeable future – if you have any queries or would like to find out more about this, please email me ([amy.clark@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:amy.clark@canterbury.ac.uk)) or ask at reception for more details.

Please note that the information I gather throughout will remain confidential.

Thanks for you cooperation,



Amy Clark

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