

**Hegemonic Masculinity:
Just Another Day at the Gym?**

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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

November 2000

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of masculinity and gym culture in a regional Canadian community. Through ethnographic observation and in depth interviews I explore the ways in which masculinity is literally embodied in the gym through participation in weight lifting and interaction with peers. Drawing on research on masculinity, sociology of the body, and feminist and gender studies, I examine the social construction of hegemonic masculinity and the extent to which it influences men's desires to lift weights as well as how it permeates and shapes the gym environments in which this activity is carried out. In contrast to earlier social science work which focuses primarily on elite, urban bodybuilders, this study examines the experience of recreational weight lifters in two distinct gym settings, "hard core gyms" and "chromed-up health spas" (or health clubs). Comparisons and contrasts in the construction of masculinity in these two settings are drawn and data is compared with the experiences of elite bodybuilders described in the earlier studies.

I argue that the experiences of recreational bodybuilders in a regional Canadian community are different than those of professional bodybuilders. What links these two different communities together is how hegemonic masculinity affects the men that work out. Hegemonic masculinity invades gyms in different ways and therefore affects the men in these gyms in subtly different ways. I have argued throughout this thesis that the works of Alan Klein (1993) and Samuel Fussell (1991) are useful and necessary, however, do not account for the range of experiences that men go through well at the gym.

Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Pam Wakewich, I thank you for all your patience. Your kind and helpful words were a tremendous help to me in completing this thesis. You have been a immense inspiration, thank you.

I would also like to thank Tom Dunk for being a friend throughout the thesis process. Thank you Tom for your insightful and realistic advice. Your comments, as always, have been sharp and humbling.

I thank Randy Nelsen for reading my work. I realize that you have been busy and this thesis may have been a pain for you so thank you.

A special thank you to all those who agreed to be interviewed and to the rest of the populous for passively accepting the task of being "studied."

Table of Contents	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Appendices	v
1. Introduction:	1
i) Sociological Considerations: Aim of the Work	1
ii) The Body, Muscularity and Masculinity	5
iii) Focus of the Study	8
iv) Methodology	9
v) Ethnographic Considerations	15
vi) Significance of the Research	16
vii) Plan of the Thesis	18
2. Defining the Gym:	20
i) Introduction	20
ii) The Hard-Core Gym vs. The Fitness Facility	20
iii) Club Flex: Hard-Core - Fitness First: Fitness Facility	23
A) The Men of Fitness First	24
B) The Men of Club Flex	25
iv) A Day in the Life: An Ethnographic Sketch of the Gyms	27
The Physical Description	28
- Club Flex	28
- Fitness First	33
The Interaction	35
- Club Flex	35
- Fitness First	38
v) Conclusions	40
3. Representing the Masculine Body:	43
i) Introduction	43
ii) Theoretical Representations of the Body	43
iii) From Theory to Practice	46
iv) Club Flex: The Body Represented	52
v) Fitness First: The Body Represented	60
vi) Conclusions	64

4. Consuming the Body:	68
i) Introduction	68
ii) Some Theoretical Considerations on Consuming the Body	69
iii) The Men of the Gym(s) Consuming the Male Body	74
A) The Synthesis: Influences of Socialization and the Body	75
B) The Perpetuations of Consumption	78
iv) Conclusions	81
5. Hegemonic Masculinity?	83
i) Introduction	83
ii) Theoretical Considerations of Hegemony	83
iii) The Men of the Gyms: Visible Bearers of Hegemonic Masculinity?	87
A) Club Flex	87
B) Fitness First	92
iv) Conclusions	97
6. Conclusion	99
Appendices	105 - 114
Works Cited List	116

List of Appendices

Appendix	Page
A. Key Informants' Profiles	105
B. Interview Schedule for Gym Members	111
C. Interview Schedule for Club Flex Gym Owner	114

Chapter 1: Introduction

i) Sociological Considerations: Aim of the Work

This thesis examines masculinity, especially how men embody gender through muscle and the process of producing muscle in weight rooms - a social space in which notions of gender are literally written on, and with, the body. I have explored how men, in the context of the gym, are affected by dominant, or hegemonic, notions of masculinity. The study illustrates how men act out their gender in the gym and how they, while in the context of this environment, cultivate hegemonic notions of masculinity. Understanding why men lift weights helps to reveal how the male body is signified and shaped in relation to the dominant discourse of masculinity in Western culture. This study focuses on how men in the regional setting of Thunder Bay compare with men in elite and non-elite gyms in larger urban centres such as those discussed by Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991) in their ground breaking studies of masculinity and bodybuilding.

The body is the object of much attention in contemporary academic discourse. In the past two decades, "the sociology of the body has emerged as a distinct area of study, and it has even been suggested that the body should serve as an organizing principle for sociology" (Shilling 1993, 1). To understand the importance sociologists place on studying the body we need only look to public perceptions of the body. For example, many people in contemporary Western cultures have come to understand their bodies as something which they autonomously control. However, diet, sport, and personal "fitness" also comprise elements of a pervasive public discourse about health, morality, and mortality. In this sense, individual bodies are politically and culturally shaped. Diets require schedules, sport requires rules, and working out requires discipline and programming. In addition, the muscular male body is both a gendered social construct and a symbol of gender ideology, as Gillett and White suggest (1992,

358).

The idea that the body is an autonomous entity, thus, requires serious investigation. Recent work on the subculture of body builders attempts to do this through an examination of cultural ideas about the apparent naturalness and superiority of the muscled male body and how these are conveyed through the subculture of bodybuilding. The works of Alan Klein (1993) and Samuel Fussell (1991) are excellent examples of research in this field. Both writers have produced insightful accounts of the subculture of bodybuilding and its reinforcement of particular notions of masculinity and the male body among professional and elite bodybuilders.

Alan Klein introduces Little Big Men (1993) by stating that there is something behind the muscled (male) body that is suspicious. "In fairly short order it becomes apparent that the formidable bodies are responses to a shaky psyche, that the powerful arms and chests are a bodybuilder's way of working out a range of personal issues" (Klein 1993, 1). Klein focuses his study on the "shaky" interior of the bodybuilder but he is also studying broader cultural notions of masculinity. He argues that male bodybuilders have the same "crisis" dealing with masculinities as other men outside the bodybuilding community do. Although the size of bodybuilders makes them distinct from many other men, Klein shows how bodybuilders encounter concerns and issues of gender identity in common with other men outside the bodybuilding subculture.

Klein's work draws out common links between the bodybuilding subculture and ideas about masculinity in contemporary American society. As Klein tells us:

Without sinking into essentialism, I would argue that every man determines his sense of self through some sort of response to the biological emblems of masculinity: possessing a penis and male musculature. Bragging about the size of grants won or the numbers of publications one has is the same thing, in this respect, as showcasing a massive chest or arms with a skin-tight T-shirt (1993, 4).

Klein discusses how the narcissism and narcissistic behaviour of bodybuilders are attempts to strengthen a weak self image. In bodybuilding, the muscled body can

express to others a considerable degree of success. Klein sees a link between narcissism and gender identity and suggests that, "gender narcissism involves the process of mirroring back to a person his or her gender as an ideal" (1993, 215).

Another theme of interest to Klein is the connection between professional bodybuilding and homophobia. As Klein explains, homophobia is a range of negative attitudes which frame what are considered the borders or limits of masculine identity, the antithesis of which is femininity. Masculine traits do not include so-called feminine characteristics, and femininity is to be avoided at all costs. Muscle, for male bodybuilders, represents a repudiation of feminine characteristics. For Klein this explains why, on the surface, bodybuilders' masculine identity is never in question. "The construction of masculinity in our society is, then, built on the equation of homosexuality with women's effeminacy, and the repudiation of both" (Klein 1993, 219). Homophobia not only regulates a "male identity" it reinforces a hegemonic masculinity. Homophobia and narcissism are, according to Klein, basic constituents of the hypermasculinity so prized in American culture.

In Klein's final chapter, "Comic Book Masculinity and Cultural Fiction" (1993), he argues that the crisis of masculinity is experienced similarly by men who do not work out, regardless of how muscled bodybuilders become. Although Klein spends a considerable amount of time describing bodybuilding as a subculture he is evidently aware of how bodybuilders' notions of masculinity are tied to broader cultural ideals of masculinity.

Klein examines how the subculture of bodybuilding engages with issues of gender. His work does an excellent job of drawing connections between society and the subculture of bodybuilding. Yet since Klein's analysis is based on research with a select group of elite bodybuilders entirely within the subculture it is limited in its ability to tell us how the gym world is integrated with life outside of the gym. It is here that Samuel Fussell's work on the world of bodybuilding is instructive. Fussell's autobiographical

account of bodybuilding allows the reader to follow him both inside and outside of the gym. His analysis is useful in its attempt to link issues of masculinity within the gym to those in a broader societal context. In part, this analysis comes from Fussell's revelation of his own psychological insecurities about his body and his social situation.

Fussell's, Muscle: Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder (1991), reinforces Klein's findings in many respects. Fussell's initial interest in bodybuilding was generated by his own fears and insecurities. As he explains,

What if I made myself a walking billboard of invulnerability like Arnold [Schwarzenegger]? Why couldn't I use muscles as insurance, as certain indemnity amidst the uncertainty of urban strife? Arnold had used iron to his obvious advantage, why couldn't I? And if the price was high, as a quick glance at the tortured faces in the training photos suggested, well, wouldn't four hours a day of private pain be worth a lifetime of public safety? (1991, 24).

Fussell felt that if he could look tough on the exterior he would never have to reveal his inner fears. By engaging in bodybuilding he felt he could combat self-esteem problems. The thought of a weak and inferior body made him work harder at achieving what he saw as his own physical perfection. "I hated the flawed, weak, vulnerable nature of being human as much as I hated the Adam's apple which bobbed beneath my chin. The attempt at physical perfection grew from the seeds of self - disgust" (Fussell 1991, 138). The muscled body, in Fussell's case, represented an image of success and positive self-esteem. Muscle embodied power. The power that was embodied in muscle stood as a safety device for Fussell's everyday life.

The work of Klein and Fussell helps deconstruct the notions of "natural" and "autonomous" male bodies. Their research examines how bodies conform and are shaped in relation to broader societal forces which affect us as individuals. Understanding that the male body is constructed in relation to larger ideological forces is important when examining the affect hegemony has on men. Combining a view of the body as a biological organism and lived experience which contributes towards social relations, clarifies an analysis of the body as a system of representations (Shilling 1993,

101). This does not imply that there is a Cartesian mind and body duality; rather, it is that the lived experience of the body, and in this case the muscled male body, carries with it a wide range of social interpretations. Masculinity is not inherent to the male body, it is socially defined through the recognition and validation of certain characteristics and behaviours (Connell 1990, 89). Therefore a central concern of this research project has been to explore how the embodiment of the muscled male body has been reinforced in the social relationships within the gym.

ii) The Body, Muscularity and Masculinity

Understanding that the body is not an autonomous entity, separate from the self, is important. As Goldstein argues (1994, x), the sense of brute power is part of the carnal enjoyment that constitutes masculinity therefore a focus on the male body is important if one wishes to understand masculinity. The body works not as a reaction of the self, but may also be a projection of the self. Part of learning to be male involves learning to project a physical presence that speaks of latent power, therefore the body for many men may be the tool or vehicle of empowerment (Whitson 1990, 23).

Traditionally muscle has been viewed as unequivocally bound up with masculinity therefore many see bodybuilding, or weight lifting, as a natural extension of male identity. Determining whether or not men who lift weights view bodybuilding as a natural act may help to clarify why some view muscles and masculinity as unequivocally bound. Fussell believes that the concept of a natural bodybuilder is an oxymoron (1994, 44). The muscled body is carefully monitored and exacted for presentation. The body for weight lifting men, then, becomes object rather than subject (Fussell 1994, 45). "The muscular body as masculine is valorized, and identified with, as an object of desire to be sculpted and presented in exchange for recognition of its social value" (White and Gillett 1994, 21).

As an object, the muscled body is seen to hold a certain social value. "Muscles have great power, a power that consists not only in their ability to move heavy objects

but also as puissant symbols of masculinity” (Pronger 1990, 154). Therefore, muscle for men not only affords them physical strength but, also, a sense of masculine power. For Fussell, for example, bodybuilding represented a transformation from thin to “muscle crammed.” This “transformation” was associated with a personal identity change. The association between muscle, power, and masculinity altered how others viewed Fussell’s body. In this case, the muscled body went from being a defensive device to a principal means of assault (Fussell 1991, 25). Seeing and treating the body as an object shaped Fussell’s subjectivity.

Bordo argues that gender relations are literally embodied through the disciplinary practices of contemporary Western culture (1990, 85). The current emphasis on fitness promotes strategies of self-monitoring and self-discipline with a goal to achieving the ideal masculine and feminine bodies so visible in contemporary media and advertising. With regard to masculinity, her research suggests that it is useful to deconstruct the apparent naturalness and superiority of the muscled male body and examine the social context in which it is created and reproduced. We must continually remind ourselves that the apparent “natural” process of its growth has been constituted for us in particular ways by the discourses of a patriarchal culture (Whitson 1990, 27).

Understanding how certain bodies come to embody more power than others in the context of the gym highlights that certain dominant ideologies affect the construction of masculinity. Using the concept of hegemony allows us to examine the power of these “dominant ideologies.” “[Hegemony] is about the winning and holding of power and the formation and [marginalization] of social groups in that process” (Donaldson 1993, 645). In a sense, the concept of hegemony helps to identify the ways in which the muscular man, in the context of the gym, establishes and maintains power. To state that a particular form of masculinity is hegemonic means that it is culturally exalted and that its exaltation stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order as a whole (Connell 1990, 94). As Klein (1993) suggests, the muscled body

constitutes part of a hegemonic masculinity, and this masculinity is oppressive to others as well as to the self.

Understanding and identifying dominant masculinities is useful in exploring whether all, or even most males, participate in the construction of a hegemonic masculinity. Although hegemonic masculinity in the gym seems extremely prevalent, as researchers it is important to examine whether many at the gym actually identify with this form of masculinity, or whether they are merely complying with its dominant view of the self and body. Interpretations of maleness, manhood, or masculinity are not neutral, and in any given setting at any given time, situations may align men against women, or men against men (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, 10). Gender identities for men may differ from context to context. The muscled male body, according to some theorists, is viewed as the highest embodiment of masculinity in our society, and for this reason may legitimize power and prestige over other men (Klein 1993, 219).

The concept of hegemony also allows one to understand how certain ideologies function in a larger social framework. To understand why the image of the muscled male body is valorized in contemporary culture, and why these images embody power, requires studying why men feel that the body is an important tool of communication. Hegemonic masculinity and the message it conveys renders inferior not only femininity in all its forms but also non-hegemonic forms of masculinity (Bryson 1990, 173). Homophobia and misogyny are tools used by hegemonic masculinity to galvanize its hierarchal dominance. The fear of homosexuality as exposed by hegemonic masculinity permits men to show only certain emotions. For example, anger and aggression are acceptable emotions whereas compassion and empathy are not. According to Klein, men in the gym suppress emotions which are seen as unacceptable for fear of being labeled effeminate (1993, 219). Heterosexuality and homophobia, both of which devalorise what they label as effeminate behaviour, are at the bedrock of hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson 1993, 645).

iii) Focus of the Study

In reviewing the literature on the body, including some of the more specific work done on bodybuilding, it became apparent to me that there was a void in the literature. Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) discussions of elite bodybuilders are both useful and suggestive, however, it is important to ask whether the experiences of the groups which they study, typify those of other segments of the population. For example, neither Klein (1993) nor Fussell (1991) discuss the much larger category of non-elite, or recreational, bodybuilders and the extent which hegemonic masculinity shapes their participation in bodybuilding. Thus, to add to the existing literature, what I explore in this thesis is whether Klein's and Fussell's findings on masculinity and elite gym culture are relevant to the subcultures of recreational bodybuilders. In addition, this study is situated in a regional Canadian community, Thunder Bay, in Northwestern Ontario. Studying bodybuilding in this location allows for an exploration of regional dimensions of masculinity.

This study requires observing how masculinities are represented in the gym. Being part of the gym culture has allowed me to explore how men are affected by dominant notions of masculinity. Carefully documenting body practice has helped me determine how some practices embody or express more power than others. These observations have enabled me to both allow for a point of comparison between Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) studies and draw comparative observations on what makes the men which I am studying feel the need to lift weights. Thus, as mentioned above, the focus of this thesis is to add to the existing literature on masculinity and bodybuilding. Specifically, what I explore is whether Klein's and Fussell's findings on masculinity and elite gym culture are relevant to the subcultures of recreational bodybuilders in a regional setting.

iii) Methodology

The research for this project included both original data collection and a review of secondary literature on the body and masculinities. The primary data collection technique was participant observation in two gym settings in Thunder Bay over a 10 month period. Participant observation was supplemented with interviews with a convenience sample of male participants from the two gyms.

Participant observation is a methodological tool which enables the researcher to be directly involved with those who are being studied. The site in which the research is conducted is a so-called natural setting, that is the researcher has not manipulated it. This allows one to study participants in their most familiar surrounding(s). As Jorgensen notes:

Through participant observation, it is possible to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why - at least from the standpoint of the participants - things happen as they do in particular situations (1989, 12).

Gaining an insider's perspective was central to the nature of this study. Participant observation and interviews were used to establish whether or not there were common characteristics among the men that worked out at the gyms. They also allowed me to determine whether hegemonic masculinity could be observed among those who engaged in weight lifting for recreational purposes.

Research was conducted at two different gym locations in Thunder Bay, each of which attracted a different type of client. The first site was a public gym that represented a "hardcore" atmosphere. Mansfield and McGinn distinguish between what has been called the "chromed-up health spa" (Francis 1989, 23) and a "hardcore" gym. Health clubs are commonly associated with meeting the exercise needs of middle class professionals. Bodybuilders tend not to associate themselves with these types of clubs, and consequently "chromed-up health spas" do not appeal to many bodybuilders

(Mansfield and McGinn 1993, 51)¹. The location of the first setting was a more 'hard core' atmosphere, tailored to the serious bodybuilder or weight-lifting enthusiast.

The site of the second case study was a public gym that was associated with an educational institution. This site more closely resembled the "chromed-up health spa" and provided an interesting contrast to the first site. The reason for choosing the second site was to determine whether there were similarities and differences between more serious bodybuilders and those who weight lift for recreational rather than commercial purposes.

Participant observation was used to interpret and define the social and geographical context of the two gyms. Notes were compiled over a ten month period and were recorded in a diary format, and later coded by main themes². During this ten month period I distributed my time evenly between the two gym sites to keep a balance in recorded data.

When I began the study I started at the hardcore gym, to which I have given the pseudonym of Club Flex. After receiving permission to conduct my research, from the owner of Club Flex in June of 1996, I began working out and collecting participant observation notes. During this time I attended the gym a minimum of four times a week and shuffled the times that I attended so that I could witness the gym dynamic at different times of the day and evening. I was interested in observing differences in who worked out at particular times of day. After the summer months I was familiar with the general schedule of the gym. For example, I knew that Monday, through to and including Friday, there was a rush between the hours of 4p.m. and 6p.m.. The increased number of individuals during these times was due, in part, to high school students coming after classes and individuals attending after work. The weekends were a bit less predictable and busy times could happen at any time of the day. Although I staggered

¹ A more thorough discussion of defining the gym is found in Chapter 2.

² I continued to lift weights at both locations after the participant observation "note taking" was complete. If major themes arose at the gym(s) while I was there I recorded those incidents too.

my workout times, Monday through to the following Monday, I attempted to spend the majority of my hours at the gym during “peak” times for two reasons. First, by attending the gym during its “peak” hours I had the opportunity to meet more individuals, which proved useful when it came time to recruit interview participants from among the gym members. Secondly, the busier gym times had the greatest cross section of individuals working out. This cross section allowed me to observe the different groups of men at the gym and see how these different groups reacted to one another.

During the four days a week that I spent at Club Flex I reserved at least two days to go to my second site. By attending the two gyms, more or less simultaneously, I was able to draw comparisons between the two sites. After roughly five months of attending Club Flex four times a week, I shifted my focus to the second site, which I will refer to here as “Fitness First.”

September 28th marked the change between site one and site two. Since Fitness First was a public facility, determining the peak hours of operation was somewhat more difficult and as it turned out there were many different time blocks that could be considered “peak” times. For this reason I shuffled my workouts at Fitness First to include mornings, afternoons and evenings. I maintained the same schedule at Fitness First that I did at Club Flex in regards to the length of my workouts and the number of days I attended. The only difference between my workout schedule at Club Flex and Fitness First was the actual time of day that I worked out.

After the initial stage of observation and familiarization, the second part of the data collection began. Ethnographic observations were supplemented by a second stage of the qualitative method process which involved in depth interviews with male gym clients from each site. The interview process proceeded inductively, taking specific coded themes from the ethnographic observation and questioning the key informants on a broader basis. Based on the various preliminary observations that I made at the

two sites a sample interview schedule was drafted (see Appendix B).

I interviewed male participants from both sites. I used the same basic set of questions for both groups of men, but incorporated new issues which arose during the course of interviews. I conducted a total of 17 interviews between the two sites over a six month period³. Seven interviews were done with men from Club Flex and the remaining ten were conducted with men from Fitness First. Potential interview candidates were selected from the core of regular gym users at both sites, apprised of the research and asked to participate in the study. Since this study examines a segment of the subculture of bodybuilding and weight lifting I chose men that were part of this subculture. Men that only came to lift weights once a week or very occasional users that attended the gym only from time to time would not have had the same insights into the gym culture that regular users had. Regular users of the gym, then, were defined as those who attended the gym to lift weights four or more days a week.

In selecting potential key informants I attempted to be as representative as possible. Although all the men that I had interviewed were regular core users, not all of them had the same commitment to bodybuilding. For example, some of the men that I had interviewed had competed as bodybuilders where as others used weight lifting as a means by which to condition their bodies for other sports. The ages of the male participants ranged between 17 to 37, with the average age of 26 years - the age range and the average age were similar for both sites.

Although I attempted to identify men that were distinct from one another I was ultimately limited by the fact that not all the men that I wished to interview would commit to the actual process. Two examples of this were: some men told me that they would do an interview and then were never available when I attempted to schedule one with them - either they were busy or they plainly avoided me after agreeing to be interviewed; other men would set up times to meet and then, simply, not show up for the interview. Sixty percent of the men that I asked at Club Flex did not wish to be

³ At the point where no new themes arose, or the point of saturation, interviews ceased.

interviewed; the remaining 40 percent, that I asked, agreed to an interview, but 15 percent of those did not show up for their interview, or could not find an interview time which was conducive to our respective schedules. Fitness First had a much higher rate of acceptance for interviews than Club Flex. Only 10 percent of men that I asked from Fitness First declined to be interviewed and of the 90 percent that did agree to be interviewed only 5 percent did not show up to the interview. It is difficult to know why there was a disparity in response rates between the two sites, but from my observations it appeared that the men of Fitness First seemed more casual or comfortable about their interest in working out - they were not hesitant to discuss their attitudes towards lifting weights.

Recruiting the men from both sites was somewhat difficult. After a certain amount of time I became familiar with the men from both gyms, and we were on a first name basis. As casual relationships progressed the men understood why I was there and what I was doing. Some men felt uneasy about being "studied" and others thought that it was "queer"⁴ that a man would be studying other men. This fact did account for why many of the men, at both sites, refused to be interviewed. Generally, as time progressed, I was able to recognize which men felt at ease with me and which did not. Consequently, I asked the men that I knew were comfortable with my presence for interviews, and most agreed. I also asked men that felt uneasy around me for an interview - this happened only by virtue of being introduced to them first. Only one man that seemed uncomfortable with my presence agreed to meet me for an interview. Because of the poor response rate from Club Flex I also posted an advertisement at that gym. This proved to be a non productive effort. The only call I received from this posting was from a woman who informed me that a certain group of men thought that I was gay and that the posting was my means of trying to "pick up" other men.

The men who finally agreed to be interviewed were apprised of the focus of the

⁴ Homosexual is substituted by the word queer in this instance because this is the term that was used to describe me, and my presence at the gym.

study, asked to complete an informed consent form and assured that their anonymity would be protected⁵. With respondents' permission, the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Recurring themes from the interviews were marked and coded for further analysis. The interview data was used to help focus and elaborate the issues identified in the participant observation phase⁶.

The interviews used thematic open-ended questions (see Appendix B and C) which were formulated to probe the respondents' opinions on how the subculture of the gym affected their perceptions of masculinity and gender identity. I explored how their workouts made them feel (physically and emotionally); if their mood was affected by their workouts; how their workouts affected other aspects of their life, for example relationships and work; what motivated them to lift weights; why they continued to workout; as well as other themes which arose from participant observation. Questions also elicited attitudes towards different masculinities, perceptions of femininity and the presence of women in the gym.

The interviews were conducted outside the setting of the gym and took between 30 and 60 minutes to complete. All but one of the interviews were conducted at my office on the university campus⁷. By conducting the interviews outside of the gym, it was hoped that respondents would be more comfortable in presenting their own opinions. I anticipated that interviews in the gym setting might compel respondents to give answers to questions that others present in the gym would like to hear rather than the answers that they would like to give.

By choosing to use participant observation and interviews as methodological tools I hoped to achieve certain goals. The aim of the participant observation was to get "inside" the subjects heads or, ethnographically speaking, to understand the weight lifting world in "emic" terms. Interviews helped to ground the participant observations

⁵ Key informants identities have remained anonymous and all the names given throughout the course of this paper are pseudonyms.

⁶ For a more comprehensive sketch of the key informants see Appendix A.

⁷ The one interview that I refer to was conducted at the home of the participant.

that I had made. It was important to have the men of the gym tell me what their impressions and experiences were of the gym and the subculture. In essence, the everyday lived experience of these men helped to shape and formulate my understanding of the gym. The interviews also allowed me to contextualize my participant notes. For example, when I noted that there appeared to be an excess of mirrors at Club Flex and then was able to ask an informant why the mirrors were in place I was afforded the opportunity to hear his rationale for the mirrors which helped me to “make sense” of my observations.

The primary data was supplemented with a review of secondary literature on bodybuilding, masculinity, feminist and gender studies, and sociology of the body primarily from the social sciences. The secondary literature was used to contextualize local findings within the broader theoretical and empirical work on masculinity and the body.

iv) Ethnographic Considerations

The balance between distant observation and staunch participation must be delicately balanced. As Thornton explains: “If [ethnographic observation] errs on the side of distant observation, then [the researcher does] not get inside the perspective of the participants ... in question. However, if they err on the side of staunch participation, then they are in danger of what has been called ‘*going native*’, that is, of over-identifying with and being an uncritical celebrant of the subculture” (1997, 214). This dilemma is one which any ethnographer must face, at one level or another. In order to alleviate this problem contemporary ethnographers attempt to generate, what Klein calls, a self-reflexive style of cultural interpretation (1993, 285). There are two aspects of the self-reflexive style which deserve special attention.

First, as with any ethnography the ethnographer works towards transforming the “foreign,” or unknown, to a point of familiarity. There are moments when maintaining self-reflexivity is an arduous project. As Klein states, “[t]o make people

(readers) look at their own institutions, perceptions, and behaviours at all ethnographically, they must first be made to see these things as culturally exotic; hence the preliminary need for a requisite distance from their own culture before reinterpretation of the foreign to familiar stage" (1993, 285). In other words, at one and the same time as the foreignness is being made familiar, it too must retain its foreignness. By partially retaining its foreignness the ethnographer has a better opportunity of distancing him or herself from the site in question therefore avoiding the 'going native' pitfall.

The second point that deserves special attention when considering a reflexive mode of observation pertains to the familiarization process. That which is being familiarized must always be contested. As Willis mentions:

It is time to ask and explore, to discover the differences between subjective positions, between cultural forms. It is time to initiate actions to break expectations in order to probe different angles in a different lights. Of course, this is a time of maximum disturbance to researchers, whose own meanings are being thoroughly contested (1997, 250).

The division between 'going native' and distant observation is a tenuous balance. The technique, method, or approach must be the key between grounding theoretical rigor and ethnographic observation. "Though techniques are important, and though we should be concerned with their 'validity', they can never stand in the place of theoretical awareness and interest arising out of *the recognition of one's role in a social relationship at its variable patterning*. Without this theoretical quickening, the techniques merely record uncritically only the apparent outward face of an external 'reality'" (Willis 1997, 252). As an ethnographer the role of reflexivity is a useful technique to deconstruct the, "hegemonizing tendency of technique" (Willis 1997, 252).

v) Significance of the Research

The study of men and masculinities has grown in popularity in academic literature. Recent studies have highlighted male sexuality, work, religion, family, violence, sport, and the male body. Generally speaking, these studies have illuminated

the point that men too have a gender and that they too must critically examine the way in which gender is shaped by, and in relation to, dominant discourses.

In considering the construction of male identities many dimensions of social life must be analyzed. The gym would seem like a particularly good venue in which to study masculinity. The notion of masculinity is, literally, embodied by the men at the gym. Muscle, traditionally, has been viewed as something of a male preserve. As Pronger states: "the athletic body is an embodiment of masculinity and, as such, a vehicle of masculine significance in the gender myth" (1990, 129). This gender myth, as Pronger states, affords men the right and perhaps even the imperative to build muscular bodies and to use these bodies as a means by which to gain power over others, either physically or symbolically. Whether, and when, men gain power through the use of muscles is part of the focus of this thesis.

Exploring issues of gender and power has inspired many works focusing on the gendering of the male body, as has been illustrated by the work of both Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991). Many theorists have analyzed both professional and amateur sport but few have focused their attention on "leisure" activities, such as casual weight lifting or amateur bodybuilding. Even fewer studies have focused on leisure activities in smaller urban centres. For both of these reasons, and in combination with my own personal experiences in the gym, I have chosen to focus on how dominant notions of the male body and masculinity have affected men in the regional setting of Thunder Bay. From the ethnographic data that I have collected I will make comparisons back to the literature on masculinity.

The main goal of this thesis is to show how men are affected by hegemonic notions masculinity. In explaining this, it will become clear that although men in the regional setting of Thunder Bay are affected by hegemonic notions of masculinity their experience needs to be documented as unique and not subsumed under the classification of "bodybuilders," as the early work of Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991)

might suggest. I argue that all men who lift weights are not the same and that we must continually remind ourselves that there is a plurality of masculinities operating at any one time. The purpose of the study then is to add to the growing field of masculinities and the male body.

vi) Plan of the Thesis

Chapter 2 begins by describing the gyms. In this chapter a distinction is made between a hard core gym and a fitness facility. This chapter introduces the men of the gyms and highlights the differences between not only the gyms' memberships, but their ethos' as well. This chapter includes an ethnographic sketch of the gyms which explores the physical layout as well as the interaction of the individuals at the gyms. It is within this chapter that the gyms themselves are distinguished from one another; these distinct atmospheres, then, create an ambiance that caters to different male clients and masculinities.

Chapter 3 discusses how men at the gym represent their bodies through dress, language, and the physical body itself. In this chapter I argue that, despite their differences, the men of the gyms are on a quest for the "perfect" male body. The way in which the male body has been represented at the gyms reveals how men want others to see them. Some use tight fitting clothing to present the body as a model of success where others use language as a means by which to solidify their gendered identities. The chapter explores how common vernacular is used at the gym to reinforce gendered differences. In this sense, how the physical body is presented (depending on its presentation through muscle, dress, and language) shows how it is affected by external forces, such as advertising, muscle magazines, and other men.

In Chapter 4 I discuss how the male body is consumed at the gym and how the representation of the male body reveals certain ways in which the body is also consumed. Here an examination of how the body is signified, or given meaning, helps to explain how the notion of "fitness" is understood by the men of the gyms. Through

understanding how the male body is objectified and controlled by a number of different sources it becomes evident that the male body is not autonomous.

Chapter 5 explores why men of the gyms consume and represent the masculine body in a certain fashion. This chapter focuses on the discussion and analysis of hegemony and dominant notions of masculinity. I examine how hegemonic notions of "fitness," the body, and masculinity affected the men at the gym and how they viewed themselves and others.

Chapter 6 concludes the work by summarizing my main arguments and exploring the relevance of Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) works to this local case study.

Chapter 2: Defining the Gym

i) Introduction

Describing the gyms is important for three reasons. The first, and perhaps the most obvious reason, is to give the reader a visual sense of the social space which is being observed. The second reason and more important reason, is to demonstrate that the two spaces (sites) are distinct from one another. For example, early on in my work many people asked why I had chosen to focus my study at two sites, after all, as a fellow student mentioned, "all gyms are the same." As I will describe below, all gyms are not the same and the distinctions between them are relevant to understanding how masculinity and gym culture vary between sites. Finally, describing the gyms of this study also allows for a comparison to be drawn between Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) sites of study and my own.

With the above explanation in mind, this chapter explores how gyms differ. The first part of the chapter discusses some of the analytical considerations when classifying a gym, in particular the distinctions recognized between a hard core gym and a fitness facility. The second section of this chapter explores how the members of each gym define a gym and/or the gym in which they lift weights. The third part of the chapter, which is an ethnographic sketch of the gyms in question, has been divided into two sections; the first section is primarily a physical description of the space; the second section is a description of a typical day from an ethnographic and interactionist perspective (i.e. how the people at the gym interact with one another).

ii) The Hard-Core Gym vs. The Fitness Facility

Theorists have described gyms in a variety of ways. Some of these distinctions have been based solely on a gym's membership policy while others reflect the equipment that they house. Mansfield and McGinn offer a good description that combines these two techniques and draws a distinction between gyms in the following manner:

[Two general categories of gyms have] been called the 'chromed-up health spa' and the 'hardcore' gym. Certainly over the last ten to fifteen years there has been a rapid expansion and growth of health clubs commonly associated with meeting the exercise needs of middle class professionals. Bodybuilders are actively discouraged from using this type of institution by the deliberate exclusion of certain aspects of the technology necessary to carry out the activity from the facilities on offer. It is often the case that the weights available are simply not heavy enough to meet the needs of a bodybuilder. The ambience created by bodybuilding is not one which is valued by health clubs. A gym, on the other hand, whilst of course not being used exclusively by muscle 'freaks', can best be described for our purposes as being situated within a discourse which makes the 'outlandish' body possible (1993, 51).

Mansfield and McGinn's description is useful in that it makes a distinction between the "health spa" and the "hard core" gym. Their definition considers not only the socio-economic class of its membership but, also, considers the layout and/or the equipment of the gym. The description, however, does not question the gym's membership policy or the gym's ethos. A gym, for example, may have a particular membership policy that drastically differs from its ethos or character, as their description alludes to. For a more complete description of a gym I argue that these elements need to be included when classifying a gym.

To classify a gym by its membership policy involves looking at the composition of the facility's membership, or perhaps reading the gym's mission statement. A gym's membership policy may include two general classifications, female gyms, and co-ed gyms⁸. Gyms that are not co-ed usually specify that they are a specialty gym before prospective members are permitted to join the club. These membership policies are sometimes visible in shaping or defining the gym's ethos.

The second distinction that should be made when defining a gym requires analyzing its ethos or character. To recognize a gym's ethos requires considering many factors other than its membership policy. Some of the more pertinent factors that go

⁸ Female gyms are gyms that have membership restricted to female members only. Co-ed gyms are gyms that have a mixture of members, male and female, and straight and homosexual. In most smaller centres, such as Thunder Bay, co-ed gyms are most prevalent.

into categorizing a gym by its ethos include: what the gym looks like, what kind of equipment is in the gym, how the equipment is spaced in relation to other equipment, what is displayed on the walls, and what type of music is playing. What type of members frequent the gym, too, is an important factor to consider when categorizing a gym⁹.

With these distinctions in mind it is obvious that all gyms are not the same, even though all weight rooms have weights, some sort of workout benches, and a variety of fitness machines. Yet the physical structure of a gym is but one aspect that must be considered when accurately defining a gym. What makes Muscle Beach in Venice, California different from a Y.M.C.A. in rural Canada includes its physical structure as well as its location, membership composition, and the overall atmosphere. Alan Klein's work on professional bodybuilders in Southern California combines a description of both the physical structure of the gym and the behaviour of its members. "Don's turn had come to squat (performing a deep knee bend with a weighted bar), and the ante was up to 400 pounds. His training partners rose to the occasion by hurling a torrent of insults at him, even threatening him physically ... Face flushed with exertion and insult, Don stood squarely beneath a rack groaning with metal" (Klein 1993, 12-13). Klein's description of the "Olympic Gym" site combines a description of the members as well as the surroundings of the gym in which people workout. For example, the amount of weight that the men are using for their sets helps the reader to identify the site as a hard-core gym.

Determining the atmosphere of each site is an important aspect to consider when one is to define a gym. The first part of this defining stage involves mapping out what the actual physical structure looks like. Each piece of equipment, every mirror, picture on the wall, and cordoned off room come together to create an atmosphere unique to that space. The second part of defining the gym is determined by its membership.

⁹ This does not exhaust the list of potential questions that one may ask when attempting to classify or define a social setting such as the gym but these are some of the core elements.

Individuals that I have talked to have indicated that both membership and the design, or layout, of the gym are important factors to consider when choosing a gym. In part, I have used both the membership of the gym and the gym's physical composition to define it; secondly, I have used interviews and participant observation notes to contextualize the definitions of the two sites.

iii) Club Flex: Hard-Core - Fitness First: Fitness Facility

Apart from stating that one gym houses more weights than another, or that one gym offers more floor space, it is difficult at a glance to see how weight rooms are different. However, when we consider why some people choose to workout at one gym and not another it becomes obvious that there is a conscious decision to work out in a specific gym. Some men, for example, may prefer to lift weights at a gym which is more representative of a hard core gym, where others may prefer a fitness type facility. When questioned why they workout where they do one respondent from Club Flex said: "I've been to every gym in Thunder Bay and Club Flex is the best. It has a good atmosphere. Q: *What's a good atmosphere?* A: A gym has a good atmosphere when it is geared for lifting weights and not socializing."

Determining whether or not Club Flex and Fitness First can be categorized as hard-core gyms or fitness facilities, then, requires finding out what the perceived atmosphere of the gym is. Having questioned respondents on their choice of the gym, who they see as typical members, and carefully listening to their descriptions of behaviour which they saw as prevalent in the gym helped to solidify a distinction between Club Flex and Fitness First in my study.

In order to adequately define the gym understanding the clientele at each location is vital. I wanted to have the members at each site tell me who they thought were typical members at the gym. In combination with my own observations, the interviews helped to ground some of the more theoretical and academic definitions of the gym.

A) The Men of Fitness First

For the most part, Fitness First can be classified under the health club status. As Ian¹⁰, from Fitness First, told me when I asked him who he thought the typical member was: "An academic. Most of them are well educated. You are more likely to hear them talk about [work] than working out" (Interview 1, Ian). This response seemed consistent with Mansfield and McGinn's commentary on health clubs meeting the needs of middle-class professionals, however, the response tells us little about the fitness level, or drive, of the typical member. To think of it another way, Jason described the people at Fitness First as: "Mostly students. They are here for fitness, [but] I can't think of one way to describe them all, really. They're all different shapes and sizes" (Interview 2, Jason). One response seemed to be consistent throughout all of the interviews conducted at Fitness First, the gym is a mixed group of people.

All different shapes and sizes, however, did not include serious or professional bodybuilders. Most agreed that the gym floor at Fitness First catered to different levels of weight-lifting enthusiasts, however, when asked about bodybuilding there was a definite air of distaste. Nick told me during his interview that: "Everyone seems more concerned with fitness and exercise as opposed to hard core weight lifting or hard core bodybuilding" (Interview 3, Nick). When I asked him what he thought about working out at a gym which catered to a hard-core bodybuilder he told me: "It would bother me because it would change the dynamic of the gym. Q: *In what way?* A: The level of competition - maybe it's self conscious. 'I'm not doing as much as him' ... when you have huge guys at the gym [it turns into] a macho thing, they're ego tripping" (Interview 3, Nick). Most people concurred with Nick's response and shared the same displeasure with "bodybuilding types." "I don't like the tough guys," Mike tells me in his interview. "I don't like the people that go in there with their buddy and grunt and groan and lift as much heavy stuff as they can and have no form at all. Or talk about

¹⁰ The names that are used throughout the body of the text are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

how big they're going to be or how tough, that kind of thing bothers me. I don't want to be around people like that" (Interview 4, Mike).

Not only are the members of Fitness First not complimentary of bodybuilders, neither is the equipment at the gym suited to their needs. The dumbbells, for example, do not come close to the weighted amount at other gyms, such as Club Flex. Some have complained that gyms which house large amounts of weight foster an atmosphere that is conducive to bodybuilding types which have been stereotyped, correctly or incorrectly, as intimidating. As already mentioned in the interview with Mike the "tough guy attitude" is not appreciated at Fitness First. With motivations focused on fitness and not on bodybuilding one member, Hank, explained to me that the members at Fitness First do not attract a bodybuilding clientele. "You see very few of the bodybuilder types [at Fitness First]. I would say, in general, that some of the people that approached weight lifting in a manner with very specific goals, such as bodybuilders, tend to go to other gyms that better meet their needs" (Interview 5, Hank). The atmosphere that Alan Klein described in his study was not one which was fostered at Fitness First.

B) The Men of Club Flex

Individuals at Club Flex identify their gym in a different manner than those at Fitness First. Zane was quite clear about his opinions on the gym membership at Club Flex.

If I were to have to pick someone in the middle, with respects to level of interaction as well as middle of the road in goals, I would have to say it would be somebody that is hard core.

Q: How would you describe a hard-core gym, or someone who is hard core?

A: I'd say it's a hard-core gym because the majority of the people, that I'm aware of, are there to get bigger and stronger and that constitutes a hard-core gym and a hard core person. Percentage wise [Club Flex] has a lot of people that compete. It's also predominantly male as well, which constitutes hard core; and, a lot of people move a lot of big weight (Interview 6, Zane).

Zane's description of Club Flex is contradicted by the owner, Frank's, description of the gym. On more than one occasion Frank has mentioned to me that the gym has a great amount of diversity. "We get all kinds of people that work out here," he noted on one occasion. Frank's partner, Lisa, told me that Frank was consciously trying to change the membership composition of the gym. Frank told me that the gym had a good cross section of members, although he acknowledged to others that he was concerned about the gym's hard-core atmosphere. When I asked about it Frank conceded that, in the past, his facility has had the reputation of a hard-core gym, but felt that the gym was starting to attract a more diverse crowd. "[Club Flex] has always had the reputation of the steroid gym. 'If you're not 200 pounds and can't bench 400 pounds don't even bother going in there because you will be laughed at, or worse' has been a prevalent stereotype, but, that point of view is changing rapidly and I can't see that being a factor anymore" (Interview 7, Frank). However in spite of Frank's image other members, such as Zane, believe that the gym is largely tailored to one type of member.

Just as the members of Fitness First negatively commented on the hard-core atmosphere, so too did some of the members at Club Flex air their dislike for the health club atmosphere. As Stan mentioned, "I like the atmosphere of [Club Flex]. The gym has the weights and the professionalism that you need" (Interview 8, Stan). Stan explained there was something that was missing from the other gyms in Thunder Bay, namely, "the equipment you need" (Interview 8, Stan). "[Club Flex] is definitely a weight lifters' gym ... and I stay here because it's an excellent gym" (Interview 8, Stan). The hard-core atmosphere of Club Flex was of particular appeal to many of the gyms' members.

This atmosphere, then, influences and is influenced by the bodybuilding subculture which frequents the facility. Even within the subculture most associate bodybuilding, or hard-core weight lifting, with a certain level of commitment. Commenting on the typical gym member at Club Flex, Martin described this individual

as:

A person that wants to be there to workout, like you or me. The typical members are there to workout ... most of the people there are educated about weights and know what bodybuilders want. ... If there were people at [Club Flex] that were there that weren't committed I wouldn't be there (Interview 9, Martin).

Martin appreciated an atmosphere that was conducive to working out. He did not want to lift weights at a gym which was, "too social." A gym that was too social, in Martin's eyes, was one which attracted people that were not committed to lifting weights.

For most, identifying with the gym was an integral part of the entire workout experience. It was not enough to have four walls, a roof, and some weights, they must be specific weights and a certain type of people must be using those weights. "Not only is [Club Flex] the best gym in the city, it's like home to me. This is where I feel comfortable" (Interview 10, Jake). This "home-like" atmosphere created an ambience which members positively associated with their entire workout experience. As Jake mentioned, "at first [Club Flex] is intimidating, from the outside, but ... once you're in, you're in" (Interview 10, Jake). Wayne, from Fitness First, concurred with this type of statement. Wayne appreciated the convenience of Fitness First, but admitted: "even if I worked somewhere else I'd still come back here and workout with the people here. I like the people here" (Interview 11, Wayne).

In general, then, the choice of gym was not arbitrary. There are a number of variables which make a gym appealing to its members. Preference for some may be based on the equipment in the gym, while for others the clientele is important. For example, Wayne continues to workout at Fitness First because he likes the people there, whereas the equipment at Club Flex attracted other individuals.

iv) A Day in the Life: An Ethnographic Sketch of the Gyms

Ethnography involves keen observation and description of the sites in question. At times the descriptions may seem quite mundane, and for some, perhaps, even pedantic. However it is valuable to note both the mundane and peculiarities of both of

the gyms so the reader may visualize the two settings of this research. What follows is a description of a typical day at each of the gyms focusing on the physical description and typical interactions within each space.

THE PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

In an attempt to coherently convey the ethnographic information to the reader I have clearly divided the physical description of the gyms from the description of the interaction of gym members. In essence, the first section involves simply mapping out what one would physically see in the gyms (i.e. the equipment) and the second section examines the members of the gyms (i.e. their actions, and some of the more typical behaviours observed).

Club Flex:

Upon entering Club Flex I am typically greeted by one of three people: the owner, Frank, the owner's partner, Lisa, or one of Frank's employees, John. As I open the heavy wooden door immediately to my left is a desk where one of these people is seated. The attendant at the desk monitors who is entering and exiting the gym. Being the only entrance into the gym, no one is able to pass without either paying or being recognized as a member¹¹.

The desk is the pulse of the gym. At the front desk members or users may pay their membership dues, purchase carbohydrate beverages and other weight lifting supplements such as power bars¹², have conversations with the attendant on duty, request music - for this is where you will find the stereo that gives the gym its music, buy workout garments, admire the "wall of fame" where pictures of successful competitive bodybuilders from Club Flex are displayed for all to see, or simply weigh yourself on the scale which is located beside the massive bureau.

Frank, Lisa, and John, who are the regular occupants of this desk, are dressed in

¹¹ Not all members at the gym have to show their membership cards. Most of the members workout frequently enough, or have been there long enough, that proof of membership is not necessary.

¹² Power bars are snack bars that contain high levels of vitamins and minerals and are, for the most part, high in calories and, are generally, low in fat.

typical gym attire - baggy sweat pants, running shoes, and loose fitting sweatshirts which are layered over a t-shirt or tank top. Their dress is similar to the majority of members at the gym. Since there is no official dress code at the gym what one wears to workout reflects personal choice. The manner in which one is clothed may reveal some interesting distinctions between the members of the gym. The way in which a member is dressed reveals, in many cases, their commitment to weight lifting and/or bodybuilding. "Most of the *regulars*, particularly those who consider themselves in top physical condition, [wear] sleeveless undershirts or muscle shirts for their workouts" (Thompson and Bair 1982, 193). The novice weight-lifting enthusiasts, on the other hand, wear the standard gym shorts and t-shirts and the competitive bodybuilders, typically, wear strategically layered tops¹³, loose fitting sweat pants, and steel-toed work boots.

The desk is located on your left as you enter and the weight room is located on your right. Before you are able to enter the weight room you must pass not only the front desk, but the lounge as well. The lounge is little more than a couple of sofas. In front of the sofas is a magazine rack where members may peruse their favourite back issues of Muscle & Fitness, Flex, Ironman, Musclemag, Shape, and a scattering of other titles which include a limited number of Sports Illustrated, Fortune, and Cosmopolitan magazines.

The lounge not only allows members of the gym the opportunity to shuffle through the library of pulp magazines, and sit and relax, but it also allows these members a clear view of the gym floor. From the sofas some members sit and watch the interaction on the gym floor. While relaxing on the sofas some like to watch others work out, where other members wait until the gym fills up before they begin their workout.

Back issues of bodybuilding magazines are visibly strewn over parts of the floor.

¹³ These tops can be described as large sweatshirts that have had the necks removed and the individual then wears either a t-shirt or a tank top under them to give the appearance of the layer.

To complement the bodybuilding magazines that are read by the members on a regular basis, pictures of successful bodybuilders, too, are displayed on the walls around the gym. Where mirrors do not blanket the walls there are pictures of bodybuilders. Arnold Schwarzenegger, for example, has his own wall where multiple pictures have been pasted into a collage to pay homage to his illustrious past. Although there are other pictures of professional bodybuilders displayed, nobody seems to share the attention that Arnold does on the gym walls of Club Flex.

Continuing through the gym floor you reach another room which is sectioned off by a glass wall, and a step. This room houses the pin board (which posts announcements, gives the numbers of personal trainers and physical therapists, updates members on the various bodybuilding competitions - complete with times, locations, registration fees, and guidelines, and news clippings of successful Club Flex bodybuilders), the television, four different weight machines (three of which are machines designed for leg exercises), and the rest of the space is dedicated to cardiovascular machines. The "cardio room," as it is called, is unique from the rest of the gym. In the cardio room the music from the gym floor is masked by the sounds emanating from the cardiovascular equipment and the television. Many of the members watch the television while on the various machines. The cardio machines vary from stair climbers and tread mills, to stationary bicycles. Most members use this room for short periods of time to "warm up" before working out. There are also mats situated throughout the room where one many do abdominal work, or stretch.

Proceeding through the cardio room you come to an area which consists of four separate spaces. The first two spaces are the women's and men's change rooms. Down the hall from these two rooms is the sauna and a tanning room. Both the sauna and the tanning rooms are used by only a small percentage of the gym members. Both rooms are used by bodybuilders looking to cut weight and tone for competition.

Once inside the men's change room there is an overwhelming odor of body

perspiration and cheap, or at least overabundant, men's cologne¹⁴. Like any change room there are lockers, showers, washroom facilities, but unlike the ordinary change room there is a small room off of the locker room which contains two small sinks, and wall to wall mirrors. This is where the 'guys' come to pose before they get ready to either workout or go home. I am sheepish to admit that on occasion I myself have been caught admiring a side of my body that I have not seen before. Most though are not as bashful as I was the first time I noticed myself doing this. Many of the men storm into the change room slowly peel off their sweaty gym uniform and practice their poses.

The actual gym floor utilizes the majority of the total floor space at the gym. For example, the cardio room in comparison to the gym floor is much smaller. The weight room itself contains a variety of machines, but the definite focus is on free weights. Dumbbells run along two entire walls of the gym floor. The long rack of dumbbells range in weight from five pounds all the way up to one hundred and thirty pounds. At Club Flex, free weights have a prestige position in working out. Due to the expertise required to properly lift free weights many prefer to use them, as opposed to the machines. As Aycock mentions in his study:

Partly because of the greater skill said to be involved in the use of the free weights, and thus the potential for successful presentation of oneself as a more proficient athlete, a serious lifter tends to denigrate weight machines and those who use them, and to emphasize barbells and dumbbells for a heavier, more complex workout (benches of various kinds are often used in conjunction with free weights but aren't usually included under the rubric of machines) (1992, 348).

Many times you see individuals using part of a machine to do an exercise with free weights. For example, individuals may use the seat of the "lat¹⁵" machine to work their

¹⁴ From time to time the smell may change, and it would be false to suggest that the change room always smells like men's cologne, however, it is a popular scent.

¹⁵ "Lat" refers to the latissimus dorsi muscles running down from the underarm to the lower back. These muscles are responsible for giving individuals the "V-shape" that is so admired in bodybuilding. The machine itself consists of weights that are connected to an overhead cable which is then fed back to the lifter via an overhead bar which they pull down behind the head and neck until they reach the shoulders.

hamstrings.

Most individuals who start lifting weights at a gym for the first time tend to use the machines as their primary means of working out. Samuel Fussell came to understand the primary difference between the free weights and the machines during his time at the gym. "The hugest men I'd seen, the men in the magazines, were always pictured with free-weights. They never seemed to trifle with the Universal [machine] ... 'See, we been watchin' you at the machines. And you know, man, we don't get it. Wha'choo want to work so hard for and waste it on them machines?'" (Fussell 1991, 44). With the focus on free weights at Club Flex many first time users are not afforded the comfort of using many machines and in the majority of cases use the free weights, for reasons similar to Fussell. I have seen and heard some of the older members encouraging the younger members to, "get off the machines," so they can, "maximize their gains." Many of the younger members who decide to dedicate their workouts to the free weights are unprepared to do so. As the owner, Frank, told me in his interview, "a lot of people come in very uncoordinated" (Interview 7, Frank). This lack of coordination can lead to serious injury if the members are not aware how to lift the weights properly. This emphasis on free weights does not make Club Flex attractive to many novice weight-lifting enthusiasts¹⁶.

An additional part of the defining atmosphere is the music that courses through the gym on a daily basis. The music is loud, and heavy. "Music speakers blare a constant stream of rock that is far removed from the elevator music by virtue of its jagged rhythms and driving beat" (Aycock 1992, 344). The music is rather eclectic but for the most part two genres are represented: heavy metal, and dance. Van Halen and AC DC are both popular selections at Club Flex. Similar to my experience at Club Flex, Klein explains:

"Aerosmith's Steve Tyler could be heard singing 'Love in an Elevator' in every nook and cranny of the two-story structure. The massive sound system is the

¹⁶ This does not imply that there are no novice weight lifting enthusiasts working out at Club Flex though.

heartbeat of the gym. You won't hear rock classics or flaccid rock here, only the baseline stuff that gooses you as you enter into a world in need of a psych (elevated mood to fit the level of activity)" (1993, 12).

The desired effect of the music is to motivate the members of the gym throughout their workouts. On occasion a song may resonate out of the speakers which does not appeal to the majority of the gym members. For example, if a song were to be played which was soft and slow the displeasure of some members would come about in the form of requesting that the music be changed. I have heard members shout: "How the hell am I suppose to workout to this!" On one occasion I heard a member express his displeasure with a particular song by stating to the other members around him, "Am I suppose ta be workin' out, or am I suppose ta be makin' love?"

The music, the mirrors, the pictures, and the sport drinks and supplies all have the ambiance of a hard-core gym. Talking with many members about the atmosphere at Club Flex most agree that it is a hard-core gym. Some of the members express their dislike for the hard-core atmosphere, but ironically continue to lift weights there. Most of the members agree that it is a good place to workout and for this reason remain members.

Fitness First¹⁷ :

There are two entrances to Fitness First, one from the parking lot, which may seem like the back door, and another from the front, for those who have walked or ridden their bikes to the gym. Entering from the parking lot allows access to a hallway which takes you past three squash courts on the right and the weight room on the left (both of which are viewed from above through glass windows). Due to the fact that the hallway is above the weight room, standing in this space allows you to observe the weight room without having to actually be in the gym. In this respect, the hallway is much like the lounge that has been described at Club Flex - though people do not gaze at others from this location with the same frequency, or intensity, as they do at the

¹⁷ The name Fitness First is a pseudonym.

previous location.

To reach the weight room, the squash courts, and the change rooms you must go to the lower level of the fitness complex. But before you are able to reach any of these three destinations you will pass what is commonly referred to as "the cage." The cage is where you "check in," so to speak. At the cage you may request a towel, tickets for the swimming pool, athletic clothing, squash sports supplies, or bottled water. The cage does not specialize in fitness-related drinks and supplements as the front desk at Club Flex does. The main purpose of the cage is to regulate members' access to the facilities.

Proceeding away from the cage you reach the change rooms. Once inside the change room, which is considerably larger than Club Flex's change room, you find a mass of lockers. If you do not rent a locker, day lockers are provided for the members or guests. The washroom facilities consist of urinals, stalled toilets, and many sinks. Opposed to the multi-mirrored room at Club Flex, the sinks at Fitness First have above them one single long mirror.

Leaving the change room facilities you make your way down a long hall to an open set of double doors to the weight room. You are immediately greeted by cardiovascular equipment. Stationary bikes and stair climbers are available for all members to use at any time as long as you sign up on the boards located directly behind the machines. Passing by the bikes and stairmasters there is a large area of mats that are used for stretching or abdominal exercises. Once leaving this space you are on the gym floor. The gym floor, the matted area, and the cardio equipment are within the same space and are not separated by walls, steps, or glass.

The gym floor, or weight area itself is not terribly large, perhaps half the size of a hockey rink's ice surface. There are the basic machines, including racks of barbells and dumbbells, but the quantity of equipment and the range of weights falls well short of what is offered at Club Flex. The dumbbells range in weight from five pounds to eighty

pounds. This is fifty pounds less than those at Club Flex.

There are no pictures up on the walls, and the mirrors are limited to one wall. Although there is plenty of space on which to hang pictures and more mirrors, Fitness First chooses to leave the walls relatively bare. Nobody seems to take notice of the barren walls, nor does there seem to be any competition for the limited mirror space in the gym.

People at the gym seem far more concerned with their individual routines and less with their own appearance, or that of those around them. The basic dress code at the gym is t-shirts and shorts. Relatively, few individuals wear spandex and muscle shirts¹⁸. Most people appear to be dressed in similar garb at the gym, as opposed to the multiplicity of work out wear at Club Flex.

The music does not seem to play a central role at Fitness First. The music at the gym comes from one of the local radio stations, varies tremendously, and is rarely loud enough to either disturb or motivate the gym members. For this reason members who are interested in listening to music tend to bring Walkmans and other listening devices with them when they workout.

THE INTERACTION

Aside from the actual physical description of the two facilities it is useful to give a detailed description of a typical day at the gyms from more of an interactionist perspective. The interaction that actually occurs at the gym on a typical day reveals different aspects of the gym and its clientele.

Club Flex:

Apart from the physical description previously discussed there are other dimensions or features which make Club Flex's surroundings conducive to a hard-core environment. One of the most striking features of this environment was who inhabited the space and what types of equipment various people used. The gym membership

¹⁸ Muscles shirts may come in two varieties: either tight fitting tank tops and t-shirts or loose fitting sweat shirts which have the neck cut out to expose the trapezoid muscles.

consists of, roughly, 80 percent men¹⁹. Of this 80 percent, I have estimated that 90 percent of them are dedicated to using the weights as their primary means of fitness. It was not unusual, for example, to walk into the gym and find the men using free weights and/or machines and the women using the cardiovascular equipment. This statement, of course, is not absolute for I did see men use the cardio machines, however, a greater proportion of women tended to use the cardio machines as the primary focus of their workout. Many members at the gym have told me on more than one occasion that, “women are more interested in cardio, and fitness, and less concerned with strength.” Some men at the gym had expressed to me that they preferred women to focus their workouts primarily on the cardio machines. When I asked Zane what he thought of women who worked out he told me: “If they’re in it for general fitness I think that’s great. Q: *Why?* A: It’s not attractive to me when a girl gets too big, too muscular. [When women are like this] they look too much like a guy and it’s just not attractive” (Interview 6, Zane). Most people that I had casually talked with at the gym, about this issue, concurred with Zane’s response.

There were women that were dedicated to lifting weights at Club Flex, however, the majority of these women tended to work out with men. There were male-female couples that came in on a regular basis and worked out together. A few women, that I am aware of, worked out on the weights by themselves. One was a certified personal trainer, Betty, who trained men and women alike. Betty was met with mixed reaction by the people at the gym. She had a core group of friends that she had regular conversations with, but others told me that they did not like her. Betty advertised her services using the pin board in the cardio room. This advertisement included a detailed resume and a picture of herself “posing down²⁰.” The picture of Betty “posing” was

¹⁹ The owner of Club Flex never did not give me an exact membership numbers of men and women, therefore, the numbers of men and women are estimates.

²⁰ To “pose down” refers to a routine where one flexes the muscles of their body to a structured order. For example, a double biceps pose is, normally, followed by either a lat spread (men) or a side chest pose (men and women). This posing down allows individuals the best view of their expanded muscles.

from the side chest pose perspective. Every time a new picture went up on the board, regardless of the pose, it was inevitably vandalized. Some people at the gym seemed concerned about Betty's sexual orientation. "I think she's gay," one member told me. When I asked this member to elaborate on his comment he said that it was not natural for women to pursue weights in the same fashion as men did and did not understand why women strive for excess muscle. If a woman strives for excess muscle she was trying to be like a man, as I was told.

Nobody seemed too overt about openly criticizing another member, whether it was a woman or a man. Most people huddled in groups to express their distaste for someone. After a competition, for example, many gossiped for weeks after about who should have won and why. On the surface, people seemed to be civil to one another, but this civility appeared to be more superficial than real.

The air of competition was quite evident at Club Flex. Some of this competitive "nature" was revealed by the gossiping, as noted earlier, but this angst was also evident when one considered the unwritten rules of the gym. Similar to other gyms I have attended there were "simple" rules that one must follow (must being the key word). First, never grab weights from the ground without asking whether somebody else is using them. Second, do not interfere with someone's view to the mirror. Interrupting, or distracting, someone's gaze in the mirror can lead to verbal abuse, or physical assault. As Thompson and Bair explain: "The most serious weight lifters [do] not hesitate to stand directly in front of the mirror while forming certain exercises and periodically stand there to flex particular muscles and evaluate their development" (1982, 194).

It is difficult to determine whether these two rules are common to all gyms, however, at Club Flex they are enforced with some intensity. I have been reprimanded in the past when I attempted to put weights back on the "rack" before someone was finished their set. On one occasion I crossed a woman who was in the middle of her

“set.” This woman was working out with two “big boys”²¹ who promptly yelled at me, “she can kick *your* ass!”

The rules of the gym are unspoken and unwritten, but are adhered to by the regulars. Nobody explains the rules to you unless you are in direct violation of them. You tend to learn the rules gradually as you become familiar with the gym setting. Sometimes this learning process can be frustrating and scary. It is not enjoyable having a 250-plus pound individual shouting at you in a gym crowded with people. On more than one occasion I had observed many of the gym’s younger members being chastised for not following a proper code of conduct. Having mirrors on every available wall though can make it difficult to maneuver yourself through the traffic, and at times, these conventions or codes are difficult not to violate.

Being cognizant of the rules aids in an enhanced enjoyment of the gym. Once you have established what these rules are you may, then, maneuver through the gym with greater ease. Finding a space that you can occupy is an important part of this process. For example, while in the changing room some individuals take the opportunity to “pose down” in front of the mirrors. Since the space is small one of two things inevitably happen, either more than one individual enters the space and casually examines their body for development, or the individuals wait until the room is uninhabited and practice their pose down routine. On more than one occasion I was asked to watch as guys pose down. “Hey, Justin com’ here and tell me w’at ya think of these guns?” I would estimate that the majority of the men at the gym, at one time or another, have actively participated in this process, either as the poser, or the voyeur.

Fitness First:

One of the most striking features of Fitness First was the apparent subdued environment. As opposed to the competitive nature of Club Flex, Fitness First’s clientele seemed more eager to foster friendships than develop competitive alliances.

²¹ Big Boys is the term that some have used to describe either bodybuilders, or extremely large weight lifters. It is a term which I have grown accustomed to using in the Club Flex setting.

There appeared to be no rules at Fitness First. People did not seem to be overly concerned with disrupting someone's view of themselves in the mirror. People also freely grabbed weights and shared weights with little or no negotiation what-so-ever. The atmosphere was conducive to a relaxed environment at Fitness First. This may have indicated that the emphasis on appearance was secondary to the commitment that these individuals had to exercising. People seemed more committed to helping each other and less concerned with competing against one another. For example, during the Christmas season I was hampered by a chronic back problem which severely limited my range of motion, therefore making it nearly impossible to lift any weight. I went to both sites within a short period of time to measure the response that each site had to my level of discomfort. I had chosen to workout at both gyms during this time purposefully to see what the reaction by the men would be to my injury.

On one particular day²² I proceeded to Club Flex. I interacted with the various members of the gym and the responses about my back discomfort varied from, "what, is the old lady comin' down on ya'?" to "no pain, no gain." The most interesting of all of the responses I received that day came when I asked someone to spot me²³. The man that I asked harshly responded, "I ain't doin' shit for ya'!" which meant that he would be happy to help me, but I would have to do all the work. As I worked through my initial repetitions, with great difficulty I may add, he curtly added, "this ain't no fuckin' game, get workin'!" This comment was blared into my ear as a means by which to motivate me. At the end of my set I was asked by the man, "now doesn't that feel better?"

The response at Fitness First less than a week later was quite different. As soon as I entered the gym floor at Fitness First I was greeted by some old workout

²² December 12, 1996.

²³ To spot someone refers to having someone watch you as you do your exercise. This is generally done for two reasons: first, it allows the individual lifting the weight to lift until they are no longer able to at which time the "spotter" may force the person to do a couple more repetitions - these are known as "forced reps." Second, by having somebody spot you it ensures that you can safely lift the weight without the worry of injury - i.e. the bar, or weight, falling on you during your repetitions.

companions. Most noticed immediately that I was in physical discomfort and were quick to ask what the problem was. When I told them of my injury the immediate response was sympathy, which was followed by advice not to workout. "Take it easy," they encouraged me. "Are you certain that you should even be in here?" was another common response. As I sat on the bike that day I had people coming up to talk to me about similar injuries they had and how they overcame their disabilities. This atmosphere made me feel much better about my injury. At Fitness First it was okay to be injured, and it was okay to rest when your body needed it. This approach to working out was unquestionably more relaxed than being in competition for mirrored space and flexing beside your training partner.

Another distinction between the two sites was in regards to the women who worked out at Fitness First. I would say that men still outnumbered the women on the whole, but there had been occasions where I had worked out at the facility when it had been dominated by women. The women at Fitness First tended not to be confined to one space and appeared to comfortably work out where ever they pleased. The women at the gym did not seem inhibited by the men, or by what the men did. There was a tremendous amount of diversity among the women who attended the gym regularly. Similar to the pattern exhibited by the men who came to lift weights, women too either came in alone and worked out alone, came in groups to workout, or preferred to be with their training partner. The frequency with which the women lifted weights was similar to that of the men at the gym.

v) Conclusions

Many factors must be considered when categorizing a gym. This chapter has explored some of the more pertinent aspects. I began with a distinction between a gym's membership policy and a gym's ethos or character. A gym's membership policy explains the club's mission statement. The characteristics of a gym's members may also be a defining characteristic of a club's membership policy. For example, women's gyms

only have female members. The gym's ethos or character, on the other hand, allows one to examine how the gym looks, what equipment it houses, what is displayed on the walls, what music is playing, and what type of members inhabit the gym.

This information, which derived from my own observations and members accounts, was then coupled with, what I termed as, an interactionist approach. This approach allowed seriously examining the gym's atmosphere. This section showed that there is a conscious choice made by members of a gym to work out in a particular setting. Whether it is for location, the weights or equipment that the gyms houses, or the people at the gym, all the members offered a different description of why they work out where they do.

In light of the above, I have categorized Fitness First as a "health club." Club Flex, though, is more representative of the "hard core" gym setting. Fitness First had a more relaxed atmosphere. The physical description highlights that the walls were bare, the music was ineffectual, there were fewer mirrors and less mirror competition, and there was no obvious division between certain spaces, such as a "cardio room." Members' dress was less elaborate and their attitude towards bodybuilding and the bodybuilding subculture was not complementary, as some of the interviews highlighted. Club Flex, on the other hand, had greater amounts of weight, more machines, a clear division between weights and "fitness machines" such as the cardio room, intense music, walls of mirrors, and pictures of bodybuilding idols pasted on every available wall. The members, too, expressed their desire to workout in an environment that was conducive to bodybuilding.

Following from this description of the physical and social space I will explore dimensions of masculinity in the gym and highlight how the gym's social space affects its' members. The following chapter examines how the body is represented in the gym setting beginning with a theoretical discussion of the body in contemporary society, and moving on to describe how the masculine body is cultivated at Fitness First and at

Club Flex.

Chapter 3: Representing the Masculine Body

i) Introduction

Just as examining the structure is important in understanding the social setting of the gym, so too is describing its membership. As the previous chapter indicated, the individuals at each gym, although not a homogeneous group, can be classified as either hard-core or fitness enthusiasts. Each gym offers its members a different environment in which to workout, and the environment of each site tends to attract a distinctive clientele. Part of the distinction between Club Flex and Fitness First is in regards to how the body is represented at each site.

This chapter will explore how the men at each site represent their bodies. The representation of the male body may be examined in several different ways, but for the purpose of this study I have examined how the body has been represented through dress (gym attire), language (the way in which the body is discussed), and the actual presentation of muscle (the physical composition of the body). Exploring some theoretical aspects of the body and embodiment will help to contextualize the ethnographic work that follows in the second half of the chapter where I discuss how the male body is represented at Club Flex and Fitness First.

Examining how the body is represented allows for comparisons between my two sites of study and those of Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991). This discussion highlights how there are certain commonalities between Club Flex and Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) work as well as points of contrast between their work and Fitness First. Clearly detailing how the body is represented at Fitness First and Club Flex has enabled me to discuss the comparisons between their work and mine in the conclusion of this chapter.

ii) Theoretical Representations of the Body

When contemplating the body as a site of study one must not only consider the actual physicality of the body, but also recognize that the body signifies a much larger

system of representations. For example, as people express their physical experience, at one in the same time, there is a process in place where this expression becomes a means of self-monitoring. Foucault explained this never ending gaze as panopticism (1979, 195). "Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere [...] This surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration" (Foucault 1979, 196). The concept of panopticism suggests that the gaze is an endless cycle which maintains a self-monitoring system.

Foucault's concept of panopticism provides a conceptual frame through which to contextualize the gaze. Panopticism assures that individuals are constantly under a gaze. Whether or not individuals consciously recognize that they are subject to the gaze is irrelevant for there is a power system in place that determines for individuals what 'normal' is. Panopticism does not define 'normality,' but it is what perpetuates hegemonic ideology. Brian Turner has discussed how in a consumer society body regulation is a product of desire. As he states:

In a consumer culture, the body assumes a new social and individual significance. It becomes the site of personal strategies of health. Jogging, slimming and keep fit programmes are designed to promote health as the basis of good life. These instrumental strategies of health are enthusiastically supported by the state as the principal basis of preventive medicine" (Turner 1984, 172).

Both diet and fitness programs are presented as a means by which to promote "healthy" lifestyles. These "healthy" lifestyles, then, keep people on a ubiquitous search for the perfect body. In this sense, the regulation of diet is constituted in a system which controls the desires of, so called, autonomous individuals. This notion of Panopticism, then, illuminates how the body is not an autonomously controlled entity.

Panopticism lead to, what Foucault terms, the docile body. "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault 1979, 136). The contemporary body, then, may be seen as subjected to forces of external stimuli that entreat individuals to transform and "improve" themselves. The analogy of the soldier

is used by Foucault to illustrate how panopticism dissociates the body from power. The soldier, for example, used the body as an object and a target of power (Foucault 1979, 136). "By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; ... in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant' and given him 'the air of a soldier'" (Foucault 1979, 135).

At a more fundamental level Foucault used his discussions of discipline and the gaze to show how power relations affect the body. "What I want to show is how power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorised into people's consciousnesses" (Foucault 1980, 186). Therefore, the representations of the body, in Foucault's work, arise out of a self-monitoring system which is not, necessarily, contingent on an individual's consciousness.

Foucault used this discussion of power relations as a basis to discuss the discourse of self awareness and body mastery. As Foucault explained:

Mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful. All of this belongs to the pathway leading to the desire of one's own body, by way of the insistent, persistent, meticulous work of power on the bodies of children and soldiers, the healthy bodies (1980, 56).

Control over the desire of the body was no longer achieved through the repression of the body, but rather its stimulation (Foucault 1980, 57). The body then becomes a site in which to represent the self, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Within this Foucaudian framework, the body is further distinguished into the 'useful' body and the 'intelligible' body. As Bordo explains these terms:

The 'intelligible body' includes scientific, philosophic, and aesthetic representations of the body, norms of beauty, models of health, and so forth. These representations, however, may also be seen as legislating a

set of *practical* rules and regulations, through which the living is 'trained, shaped, obeys, and responds...,' becomes, in short, a socially adapted and 'useful body' (1989, 86).

It is this 'intelligible' body which is, then, shaped by larger hegemonic forces. This body which is used, transformed and improved, becomes docile (1979, 136). The disciplinary methods, as were illustrated by soldiers, became a means by which domination objectified the body. In other words, the discipline that produced these 'docile bodies' dissociated power from the body (Foucault 1979, 138).

The regulation of the body may also be used as a means by which to gain symbolic value. In this sense, transformed and improved bodies may carry certain advantages in a variety of social settings. The muscled body, for example, has a degree of value within the subculture of the gym and can be seen as a bearer of 'symbolic value' as formulated by Pierre Bourdieu (Shilling 1993, 127). Bourdieu's notion of physical capital is concerned with how the body has been the centre of commodification in contemporary societies. Although physical capital is most usually converted into economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital, as Shilling tells us, the primary concern with physical capital in the gym is its ability to be converted into social capital (1993, 128). This social capital, then, allows certain members of the gym a more distinguished position. These positions are achieved by winning a competition or lifting large amounts of weight, or, perhaps, having a sculpted body which garners attention from other gym users.

iii) From Theory to Practice

Although their theoretical perspectives differ, Foucault and Bourdieu offer useful theoretical considerations of embodiment, however, neither offers a complete picture of how dominant ideology transcends itself into embodied practice. Many different theoretical paradigms have been used to discuss the body in contemporary society. Two central frameworks include a focus on the naturalistic body and on the socially

constructed body²⁴. Both the naturalistic body and the socially constructed body are worthy of a cursory theoretical discussion here for most of the individuals that I have interviewed believe that there are natural body types and these body types, then, dictate to us, as individuals, what we can and cannot do.

“Naturalistic views are not identical, but they deserve to be seen as a coherent approach as they share an analysis of the body which views it as the pre-social, biological basis on which the superstructures of the self and society are founded” (Shilling 1993, 41). These naturalistic views share the notion that the physical body is the basis for, and contributes toward, social relationships (Shilling 1993, 41). This relationship between the ‘naturalistic’ body and social relationships is one which fosters much discussion in the world of bodybuilding.

Genes are seen as being very important explanatory variables by bodybuilders. Take, for example, the owner of Club Flex, Frank’s statement on why he competed as a competitive bodybuilder: “For myself [competing] was pretty much a confirmation that I had the genetic ability to win a competition” (Interview 7, Frank). In this sense, Frank saw his physical body as being part of larger social relationships. For example, he competed and won bodybuilding competitions because, in his eyes, he had greater genetic potential which allowed his muscles to develop to a greater potential than the other competitors. These larger muscles, then, gave Frank an elevated status in the bodybuilding subculture. His “genetic superiority” represented to him and others that he deserved an elevated status on the basis of his biology alone.

Using Frank as an example, it is evident how some come to view genetics and social relations as being closely related. These naturalistic views of the body are reinforced by so called “physiological” studies of bodybuilding. In this naturalistic vein, most physiology and nutrition texts introduce the body as consisting of three primary forms: the ectomorph (the lean body), the mesomorph (the muscular body), and the

²⁴ These two schools of thought are broadly defined and do not comprise all of the different theoretical approaches to the body.

endomorph (the large body). “This much used system of body typing was devised by Dr. W. H. Sheldon, an American physical anthropologist, in 1940” (Ensminger, et. al. 1994, 223). Consider how each of these categories is discussed in the Ensminger text:

- **Ectomorph** - This type of body is tall and slender, with a delicate bone structure. The trunk is short in proportion to the arms and legs. Furthermore, the fingers, hands, and toes are disproportionately long. Finally, the muscles are wiry, rather than bulky.
- **Endomorph** - People with this body build are often described as ‘chubby’ or ‘pleasingly plump,’ because they appear to be round and soft. Also, they usually have large abdomens, long trunks, and short, but heavily fleshed arms and legs. Lastly, their body measurements from the front to the back are likely to be greater than dimensions from side to side.
- **Mesomorph** - This so-called ‘masculine’ physique is characterized by (1) bulky muscles; (2) heavy bones with large joints; (3) and a large chest and broad shoulders, which are notably more prominent than the abdomen or hips. Most people consider the proportions between the trunk and the arms and legs to be ideal. It is noteworthy that some women may have this body build, yet be truly feminine in every respect (1994, 223).

It is not difficult to see, in this description, that the mesomorph category is given an elevated “masculine” status over the others. Consequently, being ascribed to one particular category garners a tremendous amount of prestige among other lifters. The overwhelming majority of my key informants described these three body types as “natural.” Most of the men that I talked with used these terms and did not hesitate to mention that all human bodies could be represented under one these three categories, or designations. The men that described body types in this fashion pointed to the mesomorph as being the ideal masculine build for the simple reason that it was/is considered to be the most muscular. Therefore, the “mesos,” as they are affectionately called, are at the top, hierarchically speaking, of this three-tiered physiological scale. The mesomorphs are seen to be “naturally” muscular, not to mention masculine, and therefore are believed to gain the most muscle mass, in proportion, with the least amount of fat. The ectomorphs and the endomorphs, consequently, are seen to have to work much harder to achieve the same gains that the “mesos” do. Consider Samuel

Fussell's statement about being associated with one of these 'naturalistic' categories. "Sweepta pinched and prodded my aching body. He delivered his verdict with a sad shake of his head. 'He's an ecto, man. That's tough.' I felt thoroughly defeated" (Fussell 1991, 49). As was Fussell's experience, his body defined him as thin and lanky and these characteristics generated a certain social relationship between himself and the other bodybuilders at the gym - he could not be an elite bodybuilder, and "that's tough."

In reaction to the beliefs in 'naturalism' many social theorists, as Shilling discusses, found ideas and theories that were based on the premise that the body was a receptor, rather than a generator, of social meaning more preferential (1993, 70). "Social constructionism" attempts to show that the body reacts to the social meanings which the dominant discourse creates, therefore the body is merely a social product within a larger system of representations. To revisit Fussell's statement on feeling defeated we may, then, understand that the way in which the body had been socially constructed and defined created a situation that made him feel a certain way.

Some of the more theoretical discussions of this social constructionism arise from the work of Foucault. His concept of docile bodies helps us to comprehend why bodies react in particular ways to larger hegemonic structures. These structures distinguish between different bodies and, hence, influence our perception of "natural." But as Fussell tells us: "Steroids or not, a natural bodybuilder is an oxymoron. Bodybuilding is to flesh what origami is to paper. It is literally 'warped.' That's the trick. The look is as carefully cultivated, as painstakingly pared as a bonsai tree. And there's nothing natural about it" (1994, 44). The social construction of the healthy body, for example, utilizes this bodybuilding imagery of lean muscular bodies which have been exacted for presentation. To recall Foucault's "intelligible" and "useful" bodies we may become more aware of social constructionism as a theoretical paradigm. If the "intelligible body" includes scientific representation of the body, and these representations dictate models of health, as Bordo suggests, then the "useful body," in one way or another,

responds to this “intelligible body” (1989, 86).

The representation of the physical body may also include a discussion of the way in which it is clothed. For as important as the actual muscle is in weight lifting the way in which it is displayed through clothing is also significant. The representation of the physical body is complemented by the clothes one decides to wear to the gym. Dress is an integral part of the process of representation²⁵. As Fussell reveals upon entering his first California gym:

There seemed to be a California uniform code in effect. The men wore their standard issue pastel-colored genie pants (oversize cotton bloomers with drawstrings at the waist and at each ankle), oversized Gold’s Gym sweatshirts (carefully ripped at the neck to expose the trapezius muscles), Gold’s Gym baseball caps decorated with small buttons (one said ‘Pray for War,’ another ‘I’d rather be killing Communists in Central America’) (1991, 93).

In a study of a more casual gym, similar to my field sites, Thompson and Bair show too that the men of the gym can be defined by the clothes they wear. “Most of the *regulars*, particularly those who considered themselves in top physical condition, wore sleeveless undershirts or muscle shirts for their workouts” (Thompson and Bair, 1982, 193).

These examples highlight how the physical body has been enhanced by becoming a commodity of the fashion industry. Nike, Rebok, and Adidas all offer individuals an opportunity to “empower” themselves, through products, to change their bodies. “Through working out in Nike products, the [advertisements they run] suggest, everyone, no matter how different, can look great and subvert hegemonic forms of beauty” (Heywood 1997, 167). As Heywood tells us, companies, such as Nike, sell us an illusion of empowerment in the sense that the product’s effectiveness is dependent on the subject forgetting about “the shape they are in” and focusing on that which they might become (1997, 167). The manufacturers of this athletic dress are aware of the potential that their products have on the consumer. People who wear athletic gear and yet may in fact not be “athletic” at all are perceived as such by the

²⁵ A cursory discussion of what individuals wear to the gym is provided in Chapter 2: Defining the Gym.

clothing that they wear. As a basketball player told me during my time at the gym, “you don’t wear Jordan’s [a style of basketball shoe that Michael Jordan wears and endorses] unless you’re bad²⁶.”

In addition to the representations of the physical body and the clothed body, the body, too, is represented by the language in which it is discussed. As Thompson and Bair tell us in their study: “The weight room jargon served not only as a means of communication among the weight lifters but also excluded those who occasionally wandered into the weight room, but were not actually members of the weight room subculture” (1982, 193). Language is a centre of meaning, in a semiotic sense, but it is also a generator of social categories. Language, in Thompson and Bair’s study, is used as a means by which to distinguish between the members. For example, those who do not understand the vernacular of the gym are either new members or members that do not attend frequently enough to know how to decode the meaning of certain words or phrases.

Language is used in other ways to represent the body, namely in identifying one’s gender category. Commenting on gendered categorizing and exercise Connell tells us, “exercise for men and women, the disciplinary practices that both teach and constitute sport, are designed to produce gendered bodies” (1995, 50). And as weight lifting produces these gendered bodies, language is used to reinforce these gendered categories. Masculinity, in the context of the gym, stands in stark contrast to femininity and some argue that it does not exist without this contrast. “‘Masculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’” (Connell 1995, 68). Understanding that language conveys a multiplicity of different meanings is extremely important. The men at the gym speak in a certain fashion not necessarily because that is who they are, rather, they talk in certain ways because that is what is accepted by their gender.

“Whereas sociolinguistics traditionally assumes that people talk the way they do

²⁶ Bad refers to a player that is very good.

because of who they (already) are, the postmodernist approach suggests that people are who they are because of (among other things) the way they talk" (Cameron 1997, 49). In this sense, then, we want to move away from simply categorizing different patterns of speech between men and women and, more subtly, examine how people use language as a means by which to perpetuate gender differentiation (Cameron 1997, 49). When I hear people at Club Flex degrading one another by calling each other "pussy," for example, I am acutely aware of how these men are using this vernacular as a means by which to create and perpetuate gendered categorization. So as Butler tells us: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1990, 33). This stylization, in part, comes from cultural linguistic forms that, in effect, produce the appearance of substance.

iv) Club Flex: The Body Represented

Understanding some of the theoretical considerations about the body is important in analyzing gym practice. It is useful, at this point, to examine how the men at the gyms discuss and represent their bodies. The following discussion incorporates interview material as well as my own personal observations from the gyms and reveals how the body is represented through the physical body, dress, and language.

The representation of the physical body may seem like the most obvious place to begin a discussion of the representation of the body, for the focus on the "fit body" has received a tremendous amount of attention over the last fifteen years. Not fifteen years ago muscles were viewed as a symbol of deviation, however this form is quickly becoming the norm (Fussell 1994, 43). The physical body holds a tremendous amount of social capital at Club Flex in the sense that physical presentation leads to an elevated status for some members. Most of the men at Club Flex view their bodies as a means through which to build self-esteem and form a "fit" body, both of which lead to an advanced position in the gym's social hierarchy. As Isaac mentioned, "the smaller guys

pay attention to the bigger guys. The [smaller guys] get workout tips and try and reach their goals through this advice. 'I want to be as big as that guy next year' is the general attitude" (Interview 12, Isaac). Most of the individuals at the gym used the body as a gauge by which to judge other members. Part of my observations during my time at Club Flex were with regard to how the individuals at the gym reacted to me. Since I am not a bodybuilder, and therefore do not look like one, most of the elite members at the gym took quite a fondness in telling me what I should be doing, "to maximize my gains," and how I should go about doing that. Jake, at times, would 'coach' me on how to do certain exercises and then complement me on my progress. "Hey Justin, I can see the traps growing, good job. I see you're starting to lose that ecto-build a bit."

The "fit" body is a creation, development, and extension of the physical body. As Stan told me, after a workout he felt that he had "worked his body toward betterment" (Interview 8, Stan). Most of the members that I had interviewed had a strong sense about what constituted a "fit" body, but few of those informants understood where their perception of "fitness" came from. All of the men that I interviewed at Club Flex seemed to have gone through some sort of transformation in their workout routines and these transformations had then shaped their perception of "fitness." Their perception of "fitness" changed as frequently as their routines did. In other words, the reason why my key informants originally decided to lift weights was not the same reason why they worked out today. For example, when Zane first began to lift weights he told me that he did not understand what weight lifting really did for the body, other than "making it grow." After many years of working out Zane had come to "understand" his body and workouts and hence changed his routine to be more conducive to reaching some of his goals. These alterations in Zane's workouts were facilitated by his increased knowledge of the weights. The weights, in turn, gave Zane a sense of what the fit body was. Q: "What is a fit body? A: Well, it is a combination [of things]. I can say I don't want to be super huge or super ripped, but I want to get

myself closer to a more pleasing physique - let's say a very athletic male [body], a meso. You know who's fit by looking at them" (Interview 6, Zane).

The transformations in my key informants' routines had been shaped, for the most part, by a desire to maintain their "fit" bodies, as was the case with Zane. As I have suggested, the fit body is an extension of the physical body. Determining where these men got their notion of fitness from was an important step to understanding how they perceived the body and what it should be. When I asked Isaac what first got him interested in lifting weights he revealed: "Probably Muscle & Fitness magazines. Q: *How did these magazines influence you?* A: I just knew I wanted to look like a big freaky muscle head" (Interview 12, Isaac). When I asked him why this image of the bodybuilder was so important to him he told me that no one would "mess" with him. As well, Isaac mentioned that by looking like a 'freak' people would know that he was a serious lifter and therefore, according to his logic, others would look on him with admiration. Since members shaped their workouts around what others thought they should be doing many, as Isaac believed, felt that bodybuilder's knowledge of weight lifting should be seen as unquestionable.

The 'fit' body is formed, in part, by what others believe is the ideal body. Since most of the men at Club Flex had an image that a strong and heavily muscled body was the epitome of fitness they were therefore acutely aware of others around them and how others' bodies develop. For example, when I asked Martin whether or not men paid attention to one another in the gym; he answered:

A: Oh-Yeah, more than the men pay attention to the women. I find myself doing it. 'Holy man, that guy's doin' the stack! He's doin' seven plates!'

Q: *Why do you think this happens?*

A: Because of the people that work out [at Club Flex]. There are so many bodybuilders at [Club Flex], and since they win most of the tournaments, a lot of the guys that come in there are thinking that they too can look like these guys. I think that's why [the owner] gets so many people in there because people think that if all those guys workout there that if they start

coming they can look like that too. So people watch these other guys and awe at them because they're so big. That's why I started: I thought if all these guys workout there there has to be something special about the place (Interview 9, Martin).

The physical body was an important part of the representation of the self at Club Flex, however, not all of the men wanted to represent their body in the same way. Most individuals that I had talked with had slightly different goals in the gym. Some wanted to be "freaky," while others looked for a happy medium between gaining muscle mass and decreasing fat levels. Stan mentioned:

When I first started to work out I thought that if I could lose a lot of weight I would be healthy, but as it turns out, I lost a lot of weight and I started to feel unhealthy and weak from that experience. After that experience I started to seek out my natural body size (Interview 8, Stan).

Another example of the progression that some lifters went through, which was quite distinct from Stan's, was in respect to Jake's comments. Jake mentioned why he thought it was important to work out:

A few years ago it used to be, to get the biggest, baddest, strongest, fastest that I could possibly be for whatever I was doing whether it was for sports of sheer aesthetics. Now, I think, it is important to keep in shape and to keep what I have gained from working so hard all those years, and physically be able to perform in whatever I do (Interview 10, Jake).

To be the biggest, baddest, and strongest, influenced Jake in the past, but currently his goals for lifting weights had changed. Jake now felt that it was important to keep the body he had sculpted so that he would be able to "physically perform" in what ever activity he wished. Therefore, as Jake's example shows, not all members of Club Flex pursued hard-core bodybuilding actively.

The clothes which individuals wear while at the gym are of symbolic interest as markers of identity. Just as the physical body differs between groups of individuals (i.e. bodybuilders, power lifters, weight lifting enthusiasts) so too does the dress vary between the members of Club Flex. For example, the 'big boys,' or bodybuilders, dressed in a much different fashion than other regular members. The bodybuilders at

the gym seemed to strategically layer their clothing to reveal or display only various parts of their physique. For example, many of the bodybuilders started their workouts wearing baggy sweat pants, and a baggy sweat top [the neck of the sweat top has usually been removed to expose, as Fussell states (1991, 93), the trapezius muscles] and, for many, work boots. As these 'big boys' began their workouts they may have chosen to reveal different parts of their body at varying times. I had noticed that when these individuals worked their legs they would keep their sweat pants on, but when they moved to next set of exercises, for example the calves, they would roll their pants up to reveal their calf muscles to the others around them.

Some may argue that the clothes individuals wear at the gym have a purely functional purpose. For example, heavy sweats are worn to keep muscles warm between sets. Although this may be true to some extent, it was interesting to notice how the dress was modified, or complemented. Why must the neck be cut from the sweat top to reveal a certain muscle group? Some attested that it was more comfortable to have sweat tops cut in this fashion while others admitted that it was a more flattering cut to expose the body. Russ told me in a casual conversation that only certain people could "get away" with wearing this type of clothing. When I asked him what he meant by this, he told me that only big "guys" could wear this cut of clothing because if you were "too small" the clothing ended up looking too big hence it made you look smaller, which was the reverse of the desired effect.

To highlight this point it was easy to look around the gym and notice that other participants had a slightly different style of dress than the 'big boys.' The younger members who aspired to become bodybuilders, for example, wore garb that was rather tight fitting to reveal as much of their growing body as possible. One younger member asked me during one of my workouts how I thought his arms looked in his t-shirt. Some of the younger members who tried to emulate their bodybuilding idols changed their dress according to their development, or success, in the weight lifting

tournaments. For example, after a younger member at Club Flex won his weight class at one of the local bodybuilding competitions he changed his attire. This member opted for the layered look of his other fellow bodybuilders. The sweat top that he wore was one of the prizes from competition. Wearing this top assured him that everyone in the gym knew that he had competed and won that particular competition. Such representation was important to these members for it highlighted to others at the gym their upward mobility in this hard core environment.

The dress of the members at Club Flex was complemented by a number of other accessories which indicated to others their degree of commitment. Many of the members at the gym owned their own weight belts²⁷, but if one did not, weight belts were provided by the gym. Some of the weight belts that individuals wore had been customized. For example, the overall winner of the Mr. Thunder Bay competition was awarded a belt denoting his title. Other items that were popular were “straps” (which are used to wrap the wrists and give extra support during the lifts), “wraps” (which are used to wrap various joints of the body so as to give extra support), and chalk and/or weight gloves (to give individuals extra grip while lifting weight). Serious lifters used a number of these devices when working out, sometimes they were used in combination with one another, but they were also used individually. Depending on the level of expertise, some members of the gym varied the frequency with which they used these items. Some of the younger members purchased all of the accessories to express to others that they too were committed to working out. When I was asked by one member why I did not use “straps” I told them that I wanted to make sure my whole body could handle the weight, which received an immediate prompting to read up on the latest “literature” (which meant that I should keep myself apprised of the bodybuilding literature to inform myself on how I should workout as opposed to

²⁷ Weight belts are tightly wrapped around the midsection of the body to reduce the chance of injury incurred by lifting weights that are heavier than the body is capable of handling naturally. For example, when someone is squatting the lower back has difficulty supporting over 500 pounds of weight.

how I thought I should workout).

The body is also reflected in the language with which it is discussed. The way in which the members discussed the body at Club Flex was distinctly different from the way in which it was discussed at Fitness First. Members of Club Flex used language as a means by which to express to others the degree to which they understood weight lifting in general. Nobody ever talked about working their pectoralis major, rather, individuals worked their "chest" or the "tits." Biceps brachii and tricep brachii were referred to "arms," or in extreme cases, "guns," "pipes," or "canons." People at the gym were familiar with the scientific names of the parts of body, for there was an anatomy chart at the gym, but preferred to use more common terms. Giving someone a compliment on their back was more desirable than choosing one specific muscle and isolating it in a general description. On occasion I could hear individuals trying to motivate their workout partners by hurling insults at them like, "com' on ya' pussy, get those fuckin' pipes pumpin'"²⁸.

As discussed in the first half of the chapter, language, too, was used as a means by which gender and gendered values were construed. Just as the above quote testifies, language was used as a means by which to solidify a dichotomy between men and women at the gym. To have this gendered dichotomy reinforced was extremely important in the context of the gym. "Com' on ya' pussy," was a means by which some individuals attempted to motivate other members of the gym. For most men at the gym, being associated with women, or femininity, was detested and to be avoided at all costs. As Isaac told me in response to the question of whether or not there were natural body types for men and women:

It depends on your family background. Basically you have the people who have the genetics and people that don't have the genetics for bodybuilding. Naturally men are bigger boned and bigger structures than women. Plain and simple men are just bigger (Interview 12, Isaac).

Comments directed at a man that connote so-called feminine characteristics call into

²⁸ Participant observation notes from September 11, 1996.

question not only an individual's gender, but also raise questions about their sex. For example, as Isaac explains being a bodybuilder is not just about desire, it is about genetics.

Most individuals tended to get upset when their sex²⁹ or gender was challenged, therefore language proved a useful tool in reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Language fostered competition between men at the gym. Men were visibly "psyched up" when they were labeled in certain ways. When I asked Zane why men were in competition with one another he stated:

You measure yourself against everybody, especially other guys. You don't measure yourself against girls 'cause she {sic} is different. She's a she. It goes back to social conditioning, it's the way you're brought up. You don't compete with women because you are told there is no need to compete in that realm because they're just different (Interview 6, Zane).

In Zane's eyes women were non-threatening. If someone were to use language as a means by which to disassociate an individual from an ascribed gender category they may be marginalized from other members of the gym subculture. Some members, for example, had been ostracized for being "gay" and as noted previously when I posted a notice at the gym that stated I was studying the weight lifting subculture and I needed men to interview I received one call, from a woman, who asked me why I was studying men³⁰. When I told her the purpose of my study she promptly told me that the guys that had read my posting assumed that I was gay. In this way, language had been used to label me under a certain category or classification, which in turn marginalized me from some of the other members at the gym and reinforced the dominance of compulsory heterosexuality.

The physical body, dress, and language in the gym combine to show how the body, at Club Flex, was represented and molded to commonly held beliefs about "fitness." These beliefs had the men at this gym ubiquitously searching for the perfect

²⁹ When sex is in question you are likely to hear that somebody does not have any "balls," or an individual is described as "dickless." These terms suggest that someone is not physically capable of being a man.

³⁰ For posting see Appendix C

male body, or at least aware of what that ideal body was. Secondly, we have seen how the men of Club Flex used dress as a means by which to represent the body. There are certain ways to dress which carry different meaning. Dress was a signifier of an individual's commitment to the gym. For example, hard-core members had a slightly different wardrobe than the other more "casual" members. In addition language was used as a means by which, not only to signify one's place within the subculture, but also a way in which gender was appropriated and designated. For example, men were labeled through derogatory terms like "pussies" for not being able to cope with the pain of their workouts. These terms, then, made language a tool by which to solidify gender stereotypes and the dominance of masculinity - "pussies" were men that were not tough or strong enough to endure pain - they were men whose masculinity was being called into question.

v) Fitness First: The Body Represented

The representation of the body is never a homogeneous phenomenon. For as there are different ways to represent the body at Club Flex there were also different ways in which the body was represented at Fitness First. The physical representation of the body was quite varied at Fitness First. The most striking feature was in regards to presentation and size. Although there were no members at Fitness First who were elite bodybuilders, this did not mean that men at this site did not use their muscles for presentation purposes. The way in which the body was presented at Fitness First was done in a remarkably different fashion from Club Flex. The men of Fitness First, generally speaking, concerned themselves with fitness, as opposed solely to muscular development. As Tom told me: "My goals are more fitness oriented, but I'm certainly conscious of appearance; part of this has to do with the shape of the muscles, but also [deals] with the conditioning. I'm into fitness more than appearance" (Interview 13, Tom). For Tom, the appearance of muscle was important, but that representation was bound by his level of commitment to fitness.

In general, the presentation of the physical body at Fitness First was more directed to the individual himself than the other participants at the gym. For example, when I asked Charles how working out affected his self esteem he told me that it had a very positive effect. "It keeps me looking good and makes me feel good. When I look good I feel good all round. You know when people say you're having a fat day or a thin day? *I nod yes*. If I'm having a fat day, or having a lot of water retention, I feel gross. I like being cut³¹" (Interview 14, Charles). So instead of walking around the gym flexing their muscles, most of the men at Fitness First turned their attention towards themselves and were less concerned about reactions from others. For example, when I asked Wayne whether or not men paid attention to one another at the gym he curtly responded: "Not at this gym because there is such diversity at our gym. These kinds of things do not happen here. There aren't big guys working out in the corner lifting stacks of weights intimidating people. It's just not a factor here" (Interview 11, Wayne). One woman told me that the reason that you see more women working out at Fitness First, as opposed to Club Flex, is because people were more concerned with their own bodies and less with the bodies around them.

Along with the representation of the physical body, the way in which the body was represented through dress at the gym was also dramatically different than at Club Flex. It would be misleading to say that no one at Fitness First wore a muscle shirt, or tight fitting t-shirt, however, the frequency with which you saw this garb presented was minimal. At Fitness First, for the most part, the distinction between men's and women's clothing was unidentifiable. The standard form of dress was shorts and t-shirts. There was a general disregard of "muscle" fashion at Fitness First. People were not compelled to alter their dress as the gym subculture dictated. Brand new Nike spandex and Rebok cross trainers were not the primary concern of this group of people.

³¹ Cut refers to the ability to see striations in the muscle. In order to "see" striations in the muscle one must have a low body fat count in proportion to their muscle mass.

The dress at Fitness First was simple and rarely accessorized with more than the occasional weight belt. The weight lifting aids that were common on the gym floor at Club Flex were not as prevalent at Fitness First. I was once told by Wayne during a casual conversation that all the extra “toys” that people used to lift weights were not necessary. The most important thing to Wayne was that when you lifted you used the proper technique. With the proper technique you lessened your chance of injury and therefore did not need any extra weight lifting aids.

Although the representation of the physical body and dress were different than those observed at Club Flex the language used to describe the body at Fitness First was, in some ways, more similar. The similarity in the language was in regards to the way in which people termed the physical body. Similar to how people talked about their body at Club Flex, people at Fitness First talked about working their arms or chest although they shied away from the more scientific, or anatomical, language to describe the body. Some of the men, almost in a mocking fashion, talked about how they were going to “load their guns.” The reason that I say that some of the members did this in a mocking fashion was because they seemed to be aware of the stereotypical notions of hard-core gyms. This was evident when I heard men chanting in a fake German dialect, “I want to pump you up,” trying to mimic the bodybuilding icon Arnold Schwarzenegger. As Saltonstall mentions, the body as a machine represents a mechanistic, industrial, work-oriented approach to fitness which seemed to be being mocked in instances like this (1993, 10).

Language also displayed how the body was viewed both subjectively and objectively. Revisiting Tom’s comments about his body we can see how the body is both subject and object for him. “My goals are more fitness orientated, but I’m certainly conscious of appearance; part of this has to do with the shape of the muscles, but also [deals] with the conditioning. I’m into fitness more than appearance” (Interview 13, Tom). Tom said that fitness was important, although this “fitness” was only achieved

through an objectification of the body - "part of it has to do with the shape of the muscle."

The difference in the way in which language was used at Fitness First was in regards to the communication between male members working out. The people that I had encountered did not throw insults at each other as a means by which to motivate their partners. The language that I heard when people were spotting one another was supportive and encouraging, as opposed to much of the derogatory vernacular heard at Club Flex. Supportive phrases such as: "Come on buddy, you can do it, you're almost there," were common place at the gym. I personally was complemented on many occasions after the completion of a set of an exercise. "Good job, Justin!" Some members even went as far as to reinforce positive images even if I felt that I had had a "bad lift" making comments such as, "that's okay Justin, maybe you're just having a bad day." The language of the gym was welcoming and not frightening.

While there was some variation among members at Fitness First, most were concerned with the pursuit of fitness rather than sheer muscle growth. Muscle was important and the representation of that muscle too had value but, in the pursuit of fitness, appearance was often secondary. The presentation of the body through dress concurred with the representations of the body in the fact that clothing was not gendered to the same degree at Fitness First, nor was it a reflection of the hierarchy in the gym. For example, as mentioned, the clothing appeared, for the most part, to be androgynous. Men at Fitness First did not use clothing to represent a certain commitment to bodybuilding or weight lifting³².

In a different respect, the discussion of the body at the gym was also non-scientific. The vernacular at the gym required little translation, arms were arms and rarely were they biceps brachii or triceps brachii (medial or long head). Language was a

³² Again, it would be false to suggest that no men at Fitness First dress in a style which is more representative of bodybuilding types, however, the men at the gym tend to conform to more androgynous gym clothing.

means by which the body could be represented, but was also a way in which the body was identified. People at Fitness First commented on the body in such a way that the objectification of one's body was complementary and supportive. The language at the gym was welcoming though it did sometimes objectify the body. For example, objectification of the body could be seen when Nick mentioned, "Hey Justin, don't Tom's arms look cut?"

vi) Conclusions

This chapter's focus was on how the body encompasses a much larger system of representations. The body is more than simply the physical; it includes representations through dress and language as well. Individuals come to understand and know their body through these different media. It is through these media, then, that the body becomes regulated and monitored.

Foucault has been paramount in highlighting how self-monitoring of the body has become a control theme in modern life. His concept of panopticism demonstrates how the gaze is an endless cycle which reinforces a self-monitoring system. It is through the gaze that the body becomes docile. So rather than autonomous active bodies, which many individuals believe they control, the body is, rather, docile and subject to social and individual regulation.

Embodiment in the gym was discussed using two general theoretical schools of thought, the naturalistic body and social constructionism (or the socially constructed body). As Shilling tells us, naturalistic views of the body share a notion that the physical body is the basis for, and contributes towards, social relationships (1993, 41). In this sense, genes control the way in which people relate their body to power-discourse. Social constructionism, on the other hand, attempts to show how the body reacts to the social meanings which dominant discourse creates, therefore the body is merely a social product within a larger system of representations.

Understanding the concept of social constructionism clarifies why members of

the gyms, despite their differences, seem to be on a ubiquitous search for a fit and sculpted body. As Aycock points out: “[A]ctors and audience are one, caught up in an endless circulation of meaning and pleasures that comprise the political economy of the human body and relate it metaphorically to the great of seduction so fundamental to the Western project” (Aycock 1992, 339). The individuals involved in this pursuit of fitness are both audience and actors. The “fit” body is idealized through larger ideological structures and not by naturalistic notions of the body. For example, the more heavily muscled you are at Club Flex the more prestige you have. However, this prestige only comes from a relationship that you have to your body, and as a result, you have to be the actor and the audience at one and the same time.

Prestige is not accrued simply through the physical body. One must understand how to properly present the body through clothing. The actual physical muscle in weight lifting and bodybuilding is extremely important, but the way in which it is displayed also reveals some interesting aspects of symbolic capital. First, major fitness outfitters, such as Nike, Adidas, and Rebok all give the illusion of power. For example, in their “Just Do It” campaign Nike leads people to believe that if they wear Nike apparel they will be successful in achieving their fitness goals. Second, by having certain accessories, or clothing items, many gym members are perceived to have elevated status, as the example of the winner of the Mr. Thunder Bay competition and wearing its belt denotes.

The hard core nature of Club Flex is a place where tight and revealing clothing items are common place; as well, there are plenty of men at Club Flex who wear the heavy sweats that are strategically cut to reveal muscle as a means by which to secure their hierarchical position in the gym culture. In contrast, the dress code at Fitness First is more unisex and does not seem to hold the same importance as it does at Club Flex. The men at Fitness First are less apt, for the most part, to wear the same garb that is donned at Club Flex. This does not imply that dress is unimportant at Fitness First,

rather, that the men at Fitness First do not fit the bodybuilding stereotype and therefore their clothing choice is based more on function and less on style.

Finally, we have seen how people represent the body through language. Language plays an integral part of how the body is represented in the gyms. Through language we can see how, at one and the same time, the body can be subject and object. One's own body is objectified by using the third person in which to describe one's self. Q: *"What are you working on today, Dirk?"* A: *I'm working pipes³³."* "Pipes" are completely disassociated from Dirk's body and described as though they are an external object. The objectification of the body through language, in the pursuit of "fitness," or a muscular body, is common at both sites. Individuals are constantly sectioning off areas of the body which are to be "worked on." Today I'm working chest and tomorrow I'm working back are both examples of how the body is objectified. The men of the gym learn to dissect the body and view it for its individual strengths and weaknesses. The shape, size, and feel of the muscle begins to replace that of the need to be fit. As Tom has mentioned, "part of it has to do with the shape of the muscles, but it also [deals] with the conditioning" (Interview 13, Tom). Language also is used as a means by which to solidify gender distinctions and reinforce the hegemony of masculinity. Language divides individuals by gender and, for the men of the gyms, the repudiation of the feminine. Men at the gyms do not want to be "pussies," but rather want to be seen as "freaks," or "men in good shape."

Reviewing representations of the body at both Fitness First and Club Flex has revealed some interesting points of comparison with Klein (1993) and Fussell's (1991) earlier studies. The most striking feature of comparison is in regards to Club Flex. The individuals at Club Flex, in many ways, seemed to represent, although to a lesser degree, the men that would be found at Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) gyms. The physical representations, the language, and the dress are all similar to Klein's (1993) and

³³ Pipes refer to the biceps and triceps muscle groups.

Fussell's (1991) findings, yet they are less exaggerated. As Klein mentions, "Olympic Gym is more than an aggregate of bodies. Many will spend their best years here, their youth consumed with this life" (1993, 14). The men at Club Flex do have the hard-core bodybuilding air about them, but only to a lesser degree than the men described in Klein's Olympic Gym. In regards to the representation of the male body at Fitness First, Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) work does not offer a good comparison and perhaps highlights the difference between the subcultures of elite and recreational gyms.

In Chapter Four I will explore how men consume the male body and images of 'fitness.' Beginning with a discussion of the theoretical basis by which the body is consumed in contemporary Western culture, the focus will then shift to an analysis of interviews with key informants and my two field sites.

Chapter 4: Consuming The Body

i) Introduction

Representations reveal certain ways in which the body is consumed by the men at the gyms. At one level, the presentation of the body is about defining to others what is significant about oneself. In advertising, for example, clothing is used to project an image of success, and empowerment. Commenting on a Nike advertisement Heywood notes: "The ad sells an illusory sense of empowerment and choice that depends on the ... subject's forgetting that 'the shape [they're] in' also answers to the dictates of a very restrictive image, that the plasticity and infinite formability of [the] body answers to a particular script" (1997, 167). Part of the *conscious* effort to represent the body in a certain way involves consuming images which help to define the body. In one instance, hegemonic images of the "fit" body are used by clothing manufacturers as a means by which to sell an image of "fitness." Nike clothing, for example, utilizes a hegemonic image of the "fit" body to sell their clothing.

Understanding how certain bodies are perpetuated and consumed in bodybuilding and in the world of fitness, in part, requires analyzing hegemonic notions of the fit body. The signification or meaning which is projected onto the body by hegemonic forces keeps individuals on a ubiquitous search for the ideal body. Many individuals at the gym attempt to mirror the hegemonic construction of the male body in order to appear "fit." This mirroring, though, is contingent on recognizing that the body is something which can be consumed.

This chapter examines how the body is consumed at the gyms. Unlike the other chapters, the men of Club Flex and Fitness First are not distinguished by which gym they attend. The intention of looking at the men of the two gyms together rather than apart is to show that, regardless of the gym, men engage in a system where they consume a male body. I explore how the male body is signified in body building

subculture and how the men at both gyms consume images of “fitness,” the male body, and hegemonic masculinities. These observations are then compared with Klein (1993) and Fussell’s (1991) findings.

ii) Some Theoretical Considerations on Consuming the Body

Understanding how the body is signified within the gym, in part, involves exploring how popular culture projects meaning on to the body. Terence Turner, for example, explores how transformations of the human form combine to give symbolism to the body (1980, 112). “The adornment and public presentation of the body, however inconsequential or even frivolous a business it may appear to individuals, is for cultures a serious matter” (Turner 1980, 112). Fashion, or the “social skin,” for Turner represents certain ways in which bodies are defined. For example, dress is a cultural medium which shapes how one thinks about their social identity and it also communicates to others what one finds distinct about their social identity (Turner 1980, 114). Similar to the Kayapo who are the subjects of Turner’s study, bodybuilders and weight lifters expresses their identities through the clothing which they don. The reason that I draw a parallel between weight lifters and the Kayapo is because for the Kayapo the actual physical body is part of the defining characteristics of the self as are the markings of the body - the lower lip plug, penis sheath, and body piercing (Turner 1980, 115). Similarly for the bodybuilder, the physical body is as important to the way in which one is defined as are the markings of the body and forms of dress.

If we revisit the Foucauldian notions of the gaze, for a moment, we might understand how the body is symbolic. The disciplinary power of the gaze may manifest itself in the gym through other’s bodies, mirroring, advertisements, pictures on the walls of the gym, or even through the weights themselves. In this sense, the body is given meaning through the disciplinary practice of the gaze. One becomes aware of oneself and one’s physicality through a multiplicity of different media. In her discussion on the politics of women’s body images and practices, Duncan states:

The gaze is not only a visual act, it is an economy of surveillance that operates on many levels and via many forms of media. Women in contemporary Western culture are socialized to regard themselves through the (masculine) eyes of others, to train their evaluative gaze on themselves so that they are both spectator and spectacle (1994, 50).

What is of interest is how the gaze works in such a way as to make the self both spectator and spectacle.

The system which makes the self both spectator and spectacle involves a degree of objectification of the body. The self-objectification that stems from the disciplinary practice of body surveillance maintains the self as an object. One of the most prevalent ways in which the body becomes objectified to the self is through a process called mirroring. As Klein notes, the mirror promotes self-objectification by mediating a number of interactions within the gym (1992, 331). In an objective sense, the mirror is used as a means by which to monitor one's progress. This progress can be monitored either when doing an exercise (i.e. watching one's form) or after an exercise (i.e. reporting on one's condition after an exercise) (Klein 1992, 331). The mirror, though, is also used as a monitoring device of subjective evaluation. As Klein states:

What we see when looking at ourselves in the mirror is not necessarily what others see when they look at us. Here, mirroring behaviour is revealing of subjective states of the mind, of self-esteem, of body image (1992, 331).

The mirror, then, can be used in a variety of different ways to objectify the self. The mirror, in the gym, is the primary source communication (Klein 1992, 332). As was the case with Klein's study, the men in the gyms that I studied had a tendency to communicate through mirrors whenever possible. For example, on many occasions I had conversations with other male gym members through the mirror and avoided face to face contact. The mirror also provided an element of distance from one another.

As Ann Game discusses, 'the mirror' refers to a conception of knowledge as correspondence or as adequate reflection (1991, 20). Game suggests that there is a correspondence between the subject and the object of knowledge. It is of interest to

note, though, that the male body at the gym is both the subject and the object of knowledge. When communication between two individuals at the gym is conducted through the mirror there is a willingness, whether consciously or unconsciously, to use the object as subject. "In a mutual mirroring, the object of knowledge must reflect the subject" (Game 1991, 20).

In this sense the body is, thus, separated and the individual views the body as distinct from the self. The self can, then, work on the body and/or transform the body. Klein distinguishes between the transformations of the body. "Objectification turns the body into another, the other that can reflect back on one's ideal sense of the self in narcissistic fashion, just as the objectified self can be transformed into the hated self that can be 'nuked' or the technical self that can be worked on. All these functions require objectification" (Klein 1993, 245).

The photograph is another medium through which the body is consumed and objectified. Not only is the actual photograph used to objectify the body, but the photograph is mirrored as well. Many men that I have had casual conversations with admit that images in bodybuilding magazines affect how they view themselves. Isaac, for example, consumes the images of men from a variety of magazines and proudly admits that these men, not only got him interested in lifting weights, but keep him motivated to workout.

"By drawing representation closer to reality, photography seemed to make the dream of complete surveillance possible ... The technology was adaptable. It translated to a new context of control" (Hebdige 1997, 398). The photograph became a technology of power. With the potential to make others aware of surveillance, photography became a means by which to identify and control, or institutionalize the body. Photographic images created a medium by which body and shape could be attained and thus created a language in which the self became the fetish.

Through the reproduction of certain images of the body, particular postures are,

as Hebdige mentions, made auto-erotic. For example, in their analysis of Flex magazine advertisements, White and Gillett tell us, "advertisements directed at male readers predominantly foreground dominant notions of what it means to be masculine" (1994, 21). Magazines such as Flex, then, use the photograph as a means by which to sell an image of gender. To celebrate masculine physicality, in this sense, partially comes from a discourse which sells bodybuilding through pictures and advertising. This discourse, in turn, leads men to look towards themselves and other men for an appropriate definition of masculinity. Using the image of the physical male body, the self is presented as fetish. Through the constant barrage of muscular images men learn to consume, what has been seen in bodybuilding as, the ideal male body.

Klein tells of how, at his elite gym, the hierarchical status of muscular men is maintained. The perpetuation of these muscular images relies, very much, on the photographic image. "On the walls of many gyms, both in this country and abroad, hang huge posters of bodybuilding's idols: Schwarzenegger, Beckles, Everson, or Christian" (Klein 1993, 51). Part of the rise in success of the fitness industry, and with these 'elite' bodybuilders, has to do with the representation and the reproduction of the images presented to those outside the fitness community. Of paramount importance to the consumption of the fitness industry is the way in which muscle is ostentatiously presented to 'others,' or non-elites. "They [the bodybuilders] like to think of themselves as aristocrats, yet only a few years ago it was almost humorous to think of them as professional athletes, so anemic was prize money and so unknown were they outside their tiny order" (Klein 1993, 51). To remedy this problem the fitness community had to begin to present these 'elite' bodybuilding figures as moguls of fitness, idols to be mirrored.

The photographic images that are present in some gyms are used as a means by which to display to others, not only certain body types, but also to create an elitism within the subculture. These images, then, create a discourse by which the body is

discussed and understood. For example, the pictures of Arnold Schwarzenegger that are displayed on the walls of the gym are used to symbolize a successful “muscle man,” hence signifying success. This process of elitism helps to perpetuate auto-eroticism and fetishism.

This mirroring image also leads to a paradox in the heterosexist culture in which we live. Brian Pronger analyzes the homoerotic potential and capacity that sport and the male body have in contemporary Western society. For Pronger, the paradox of men consuming images of other men arises out of a struggle between the gender myth and this auto-eroticism, which he describes as homoeroticism. In Western culture, the gender myth communicates a division of power between the sexes which, hierarchically, perceives men as powerful and women as subordinate. The gender myth is constructed in such a way that makes this gender division seem natural, ahistorical, universal, and necessary for the functioning of society (Pronger 1992, 51). To understand the auto-erotic/homoerotic desire of an individual, in part, involves one’s response to this gender myth, for as Pronger mentions: “Not everybody wants to eroticize the *heterogeneity* of gender power; some want to eroticize *homogeneity*” (1992, 69). In short, the way in which imagery of the male body is portrayed is a means by which to consume the body in a much different way than the heterogeneity of gender power dictates³⁴.

To understand the image of the male body, in part, involves having a language with which to discuss these images. For as the fitness industry has built a dominant ideology around the construction of health through photographic images, so too, has this same industry created a linguistic system to maintain its cultural hegemony. The photograph and the image it portrays can only be understood through an appropriate language. As Barthes explains:

As for collections of objects (clothes, food), enjoy the status of systems only

³⁴ It is important to mention that just because an image may have the potential to be homoerotic does not necessarily mean that all who consume its image are doing so for that homoerotic potential.

in so far as they pass through the relay of language, which extracts their signifiers (in the form of nomenclature) and names their signifieds (in the forms of usages or reasons): we are, much more than in former times, and despite the spread of pictorial illustration, a civilization of the written word (1969, 10).

In other words, there is always a system of signifiers and signifieds present are interpreted. It is through such signification that we come to understand that which is represented.

Part of the self-objectification in bodybuilding comes from an understanding of the language, or vernacular, which is used to define the body. "All body parts are specialized, named, and acted upon in fashioning a champion physique" (Klein 1992, 332). As Klein mentions, body parts are renamed so as they become a property of that subculture (1992, 33). How specialized languages give signification to the body is paramount in understanding how men come to comprehend the body and its constituent parts. "Once a bodybuilder sees himself as separated (self/other) and partible, he can project various alienated self-images to the outside. For instance, at times bodybuilders see themselves as machines" (Klein 1992, 333). This process of separation is contingent upon not just the imagery of the male body which is consumed, but strongly relies on the language which is used. For example, when somebody is going to work their "guns" they are saying that they are going to work their arms. "Guns," then, represent a separation of the self into mechanized terms. These mechanized terms are then used as a means by which to symbolize the male body.

iii) The Men of the Gym(s) Consuming the Male Body

The way in which men consume images of other men may be generated by a variety of sources. To understand what creates the desire to consume idealized notions of the male body requires asking men why and through what sources they have come to understand the male body. As has been discussed, some of the forms of consuming the male body and images of masculinities have risen out of the development of certain

technologies, such as the camera and the television. This section examines how peers and active participation of working out at a gym are also important influences in the consumption of the male body. I begin by briefly examining a few case histories of my key informants, to highlight where the notions of consuming the body and masculinity come from for them.

A) The Synthesis: Influences of Socialization and the Body

Consuming images of muscular men, for many, begins at an early age. The image of the muscular male body may be promoted by variety of sources. For example, it may come from a comic book hero. It is not surprising that the over-muscled men that children see in comic books, such as Superman or The Incredible Hulk, reinforce notions of body modification and presentation. Most super-hero based comics were/are complemented by advertisements featuring Charles Atlas. These advertisements have an important place among the super-hero comic books. The Atlas image and products represent a means for boys to attain idyllic “super-human” bodies. The comic book image of becoming a super-hero was/is embodied by Charles Atlas and the way his ads speak to overcoming the fears and disdain of less-developed masculine bodies. Complementing super-hero comic books with images of Charles Atlas allows boys a basis on which to build their super-heroed bodies.

The comic book image of the Incredible Hulk helped to shape what Martin (Interview 9, Martin) thought a powerful man should be. Martin found that the image of the Incredible Hulk influenced his interest in working out. During the 1970s characters, such as the Incredible Hulk, were recreated for television. Just as Charles Atlas was a “real” human being, the transformation from the comic book to the world of the television made the comic book hero come to life for many children. Shortly after this time, when Martin was 11 years old, he saw Lou Ferigno (an elite bodybuilder and the actor in The Incredible Hulk television series) in Thunder Bay. Actually seeing the actor that played the Incredible Hulk made the character come to life for Martin. I asked

Martin what in particular, about these comic book images, increased his interest in working out. "It was what they could do physically. I looked at the Incredible Hulk on the t.v. throwing cars around and I thought if I looked like that I could throw cars around too" (Interview 9, Martin). Martin wanted to obtain this "special" super-hero status.

Consuming the image of the comic book hero is but one way in which men at the gym actively became interested in pursuing hegemonic masculinity. Many individuals that I had talked with and interviewed mentioned that their friends played a large part in their decision to workout. Wayne told me that when he was wrestling in high school the pressure to win made him focus his attention on weight lifting. "A group of my friends pushed weights while I wrestled, but our coach got us on a training routine" (Interview 11, Wayne). Wayne knew that he would have to push weights in order to become a successful wrestler. During this time Wayne started to take an active interest in weight training and the results helped him achieve some of his adolescent goals. Now at 35 years of age, weight lifting and fitness have remained an integral part of his life. "Not much has changed. I've been doing this for 20 years without a break" (Interview 11, Wayne).

Being consumed by fitness and weight lifting may also come from negative experiences. Charles described how he came to understand the pursuits of fitness: "During adolescence, around 11, I was kind of chubby and I hated it. Q: *Why did you hate it?* A: Out of cruelty my friends would joke and call me Fat Chucky. So I said, 'screw them!' I would pump up and show them" (Interview 14, Charles). This childhood experience pushed Charles to consider weight lifting. Upon entering his first year of university, and with images of muscular development in his head, Charles pursued gaining muscles mass. "My goals, initially, were to get really big. When I was in my first year of university my goal was to get as big as I could. At the end of that year I weighed 217 pounds and was solid, with 18 inch pipes. I was pretty big, but at the end

of it there was no point" (Interview 14, Charles). After many conversations Charles revealed to me that he was still very sensitive about his body and works very conscientiously to maintain his level of fitness. Charles, from the beginning of his weight lifting experience, had been aware of his own body image. The look of his body was important to Charles and he admitted that his workouts were aimed at trying to achieve a particular look, but believed that on the way to achieving that look that he would inevitably achieve a superior fitness level (Interview 14, Charles).

Dirk's interest and motivation to work out were slightly different than Wayne and Charles. Dirk cited childhood experiences with weights stemming from high school gym class although he explained that his interest in weights was centred around how others viewed him. Dirk altered his workouts according to the seasons. "They change with the time of year. [In the spring] I'm trying to get ripped, skinny and lean. When the fall comes around I try and get bigger and stronger and bulk up" (Interview 15, Dirk). The season of his workouts had a direct correlation to how people view him and his body. In the spring and the summer when more of the body was exposed (i.e. wearing less clothes) it was important to Dirk that he "looks his best." During these two seasons the body was more revealed and, for Dirk, the body must be able to reveal to others the intensity of his weight training. Dirk told me that during the summer months the women like to see men that are in shape, which for him meant having a muscled body that had a low fat percentage. When I asked Dirk what his partner thought of him working out he told me: "She loves it because of the physical appeal, sexual appeal ... there is a little more there. It's mixed though because sometimes she figures that now that I got her why would I want to bother [to workout]" (Interview 15, Dirk). Dirk felt that his body must be able to send out a message that he did lift weights therefore, in his eyes, whether or not he was in a relationship was irrelevant to his weight lifting.

B) The Perpetuation of Consumption

Most of the men that I talked with at the gym agreed that focusing their attention on other men was an acceptable part of working out. Yet several of the men at the gyms were, on many levels, extremely homophobic. Bob was shocked when he realized that while at the gym he was more interested in men than women. He assured me that he was not homosexual, but he felt that men, in order to be seen as masculine, had to be in direct competition with other men.

I think that guys do check other guys out. Definitely they do! Say one guy is doing an exercise and another guy asks to jump on and do the same exercise and you agree. I think that other guys stack on the extra weight just to cut you down, sort of thing; I've had this happen to me. I mean, you're always impressed by other men. [For example,] if you go to the bar you are always going to see some pretty big guys and you think that's impressive. It's always extra motivation when you see a guy bigger than you, or doing more weight. You're competing with another person (Interview 16, Bob).

When I asked Bob whether heterosexual masculinity was placed in jeopardy by contributing to behaviour which promotes men actively watching other men he told me that it only strengthens the image of heterosexual masculinity. "Society has their own stereotype of what the ideal man is. A lot say [this image is] tall, dark and handsome; on T.V. commercials the ideal guy is tall, muscular, intelligent, and well dressed. So, if I look at guys it's only because society makes me" (Interview 16, Bob). At one level, men actively pursue working out and bodybuilding as a means by which to maintain their masculinities, and for Bob this means being aware of the men around you.

In regards to masculinity, and the limits placed upon it, Brian Pronger discusses the paradox of homosexuality and sport. Part of the paradox that Pronger identifies comes from the fact that the homoerotic potential of lifting weights and consuming images of the male body was an unintended consequence in the development of the fitness industry. The paradox in the gym lies in the potential of having a construction of

masculinity which is stoic and heterosexual being interpreted, by some, as homoerotic. The hypermasculinity which surrounds much of the gym is, in part, a reaction to, what Bob might call, societal pressures. The possibility for homoerotic desire of the male body, or the image of hegemonic masculinity, undermines the orthodox construction of gender. The paradox comes from the fact that the response to consuming images of same sex bodies is in direct conflict with orthodox masculine behaviour. Listening to two heterosexual men at the gym complementing another lifter on his muscular development and sexual appeal highlights the paradox. As well, Bob seemed thoroughly disturbed by the fact that he realized that he was paying much more attention to other men, rather than focusing his attention on the women in the gym.

As I have learned after many years of working out it is acceptable to gaze at other men and be in awe of their muscular development, but it is not acceptable to find that behaviour sexually stimulating. In fact, if one man accuses another man of looking at men in a sexual fashion there is most often a defense of one's heterosexuality. For example, on occasion I have been witness to individuals criticizing one another about actively watching other men workout. During my time at Club Flex I observed one such incident which demonstrates this point. The gym was filled with people when a bodybuilder from another fitness facility entered the gym floor with a photographer and a couple of trainers³⁵. Some of the other men in the gym were intrigued by the newcomer, but most did not give him a passing glance. He proceeded to do a couple of exercises, perhaps as a means to warm-up his muscles. After these few cursory sets the man pulled his top off to pose for a few photographs. It was at this time that the majority of the male gym members focused their attention on this man, if only, for some, for a brief moment. Upon gazing at this man one member approached another and said, "Hey, maybe ya' should propose?" The man to whom this statement was directed looked embarrassed by the derogatory comment and replied, "Shut up, fag!"

³⁵ I knew this man was a bodybuilder, not just by his size, but I had seen him compete in bodybuilding competitions in prior years.

In this situation then it was acceptable to gaze at another man, so long as it was made clear that you were not doing it with any sexual intent. The accused man's sharp response reinforced the notion that many think that this behaviour is not intended to be "homoerotic."

Some of the men that are more active in watching others workout tend to state that they are watching somebody's form, or interested in the exercise they are doing. As Isaac mentioned in his interview: "The smaller guys pay attention to the bigger guys. The [the smaller guys] get workout tips and try to reach their goals with this advice" (Interview 12, Isaac). This behaviour is common at the gym and considered acceptable. When I asked Mike whether or not men paid attention to one another at the gym he told me:

Yes, it depends on the individual though, but I get people coming up to me asking questions about what I do to workout. It seems to indicate to me that they are looking at me thinking, 'this guy must know what he is doing and I'm going to ask him questions,' suggesting that, yes, they do pay attention to me (Interview 4, Mike).

In this case the gaze may be seen as a tool through which one learns about techniques of working out. Most men at the gym that I have discussed this issue with, not only recognize this type of gaze, but actually endorse it. Martin had told me that he thought members should focus their attention on the others so as to determine whether they were doing their exercises properly.

Some of the members at the gyms suggested that the images of other men show them, not only how to do exercises, but also how to function in real life situations. Jim told me in his interview that he thought Arnold Schwarzenegger was the ideal man. "I admire his [Arnold's] discipline, will power, and I believe that he got as far as he did by using physical fitness to his advantage. He is the epitome of the ultimate man" (Interview 17, Jim). For Jim, consuming the image of a bodybuilding mogul, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, revealed his commitment to bodybuilding as a means by which to emulate Arnold's life. Jim had told me on many occasions that he would like to

be Arnold: "Imagine the way people would react to your size" (Interview 17, Jim). Jim believed that weight lifting would give him all the tools he needed to construct his life. If, as Jim believed, Arnold had gained his success through muscle, so too, did he want to achieve an elevated status through muscle. "The idea of getting bigger and stronger got me interested in lifting weights. When I see other people that are big and strong I respect, not only their size, but their dedication too. If I was like that people would respect me and that would make me respect myself" (Interview 17, Jim).

iv) Conclusions

Though in many ways individuals wish to think of their body as their own, as something which they autonomously control, it is evident, through discussions with my key informants, that notions of the body are influenced by a number of different media that, in turn, shape subjectivity for individuals. In short, the body is objectified and treated as an object to be transformed, displayed, and consumed. Part of the conscious effort to represent the body in a certain fashion involved, for these men, consuming images which defined the body.

Self-objectification is a means by which the body is detached from the self. Self-objectification is evident through the mirroring process. This self-objectification is one way in which the process of consuming the body is made possible. The mirroring process, or self-objectification, may take many forms, as Klein expresses through the concept of the technical self and the hated self (1993, 245). Wayne's self-objectification, for example, was part of the technical self that could be worked on and this work in turn lead to his success as a wrestler. Charles' self-objectification, on the other hand, was part of the hated self which needed to be destroyed and replaced by another body. This mirroring process and self-objectification are means by which the body is consumed. The comic book character, the Incredible Hulk, became a character Martin mirrored himself against. This image of the Incredible Hulk, in turn, became part of Martin's self-objectification.

The continued desire for men to pursue an idealized norm of the male body manifests itself in the relationships between men at the gyms. Bob, for example, understood that in order to feel good about himself he must become strong and look 'fit,' but this strong and 'fit' look only came from consuming images of other men. Bob made sure that he was aware of other men and their muscular development so he might monitor his own development. Mike too was aware of how men actively consume the body and understood how this process continued. For Mike it was being approached first hand by other members that made him acutely aware that men were observing his body and the way in which he used it. On another level, we can see how Jim consumed the image of Arnold Schwarzenegger to shape his ideal body. Constantly tracking the lifestyle and progress of Arnold Schwarzenegger's life brought Jim closer to what he believed would be an ideal lifestyle.

Whether it is at the gym, on the television, or through external pressure from friends the body is given meaning and signification at both the unconscious and conscious level. The active consumption of the male body highlights how these men become aware of their own bodies, but this consumption is contingent on investing in the power with which the body is regulated. There is a precarious relationship between the unconscious effect of power and the conscious effort to use this power to shape the body. In the following chapter I will explore more closely the relationship between power and the individuals who workout to determine whether or not the men at the gyms consciously construct hegemonic masculinity or whether they simply comply with larger dominant ideological structures which regulate the way in which men construct their image of the body and masculinities.

Chapter 5: Hegemonic Masculinity?

i) Introduction

In the previous chapter I have discussed why the men at the gyms began to lift weights and how the male body is represented and consumed in the gym, but it is also important to explore why these men continue to lift weights. Some indicated that they continue to work out because they want to maintain their fitness level while others enjoy the “advantages” of having a sculpted body. Larger questions arise that require further explanation out of these respondents answers. For example, we must ask where the men’s notions of fitness and “advantages,” come from. The rationale behind probing why men workout is to examine not only how the men represent and consume the body but, rather, why they consume and represent the body in a certain masculinist fashion. To explore these questions it is imperative to examine larger ideological structures that shape images of fitness and perpetuate dominant images of the masculine body.

It is also useful to examine how notions of masculinity are tied into weight lifting. In essence, then, it is important to ask whether going to the gym is about constituting a particular form of masculinity. This chapter explores why men lift weights as a preferred fitness activity. At the root of this discussion is an analysis of hegemony and dominant notions of masculinity. I use the concept of hegemony to explore larger ideological structures which influence the construction of gender. This chapter is divided between a theoretical discussion of hegemony and an ethnographic section which presents interview information and particularly observation notes from my research. These two sections clarify how the men I studied construct images of masculinity and the “ideal” male body through their activities in the weight room.

ii) Theoretical Considerations of Hegemony

Hegemony is a concept that was originally devised by Antonio Gramsci - Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971). He used the concept to discuss cultural

hierarchy and how groups maintain and sustain power. "Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear 'natural,' 'ordinary,' 'normal'" (Donaldson 1993, 645). Hegemony may be about the winning and holding of power, as Donaldson attests (1993, 645), but hegemony does not necessarily imply the use of force. "It is not through force that hegemony is achieved. It is a lived consensus. Nor does it mean the obliteration of alternatives" (Vale de Almeida 1996, 163). So although there is a process by which groups maintain and hold power, this does not necessarily mean that all other groups will be destroyed in that process. For example, it would be futile to argue that all men have a construction of masculinity which is hegemonic. If this were the case there would be no sense in discussing a plurality of gendered experiences for men. As Connell sees it:

"To define masculinity as what-men-empirically are is to rule out the usage in which we call some women 'masculine' and some men 'feminine,' or some actions or attitudes 'masculine' or 'feminine' regardless of who displays them" (1995, 69).

Although Gramsci did not use the concept of hegemony to explore vectors of power within gender his concept has become a useful tool in the analysis of gender. "In the field of gender, hegemony is a matter of the capacity to impose a specific definition over other types of masculinity ... It is then understood as a structure of social relations in which several non-hegemonic masculinities subsist, although repressed and self-repressed by the hegemonic commonly held consensus" (Vale de Almeida 1996, 163-4). We cannot negate how hegemonic groups use their dominance to gain power, although, this dominance does not eliminate marginal masculinities in this process.

Dominant ideologies, then, gain hegemony by controlling, or influencing certain organizations or institutions. One such area which is controlled by hegemonic masculine ideals is sport. Jennifer Hargreaves discusses how many commentaries on sport, by men, have been sexist, anachronistic and theoretically unviable (1986, 109).

Many of these conservative arguments, as Hargreaves attests, ignore changing images of masculinity and femininity in sport and pass themselves off as biological predispositions. In short, sport is for men, and women cannot compete. These long outdated perspectives are not only sexist but have connotations for the construction of masculinity as well.

The androcentric commentaries which have been written about sport by men, for the most part, have until recently gone largely unquestioned. "Male power is legitimated more easily because the body, and its muscles, and its image in action are seen as 'natural' or a biological given" (Hargreaves 1986, 113). As Hargreaves and others point out, the muscles associated with the male body in sport are anything but "natural." With many bodybuilders consuming steroids and other growth supplements the "naturalness" of the body is in serious question. It would stand to reason then that the hegemony over weight lifting as a natural male terrain would slowly crumble under these insights or critical commentaries. The shift in power for weight lifting is slow to change. Some of the more liberal attitudes towards male hegemony in sport suggest that if women were simply added to sport that the dynamic of sport would change. However as women have entered the gym floor they have done so as an "other" not as an equal. To contest hegemonic masculinity requires more than just an active presence in the gym, but rather a focus on structural change. Joe Weider, who is responsible for establishing the bodybuilding empire, suggests that by weights, "has given women that opportunity to claim her equality" (Mansfield and McGinn 1993, 55). But as Bev Francis, a professional female bodybuilder, argues her ranking at many bodybuilding competitions, where she has been recognized as the most muscular person on the stage, has reflected the judges penalizing her for having muscles that were "too masculine" (Mansfield and McGinn 1993, 55).

The world of fitness for the most part, and in particular lifting weights, remains rigidly constructed around hegemonic notions of masculinity and the body. It would be

false to suggest that the inclusion of women into bodybuilding and weight lifting has not changed the way in which the sport is constructed, however, there continues to be a substantial influence by hegemonic masculine forces. As White and Gillett comment:

Advances made by women have contributed to a significant erosion of male privilege in institutions that have historically enabled men to validate patriarchal masculine identities. Despite these changes, cultural institutions such as sport and media have, for the most part, retained and continue to reproduce hegemonic notions of masculinity (1994, 20).

These hegemonic notions of masculinity are enforced in, seemingly, subtle ways. To take bodybuilding as an example, women who professionally compete are consciously aware that their bodies and appearances must retain a significant "degree of femininity." To revisit Bev Francis for a moment, it is evident that the woman with the largest and most defined muscles is rarely the winner in competition, where the reverse is true of men's bodybuilding competitions (Mansfield and McGinn 1993, 56). This leads to a contradiction in bodybuilding by the very fact that what is esteemed in one sex category as ideal is not matched in the other. This exemplifies the hegemonic control that masculinity has over the world of bodybuilding and this imagery is one which sports media preys upon. "The portrayal of male bodies in the sport media tends to construct the masculine ideal as being muscular (and by extrapolation powerful), in control, aggressive, and, when required, violent" (White and Gillett 1994, 20). And as Hargreaves points out, this hegemonic masculine identity regulates a 'feminine' subjectivity which is associated with passivity, relative weakness, gentleness and grace (1986, 112).

It is important to underline the ways in which male hegemony invades sport, and in part, maintains its control, but my study is not about professional sport, nor does it deal with professional athletes. This makes the quest of identifying the degree to which hegemony subtly invades the gyms more difficult. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that within recreation there is, or at least appears to be, a greater degree of fluidity in accordance to regulation and control. For example, what regulated Bev

Francis to shape her body a certain way to win competitions is not the same regulatory force for those involved in recreational weight lifting. This is not to imply that there is not a power system in place which regulates the body in recreation but, rather, that that power system may be less overt and thus much harder to identify. It is easy to point to a structured bureaucracy like the IFBB (The International Federation of Bodybuilding) in professional bodybuilding and see its role in limiting female bodybuilders potential vis-a-vis male counterparts. This same logic does not hold true for local recreational weight rooms; at local gyms there are no formal rules governing how large men and women are to be, but, ironically, men and women at most gyms still look and act differently. Part of the explanation around why men and women at the gym(s) act and lift differently I argue is shaped by hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity in the broader culture.

iii) The Men of the Gyms: Visible Bearers of Hegemonic Masculinity?

The male hegemony which surrounds the gym can be seen both in body representation, and the way in which men consume the body - as has been discussed in the previous two chapters. However, it is important to determine to what degree hegemonic masculinity affects the men of the gym and whether this is constant between the different gym sites. For example, are the men of the gyms visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity?

In this section I discuss how the key informants describe their motives to workout, as well as whether or not they feel any pressure to workout, and if so, why. These interviews are complemented by the participant observation notes that I have collected over the duration of my research in the gyms.

A) Club Flex:

After listening to men for quite some time at Club Flex I had become acutely aware of how important physical size was to them. Size and utilizing images of “largeness” was an integral part of daily life at Club Flex. Whether it was through

language (common vernacular), or physical demonstration, size was a central theme at the gym. Many of these men at the gym want to build “massive guns” (arms) and display them for all to see. I will argue through case study material that what keeps these men ubiquitously searching for the “perfect muscled body” involves the perpetuation and consumption of hegemonic masculinity.

“At that time [grade 8] weight lifting was the only thing. I was smaller than anyone in my class, the weakest anyway, and I hated it. In a weird way, this is what still drives me to workout” (Interview 17, Jim). I asked Jim whether or not he agreed with the statement that ‘somebody somewhere had to be the weakest;’ Jim agreed with this statement but quickly responded that it didn’t have to be him. Jim and I discussed childhood physical education classes. Jim mentioned that very early on in the educational system boys and girls were separated for physical education classes. During this separation, boys, ultimately, were put into direct competition with one another, or at least they were in the era Jim and I attended public and secondary school. Constant fitness testing kept boys competing against one another and for those boys at the top of the testing hierarchy there were rewards. “More athletic” boys were given commendation and praise and boys that continued to improve were given an elevated status over other boys. This left the “small,” “weak,” “unathletic” boys with a sense of defeat. For Jim, the sense of defeat and weakness made him pursue weights (Interview 17, Jim). “I no longer wanted to be the weakest” (Interview 17, Jim). Dominant notions of masculinity invaded the grade 8 gym class which Jim attended. The regulation of this force was implemented by the gym teacher, but its real regulation came from the school board which set the tentative structure for the gym class. From this Jim received the message that boys were to be, not only in competition with one another, but also strong. This image has remained with Jim and, hence, he continues to lift weights with the same competitive attitude.

Zane’s experience with weight lifting was interesting for he had an initial interest

in weights that faded through his adolescence and resurged in his late teens. As Zane expressed:

When I first dabbled in [weight lifting] I was little. It started with more of what I saw on television and read in magazines - big guys, lots of power. As I got older I wasn't so inclined to lift weights, it wasn't until I got into my late teens that I became more interested. To lift weights wasn't that big an issue because I was playing other sports. But, when I reached 20 - 21 my brother had been working out and I was impressed. He became a case study, or model, that showed progress in that you can actually change your physical appearance and look better and stronger; so, he sort of guided the way [to my lifting weights] (Interview 6, Zane).

Zane's notion of the muscled body, and hegemonic masculinity, did not come from an institutionalized gym class like Jim, rather he received imagery from the media, but more importantly from other men, namely his brother. The look of the muscled man in magazines shaped the way in which the body was idealized for Zane, but the interaction with other men shaped the way in which Zane carried his body. "I can say I don't want to be super huge or super ripped, but I want to get myself closer to a more pleasing physique as I can - let's say a very athletic male body" (Interview 6, Zane). It was assumed that I understood what an "athletic male body" was so Zane did not feel that he needed to elaborate; when I asked Zane to describe this body he simply said "a meso." Once this body was achieved Zane would become, in his eyes, part of an elite group of men.

The body was one of the major constituents which shaped Zane's image of the ideal man. "The ideal man is someone who is emotionally secure, has financial potential, and is, physically, in good shape and motivated to stay that way" (Interview 6, Zane). All of these aspects were sought and each one of these categories was an expression of Zane's masculinity. Driving a nice car, showing emotional stability around women, and flexing his muscles while at the gym all are situated within dominant hegemonic beliefs of what masculinity is, or should be.

Jake's interest in weight lifting was in reaction to hegemonic notions of the body and masculinity. Jake recognized that he constructed his body around what the

dominant discourse reinforced men's bodies ought to be, namely, strong and muscular. "I wish that I could say [that working out] was for sports and to perform better, but no, it was the sheer aesthetics. I wanted to look good, [and] be stronger. Whether it be an ego thing or not it definitely wasn't to perform better at sports" (Interview 10, Jake). In discussing with Jake where these dominant images came from he mentioned that he was aware of the media, but, ultimately, other men helped to reinforce these images simply by working out. In other words, if there was an image of men which was rejected by all but a few individuals, that particular image would not retain any hegemony in public discourse. However, by having men constantly pursuing a "fit" body the image of this "fit" body retains hegemony over other images of the body. "Based on biology alone, whether it be hormones or physiological factors, males are bigger and stronger than females" (Interview 10, Jake). Therefore if men are not seen as larger and stronger than women, in Jake's eyes, those men in some way, are biologically flawed. By working out, Jake felt that he was doing something natural, but this so called "naturalness" was enhanced, as he mentioned, by a variety of dietary supplements.

The regulation of diet was very important for many of the men at Club Flex. Diet has been institutionalized and individuals learn in a very bureaucratic sense, for example through the Canada Food Guide, what to eat and what not to eat. As Robin Saltonstall mentions, "health actions are political actions enacted via the body which legitimate or challenge norms and ideas of the social body" (1993, 12). These health actions include diet, which then, is a means by which to regulate what goes into the body. In turn, this helps to shape the body in a political fashion. Legitimate norms of diet, for some, involved ingesting supplements, as was the case with Jake. Q: *"Do you take diet supplements?"* A: Yes. Q: *Why?* A: When you stress the body as hard as I do you need extra. I take multivitamins, a protein supplement, and other over the counter gimmick supplements. Q: *Do they help you?* A: Yes, they give me a boost" (Interview 10,

Jake).

Not all share the same optimism about supplements, however, there was a tremendous amount of solidarity when it came to a healthy diet. “A healthy diet is important,” Stan told me. “I like to balance my proteins and my carbohydrates. I like a balanced diet” (Interview 8, Stan). Or consider Isaac’s bout with supplements:

I tried two [different kinds of supplements]. Creatine Monohydrate worked really well and it got me some good results. The only reason that I didn’t stick with it was because it was 90 bucks a month, it was too expensive for me to stick with. I [also] tried Ripped Fuel protein powder. The aminos were so high in it that I had stomach discomfort, if ya’ know what I mean³⁶ (Interview 12, Isaac).

Isaac therefore “maximizes” his diet without the use of supplements. He has found that he can achieve the same, or similar results through food, which has made him question why he took the supplements in the first place.

Martin’s explanation of diet supplements was interesting, for he articulated why he had taken certain supplements and not used others. Martin, too, mentioned that the use of certain supplements did little to boost his athletic performance. He told me that he took amino acids but found them terribly ineffective. When I asked why he took supplements he told me that advertising pushed the use of supplements with bodybuilding spokespersons. Through the use of spokespersons, individuals come to an understanding that supplements have a positive impact on muscular development. In combination with the advertisements, Martin also cited the other people at the gym being influential in his decision to take supplements. “After reading the advertisements in the magazines I think, ‘um maybe I should be takin’ these things,’ but when I see people takin’ these things and they’re working I start to seriously consider them” (Interview 9, Martin). With the lack of results that many of my key informants had with supplements, and with Martin mentioning that he felt, at one level, weight lifters are pushed into using them, it was not difficult to see how diet was influenced by

³⁶ The Ripped Fuel gave Isaac diarrhea and gas.

hegemonic forces. Advertisements work on the desires of weight lifters and bodybuilders by using images of strong and stoic men to promote their products. The hegemonic force that individuals may feel from advertisements was supplemented, if you will, by other men and their attitudes, as Martin mentioned.

B) Fitness First

The men at Fitness First had a slightly different sense about what it meant to have a fit body. Most of the men that I talked to felt that some regulatory forces were in place which kept them searching for a “fit” body. These images solidified a dominant masculine image. The interviews that I will discuss in this section highlight that the men at Fitness First, although a different type of weight lifting enthusiast, still feel external forces to maintain a certain image of masculinity which keeps them lifting weights.

Hank told me that he enjoyed working out. Being a competitive rower he felt that his workouts gave him the extra boost he needed during his various competitions. Hank’s training schedule consisted of five weight sessions and six to seven aerobic sessions a week. Amazed by the amount of time he spent in the gym, I asked what made him feel that it was vital to workout and train up to seven days a week. Hank mentioned that rowing competitions required a tremendous amount of physical endurance and therefore felt that the workouts were imperative to his success as a rower. Part of this I understood, but, Hank also mentioned to me that he was not in competition this year, therefore I was puzzled by his training schedule. When I questioned Hank about the intensity of his current training routine he told me that he simply wanted to “keep in shape.” I then asked Hank about the competitive side of his fitness routine and inquired about what first got him interested in weight lifting. “It was a fitness goal with a friend. I was interested in getting fit. From the competition we shared I was drawn in [to the weight room]” (Interview 5, Hank). Similarly, most of the men I talked with mentioned that either a friend or a competitive situation compelled them to work out on the weights and very few went into the weight room of their own

accord.

Mike concurred with this as well. When I asked him what got him interested in lifting weights he told me that his high school athletic program included weights. As Mike recalls:

I was into sprinting [in grade 9 - 10] and had read that 20% of your speed came from your upper body and I remember thinking, "oh, maybe I should start working out so I can get bigger." Of course, there was the whole Ben Johnson thing back then too; there were pictures of him and he was huge. I thought, "look at how fast he is I'd better start lifting weights" (Interview 4, Mike).

Mike came to understand that weights were a necessary part of his upward mobility as an athlete. Just as Ben Johnson used weights to his advantage so could Mike.

Both Mike and Hank found the weight room useful in improving their athletic performances. Describing why these two men used the weight room and weights exemplifies how the construction of hegemonic masculinity affects men's decisions in the gym and in sport. The dominant construction of masculinity dictates that men must be "winners." Acknowledging that certain hegemonic forces influenced the way in which these two individuals viewed weight lifting helped to illuminate what made them feel the need to compete to win. Hank felt pressure to "push weights" because he had a rowing partner that was much stronger than he was. Part of the anxiety that occurs when men are placed in direct competition with one another comes from dominant discourses. The ideology of male sport makes seeing losing a positive experience almost impossible, therefore men must compete with other men in order to feel successful. Hank did not feel good about his performance, or himself for that matter, until he took the initiative to improve his level of fitness and strength. "When I started to row competitively my partner was much stronger than me so I felt it was important to improve my fitness level" (Interview 5, Hank). Mike, too, realized that the potential to become a good runner, and athlete in general, required that he push weights. As previously mentioned, pictures of Ben Johnson along with articles promoting the

“positive benefits” of weight lifting encouraged Mike to pursue weight lifting.

Sports related goals were but one way individuals at Fitness First had become motivated to lift weights. Some individuals, such as Mike and Hank, tended to continue their efforts on the weights to increase their chances of winning at their sporting activities, but others, such as Bob, acknowledged how dominant images of the “fit” male body compelled some men to push weights. For Bob, self-esteem was a significant factor in why he continued to lift weights. Bob acknowledged the vanity behind the pursuit of an esthetically pleasing body, but explained that these pursuits were not formulated with the intention of finding a potential suitor. As Bob explained:

“A lot of guys work out because they want to get bigger. This [goal] makes them think that they are better [than others]. You’re not only trying to impress the girls, but when you’re in the gym you want to impress the other guys. ‘I’m bigger than you ... I can do more weight.’ Ya, [working out] does boost your self-esteem” (Interview 16, Bob).

In one sense, Bob wanted to make his body “appealing” for other women, but admitted that the drive to show other men that he was bigger and stronger than them kept his motivation to lift weights high. As mentioned previously, Bob confessed, “[i]t’s always extra motivation when you see a guy bigger than you or doing more weight. You’re always competing with another person” (Interview 16, Bob). Reluctant to discuss his opinions about what I call hegemonic masculinity and he labeled society’s image of men, Bob waited until the tape had stopped running to explain his confusion over men using the body to compete with other men. He explained his interest in how men perceive other men and asked me why men were so concerned with other men’s bodies. “*I don’t really know what do you think?*,” I responded. Bob then told me that men paid attention to other men and men’s bodies because society dictated that they should. The way in which we were socialized to be men, Bob noted, reinforces the notion that men must be in continuous competition with one another. Bob said that he felt the pressure, not just to compete with other men in the gym, but rather to monitor their bodies. Bob was visibly disturbed by this so I asked him whether or not he thought that

this behaviour was odd. He told me “in confidence,” that he thought that this behaviour, of men watching other men, was “a bit gay,” but did not feel his sexuality was in jeopardy because society dictated that this was acceptable behaviour for “straight guys.”

Dirk, too, admitted that lifting weights improved his self-esteem. Unlike Bob, Dirk was not concerned with looking at other men’s bodies, or at least he never saw that behaviour as remotely odd. When I asked Dirk whether or not men pay attention to other men in the gym he first responded, “I don’t know!” But when he realized that I was not, necessarily, asking whether or not the act of looking was erotic, he changed his answer. “I notice guys that are big. For sure I notice guys that are much bigger that have qualities that I would like in myself, so I pay attention to what they are doing” (Interview 15, Dirk). In this sense, Dirk did not acknowledge the influence that society, as Bob called it, has on men and their bodies. Dirk felt that it was “natural” for people to “try and better themselves.” When Dirk told me why he thought it was important to work out he stated:

[Working out is important] because you’re either getting better or getting worse. If you’re not getting better you’re getting worse, and I prefer to get better.

Q: How do you describe getting better?

A: Well, physically either I’m gaining weight, getting fatter, losing muscle mass, definition, physical appeal, and confidence, or I’m getting better, gaining muscle mass, losing fat, and more definition. Very seldom are you ever breaking even (Interview 15, Dirk).

Although Dirk did not verbally acknowledge the influence that hegemonic constructions of masculinity had over his desire to work out and consume the body, it was evident from his discussion that they were there. For example, when I asked Dirk whether or not men paid attention to women in the gym he enthusiastically responded, “OH-YEAH!” Again, this type of behaviour was “normal” for Dirk because he acknowledged this behaviour as typically heterosexual. When I asked him why he

looked at the women he stated: "Because they are beautiful, why would you not? Q: *So women that work out are beautiful?* Oh- yeah." (Interview 15, Dirk). With this response I held up a picture of a recent Muscle & Fitness (May 1997), which had pictured Lenda Murray [former Ms. Olympia] and a female model in a bathing suit, and asked him what he thought of the two women on the cover. "[Referring to Lenda Murray] I find this cool, but the non-muscular one I find sexy" (Interview 15, Dirk). I asked him why it was that he found the "non-muscular one" sexy; he told me that the other one, referring to Lenda, was too much like a man. Dirk did not think that it was "natural" for women to be muscular to the extent that female bodybuilders were. When I asked him why it was acceptable for men to be overly muscular and not women he told me that society accepted men as muscular and women as non-muscular. Again, although he did recognize it, hegemonic notions of what bodies ought to be regulate what Dirk found acceptable and not acceptable in terms of male and female bodies.

Charles had encountered the powerfulness of hegemonic notions of the body. As mentioned in a previous chapter, Charles began to lift weights because of childhood friends teasing him about his weight. "Out of cruelty my friends would joke and call me Fat Chucky. So I said, 'screw them!' I'd pump up and show them" (Interview 14, Charles). When I asked Charles whether or not weight lifting affected his self-esteem he quickly agreed and stated the positive benefits that weight lifting had on his body. "Oh definitely! [Working out] keeps me looking good and makes me feel good. When I look good, I feel good all round" (Interview 14, Charles). Charles now is a strong advocate of weight lifting and "healthy" lifestyles and has a certain distaste for those individuals who do not participate in a "healthy" lifestyle. An example of this was when I asked Charles who he thought the ideal man was. "Physical fitness is important, you don't have to be huge [referring specifically to muscles mass and not one's body fat index], but as long as you are fit. You don't have to be cut [referring to visible muscle striations], but as long as you're not sweating walking to the bus, or whatever"

(Interview 14, Charles). Before his childhood experience with his “friends” Charles had no reason to think of his body as inferior to any of his other “friends,” but once his “friends” joked and ostracized Charles he quickly learned that his body was in some way “flawed.” The hegemonic notion of the fit body was so ingrained in Charles that now he does not think twice about ostracizing others about their weight or physical condition. Charles’ childhood experience, hence, shaped the way in which Charles views his own and other male bodies today.

iv) Conclusions

Throughout this chapter I have explored why the men of the gyms lift weights. In order to adequately examine why these men lift weights it was imperative that dominant notions of masculinity and the male body be examined. For this reason the concept of hegemony was used to analyze how larger ideological structures influenced these men’s perceptions of masculinity and the male body. The hegemonic influence at the gyms was reinforced by images from advertisements, pictures, dress, and peers - to name just a few. The way in which this hegemonic control influenced these men was extremely subtle and for most, the distinction of having a muscled body appeared “natural,” and “normal.”

Many men felt that they autonomously controlled their bodies. They lifted weights, primarily, to better themselves, whether it was for “fitness,” or aesthetic gains. Many of the men felt that they were free to build and shape the body as they felt necessary. However, weight lifting, for these men, was not simply a matter of conditioning the muscles, it was about constructing a masculine identity. For example, the men of Club Flex were concerned with conditioning their muscles for more aesthetic purposes whereas the men of Fitness First were focused more on conditioning. For some masculine identity included a notion of “winning,” as was the case with both Hank and Mike of Fitness First, while for others, like Jake and Jim of Club Flex, it meant showing that their muscles were well conditioned, which for many

of my key informants was a prerequisite of becoming a man.

To say that there was a singular “force” which influenced these men to work out and continue to pursue weight lifting as a means of “fitness” would be incorrect. Unlike a formal bureaucracy, such as the I.F.B.B. (The International Federation of Bodybuilding), there were no formal rules which these men followed to construct their image of the male body and masculinity, which is much different than Fussell’s experience (1991) or the professional bodybuilders that Klein studied (1993). Many of the men had a variety of different experiences which took them to the weight room, as we have seen in this chapter. Equally, there were a variety of different reasons why these men continued to work out, regardless of the type of gym.

There was some ambiguity in the men’s responses which made it difficult to uncover why these men continued to pursue weight lifting. For example, some informants felt uneasy about discussing other men; but, almost all agreed that interactions with other men, images of men or, even, readings on men and masculinity made them feel that, in some way, the image of a powerful muscular body was part of being a man. Whether their ideal body image was that of a bodybuilder or that of an “athletic” male, all of the men that I interviewed viewed the body as a means by which to create and identify the masculine self. Hegemonic notions of the “fit” male body and hegemonic notions of masculinity both played/play a vital role in these men’s decisions to lift weights.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This study has focused on the degree by which men who lift weights in the regional gyms of Thunder Bay are affected by hegemonic notions of masculinity. It has investigated how men, while in the gym, construct a hegemonic image of the body and masculinity through weight lifting. In doing so, two different gyms were chosen to represent a more recreational type of weight lifter. This focus was in reaction to much of the contemporary literature on body building which centres on urban professional bodybuilders. I was concerned with how the works of Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991) under-represented recreational weight lifting enthusiasts. I have argued that while their analyses are illuminating they did not comprehensively represent all men who lift weights.

Doing a comparative analysis of two different weight rooms in Thunder Bay was fundamental in demonstrating that all gyms are not the same. Even in the smaller urban settings, such as Thunder Bay, there are differences between weight rooms. Examining the differences between the two gyms helped define each as a unique place, which attracted a different clientele. Much of what is described in contemporary literature on weight rooms fails to define the social space as unique and rather focus on the similarities between gyms.

While focusing on the difference between the gyms, I had explored how men represent their bodies through dress, language, and the physical body. The men at the gyms, although working out in different settings, were both on the ubiquitous quest for the “perfect” male body. Whether it was to become a more competitive rower, or to win the Mr. Thunder Bay title, these men were trying to achieve something that they felt that they did not have. Albeit in subtly different ways, men at the gyms were striving to enhance their physical performance.

Understanding why the men at the gyms, despite all their differences, continued to pursue the “perfect” male body required examining how the male body was

consumed. I primarily focused on how these men came to understand an image of fitness and the fit male body. Here the notion of the autonomous body was deconstructed. I focused on how these men were influenced by larger hegemonic forces - which, consequently, affected how they had come to understand their bodies.

In order to adequately understand why the men of the gyms continued to lift weights I examined dominant notions of masculinity and the male body. Examining hegemonic masculinity allowed for an analysis of larger ideological structures that influences men's perception of the male body. Exploring the influence of advertisements, pictures, dress, and peers (to name a few) highlighted the ways in which hegemonic control influenced these men into thinking of the muscled male body as "natural" and "normal." Again focusing on the notion of an autonomously controlled body, I examined how, for these men, weight lifting was not simply about conditioning muscle it was about constructing a masculine identity.

Throughout all the chapters there are many parallels which can be drawn between my work and that of Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991), such as the mirroring that happens at the gym, and the language by which the body is discussed, however there is a key element missing. Although Klein states that bodybuilders too struggle with the same issues of masculinity as men that do not work out (1993, 6), his study ultimately focuses on an extreme part of the subculture. It was at times difficult to draw comparisons between his conclusions and mine, which involved a more general category of weight lifting enthusiast. It is for this reason that I had chosen to do a comparative analysis in the first place. I was interested to find out whether the hard-core gym atmosphere of Club Flex compared to Klein's (1993) and Fussell's (1991) gyms of study. In addition, it was interesting to discover how the comparisons between Klein (1993), Fussell (1991), and Club Flex compared to the experience of the men that lifted weights at Fitness First. Using the work of Klein first, there were occasions where I was able to draw comparisons to what I had viewed at Club Flex, but when I tried to

compare these findings to Fitness First they rarely seemed to correlate. For example, the music that was described at Klein's Olympic gym (1993) was very similar to what I had witnessed at Club Flex, but was unlike what I experienced at Fitness First.

Fussell's work (1991) too was very interesting, but fell short in my comparison. One of the most interesting points was that Fussell's autobiographical account followed him from his very first encounter with a weight room to his life as a professional bodybuilder. His initial descriptions of entering the gym for the first time were amazingly similar to some of my initial observations at Club Flex. His need to leave his local health club/gym in New York and set out on a pilgrimage to the hard core gyms in California was of particular interest. This story was similar to the stories that I had heard from the men at Club Flex who were working out there because it was the only hard-core gym in Thunder Bay. Fussell's autobiographical account (1991) was insightful in relation to serious bodybuilders, but it hardly spoke to an entire population of recreational weight lifters.

In order to properly understand how men construct an image of gender within the gym requires examining many variables. This paper has explored some of the more pertinent variables which affect and influence men and their image of masculinity, which include the physical male body, mirroring, language, dress, and media, to name a few. The men at both gyms were, to some degree, influenced by these different phenomena. These men had come, in one way or another, to embody gender through the use of weights, and ultimately muscle. Therefore the body, for these men, was a means through which to express their gendered identity. For example in my discussion with Jim, he did not want to be the smallest or weakest therefore he associated himself with the gym subculture to create an image of himself which he found pleasing, i.e. the muscled male.

It would seem from this case study that the individualization of the body that has been occurring in the "fitness" industry is not part of a movement that is in place to

liberate the body; rather, this movement has repressed the body and made it a receptor of self-monitoring. It is this self-monitoring process that keeps men ubiquitously searching for the “perfect” physique. Hegemonic notions of the body and masculinity, in turn, negatively impede individuals’ freedom to create an image of masculinity independent of these regulatory forces. These hegemonic forces, then, help to shape a gender identity for those who enter the gym. For example, men are to be one way and women are to be another.

It is important to mention that just because hegemony plays an important role in the gym does not mean that all the men at the gyms are visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity. Some men may consciously comply with hegemonic forces while other men may react against these same forces. Hegemony is a cultural dynamic not an ideology. Rather, hegemony is a tool used to understand ideology. Hegemony, then, may affect men in rather different ways. In the case of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is an ideological configuration of gender practice which guarantees or allows the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

However, for those who work out at a fitness facility or a hard core gym it is nearly impossible to escape the hegemonic forces which invade the gym. From the pictures displayed on the walls to the never ending gaze through the mirrors, individuals are actively encouraged to objectify and consume the body. Bodies at the gym are individualized and dissected. Arms, chest, legs, shoulders, and back are all seen as autonomous pieces of the self. “I’m working chest and he’s working arms,” highlights how the body is objectified and consumed by its constituent pieces. Having men stand in front of the mirror and tell me that they need to work on the “pipes” (arms) reveals, to me, that men are aware of the body. The notion of the “fit” male body, which is created and perpetuated by dominant ideological forces, keeps men transforming and recreating a body which they believe they autonomously control.

The question remains, is it useful to draw a distinction between various gyms

(i.e. a fitness facility and a hard core gym) if, at the end of the day, hegemonic forces are seen as invading both of these types of facilities? The answer to this question is yes. It is useful to recognize that there are differences between gyms and the men that work out at gyms. I have highlighted the differences between two gyms to underscore the importance of not falling into essentialism and stating that all gyms are similar so therefore all men who lift weights too must be seen as similar. I have argued that, in part, this is the major weakness with the works of Klein (1993) and Fussell (1991). It is useful to recognize that a plurality of gendered identities may be working in a social setting at any one time. Weight lifter is a general category that may encapsulate a tremendous range of gendered experiences. This does not mean that hegemonic masculinity does not affect the men of the gyms. On the contrary, hegemonic masculinity affects the men of the gym, however it does so in different ways.

Although, I have discussed the importance of differentiating between the two types of gyms, and their clientele, it has become apparent that hegemonic forces invade both of the gyms, albeit in subtly different ways. After completing this study the question is not whether hegemonic forces invade the gym and weight lifting but, rather, how hegemonic regulatory forces influence the men at the gyms to construct an image of gender. What motivates Jake, of Club Flex, to work out and what motivates Charles, of Fitness First, to work out are completely different, but in similar ways they have both been affected by the hegemonic construction of the fit body and masculinity. The ubiquitous search for the perfect male body and the ideal masculinity continues for these men. These men are not immune to the dominant forces that regulate the construction of masculinities and the male body, but rather are acutely affected by them.

I have focused specifically on how hegemonic masculinity affects men at the gym. What I have presented is a comparison between a hard core gym and a health club facility in Thunder Bay to see if men at all gyms are affected by dominant notions

of masculinity. Although there is a degree to which hegemonic notions of masculinity are present at both gyms future work needs to be done to explore other dimensions of the experience. A future exploration might include how, or to what degree, men at gyms in other urban centres react to hegemonic masculinity and whether those reactions are consistent with my findings in Thunder Bay. As well, it would be interesting to explore women's perspectives on femininity and masculinity at the two gyms I focused on in my research. It would be interesting to study how women are affected by hegemonic notions of masculinity and hegemonic notions of femininity. In relation to this, it would be equally interesting to explore how homosexual men embody gender in the weight room in smaller urban centres. In other words, it is impossible to state that one experience could be representative of an entire subculture. This is why future work needs to continue that explores a range of gendered experiences in the gym. Just as Klein and Fussell offer one picture of masculinity and the weight lifting subculture, so too does this study. Further work needs to be conducted that specifically focuses on hegemony, masculinity, and the gym, so we may have an ever clearer picture of the subculture in question.

Appendix A

Key Informants' Profiles

Key Informant 1: Ian³⁷

Age: 28

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Ian is a full time stock clerk at one of the areas local grocery stores. Ian is originally from Thunder Bay.

Ian's "fitness" and training began later in high school. He said that the push to lift weights came primarily from his friends. Ian used to box with his friends and in order to protect himself better he began to "get in better shape." Ian said that he never seriously began to lift weights until the age of 25 and currently lifts weights four to five times a week; each session on the weights for Ian lasts between an hour to an hour and a half.

Key Informant 2: Jason

Age: 28

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Jason is a security guard in Thunder Bay. Jason is originally from a smaller rural setting in Northwestern Ontario.

Jason began organized sport in high school, but lifting weights did not begin until the age of 21. Jason said that once he finished high school sports he started to feel unhealthy. These feeling made Jason pursue weights and weight lifting. Jason states that he is interested in "fitness" and not bodybuilding. Jason currently lifts weights four times a week for, roughly, an hour per session.

Key Informant 3: Nick

Age: 25

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Nick is a full time student at the local University. Nick is originally from Thunder Bay. Nick comes from a middle class background, where his parents were both office workers.

Nick said that he began organized sport at the age of 7, but it was not until the

³⁷ All the names used throughout the thesis are pseudonyms.

age of 15 that he began to lift weights. Nick lifts weights four times a week, for, "roughly," an hour per session. Nick says that his workouts are important because they make him feel healthy. Nick stresses the importance of health and sees a direct correlation between weight lifting and health.

Key Informant 4: Mike

Age: 21

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Mike is a full time student at the local University. Mike is originally from a smaller urban centre in Southern Ontario. Mike comes from a middle class background. Mike's parents are both teachers.

Mike states that he has always been active in sport, but says that his interest in weight lifting began in grade 8. Mike says that his workouts originally began in his basement and, therefore, he did not begin to workout in a "gym" until he was in grade 11. Mike keeps his weight lifting limited to three days a week and spends the rest of his days doing other types of physical activities, such as cycling, skiing, water sports, etc.. Mike states that he likes being outside more than anything else. Mike states that his focus is on "fitness," and not bodybuilding.

Key Informant 5: Hank

Age: 37

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Hank works as a technician at the local University. Hank is from the Thunder Bay area.

Hank is a competitive rower and focuses his workouts around improving his physical conditioning. Hank lifts weights as well as having a cardiovascular routine that is separate from his weight routine. Hank lifts weights five times a week and has between six to seven aerobic sessions a week.

Key Informant 6: Zane

Age: 28

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Zane is an architect. Zane is originally from Thunder Bay, but has lived in larger urban centres.

Zane says that his current interest in "fitness" began when he was about 8 or 9.

During this time Zane was playing hockey. Zane says that his interest in “serious scheduled workouts with weights” began when he was 20. Zane said that it was his brother who motivated him to workout. His brother, in Zane’s eyes, was a model of what weights could “positively” do to the body. Zane, currently, lifts weights four times a week each session is two hours long. Zane is concerned about muscle development, but admits as he gets older he is more concerned with “health issues.”

Key Informant 7: Frank

Age: 31

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Frank is originally from Thunder Bay and the current owner of Club Flex.

Frank said that high school football spawned his interest in weight lifting. Frank has competed competitively in past bodybuilding competitions. Frank says that he does not compete any more and uses the weight lifts as a means by which to keep in shape. Frank workouts on the weights between four to six times a week.

Key Informant 8: Stan

Age: 28

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Stan works full time as an employment counselor. Stan is not originally from Thunder Bay and comes from a large urban centre in Southern Ontario. Stan comes from a middle class family where both parents work for a paid wage.

Stan considers his goals to be “fitness” orientated. Stan wants to maintain his “health,” and works out on the weights 5 times a weeks. Stan originally lifted weights to raise his competition level.

Key Informant 9: Martin

Age: 21

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Martin is a student at the local University. Martin is originally from Thunder Bay. Martin comes from a working class background where his mother is a domestic labourer and his father is a manual labour for a local blue collar industry.

Martin’s interest in weights and training began at the age of 10. Martin’s interest in weights came from both images of bodybuilders, such as Lou Ferigno and Arnold Schwarzenegger, and from a cousin who actively competed as a power lifter. Martin

lifts weights five times a week between 1 to 2 hours per session. Martin goals include pushing himself as hard as he can at the gym.

Key Informant 10: Jake

Age: 25

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Jake is an unemployed mine worker. Jake is from Thunder Bay. Jake comes from a working class family where his mother is a domestic labourer and his father is a manual labourer in a blue collar industry.

Jake became interested in weight training at the age of ten. He saw weight training as a means by which to gain an advantage over the other children his age in sports. Jake lifts weights 6 days a week for a about an hour to 2 hours per session. Jake splits his routine into light and heavy days. Jake's primary focus is on the development of muscle and is concerned with keeping the muscle that he has gained over the years.

Key Informant 11: Wayne

Age: 35

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Wayne is a full time instructor at the local University. Wayne is not originally from Thunder Bay. Wayne is from a smaller rural Northern Ontario town

Wayne began lifting weights in high school as a means by which to excel in school sporting competitions. Wayne considers his goals, currently, to be focused on "fitness." Wayne lifts weights 4 times a week, plays squash, and has a cardiovascular routine (which includes riding the stationary bike or his own mountain bike). Wayne says that he does some form of physical activity 7 days a week.

Key Informant 12: Isaac

Age: 17

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Isaac is a high school student in Thunder Bay. Isaac is originally from Thunder Bay. Isaac comes from a working-class background, where his mother is a domestic labourer and his father is a manual labourer for one of the local blue collar industries.

Isaac began to lift weights seriously at the age of sixteen, but contests that his interests in weight lifting began when he was 13. He said that his motivation in weight lifting originated with the desire to become a better high school athlete, but his

motivation in "hard core" weight lifting was spawned out of an interest in weight lifting magazines, such as Muscle & Fitness. Currently, Isaac lifts weights six days a week for three hours per session.

Key Informant 13: Tom

Age: 25

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Tom is a full time student at the local University. Tom is not originally from Thunder Bay. Tom is from a smaller urban centre in Southern Ontario. Tom comes from a middle class background; his parents were employed in both the private and public sectors.

Tom began lifting weights in high school as a means by which to improve his athletic ability. Tom stated that the age in which he began to lift weights was 14. Tom lifts weights 4 times a week for between 1 to 2 hours. Tom agrees that the focus of his workouts have changed from gaining size and strength to focusing on fitness and "having fun."

Key Informant 14: Charles

Age: 22

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Charles is a student at the local university. Charles is from a smaller rural setting in Southern Ontario. Charles comes from a middle class background, where his parents are both teachers.

Charles's interest in fitness began at the age of 11 when other children his age teased Charles about being overweight. Charles, currently, contends that his motivations for lifting weights are more fitness orientated. Charles currently does "something physical" everyday, but only lifts weights a maximum of four times a week, for about an hour per session.

Key Informant 15: Dirk

Age: 23

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Dirk is a full time student at the local University. Dirk is originally from a smaller rural centre in Southern Ontario. Dirk comes from a middle class family, where his father is a teacher and his mother a public health official.

Dirk says his interest in "fitness" began when he was in high school, but states that his interest in "serious weight lifting" did not begin until he was 21. Currently, Dirk lift weights six days a week for two hours per session. Dirk is concerned both with muscle development and "fitness." Dirk says that he always wants to be getting better physically.

Key Informant 16: Bob

Age: 23

Gym Attended: Fitness First

Bob is a student at the local University. Bob is originally from Thunder Bay. Bob comes from a working class background, where his mother is a domestic labourer and his father is a worker at one of the local wood mills.

Bob cannot cite an age at which he became interested in "fitness" and states that he was always athletic. Bob says that he began to lift weights at the age 15. He, currently, lifts weights five times a week for an hour and half per session. Bob states that his primary concern with lifting weights is to "keep fit," but does admit that he always wants to push himself to do a "couple extra reps."

Key Informant 17: Jim

Age: 22

Gym Attended: Club Flex

Jim is a full time student at the local university. Jim is not originally from Thunder Bay and came to the city from a rural town in Southern Ontario. Jim comes from a working class family where his father is a labourer and his mother is a non-paid domestic worker.

Jim's workouts consist largely of lifting weights. He lifts weights 5 times a week, between 1.5 to 2 hours per session. Jim proclaims that the notion of becoming bigger and stronger has propelled him to lift weights with some intensity.

Appendix B**Interview Schedule for Gym Participants**

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Are you employed? If so, what do you do?
 Did you receive training and/or go to school for your current position?
 Where are you from?
 If a student are you F/T or P/T? What do your parents do (i.e. class origin)?
4. If you are employed, does your employment schedule affect your workouts?
 If so, how?
5. At what age did fitness and training begin to interest you?
6. At what age did you begin to lift weights?
7. How often do you workout?
8. How long do your workouts last?
9. How do your workouts make you feel? (physically, or emotionally)
 After a workout does your mood change?
10. Why do you feel it is important to workout?
11. Would you describe your workouts as work or play?
12. Does working out affect your self esteem?
13. If you are involved in a relationship, or when you are involved in relationships, do your workouts change?
 If so, how do they change?
14. How does your partner feel about you working out?
15. Do they also workout?
16. What first got you interested in lifting weights?
17. What are your goals at the gym?
 Have they changed over time?
 Do these goals include trying to achieve a look?
 Or are they aimed at achieving a particular fitness level?

18. Do you believe there are “natural” body types for men and women? If so, how would you describe these body types?
19. What do you think about women who workout?
In your gym?
At other gyms?
20. Do you think the men and the women at this gym pay attention to one another?
If so, how? Why do you think this is so?
21. Do you think that the men pay attention to the other men at gym?
If so, how? Why do you think this is so?
22. How would you describe the people that workout here?
23. Who would you say the typical member is at your gym?
Do you feel that there are members at your gym that are different than the typical gym member?
If so, what type of people are they?
How do you feel about these different people working out here?
Do they bother you?
24. Why do you workout where you do?
Would you prefer to workout elsewhere?
25. How important is the financial cost of working out to you?
26. Who do you think the ideal man is, and why?
27. Who do you think the ideal woman is, and why?
28. How would you describe your diet?
Does it differ with your work out schedule?
If so, why?
29. Do you take diet supplements?
If so, why?
30. How important is companionship in the gym?
i.e. friends, workout partners, people with similar goals.
31. Would you be willing to give up working out?
Would you ever stop working out for good?
Have you ever stopped, and why?
Why did you start again?
32. What is the most positive aspect of working out for you?

33. What is the least positive aspect of working out for you?

Appendix C

Interview Schedule for Owner of Club Flex

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Why did you decide to open a gym / weight room?
4. Why did you choose Thunder Bay for the location of your gym?
5. How many years has your gym been open?
6. Do you lift weights?
If so, what first got you interested in lifting weights?
Why weights and not, let's say, running?
7. Have you ever competed as a bodybuilder, or do you still compete?
If so, when?
8. Why did you compete?
9. How would you describe your experience as a competitive bodybuilder?
i.e. Good/Bad, etc..
10. How would you describe this gym to someone who had never been in it?
11. Would you say that this gym caters to a particular type of member?
If so, how would you describe this member?
If not, how would you describe the gym's clientele?
12. Who would be your ideal client and why?
13. Are you pleased with the gym's clientele?
i.e. the amount of members, the type of members, the attitude of the members?
14. How would you describe the atmosphere at the gym?
Does the atmosphere at the gym reflect what you had intended it to be when you originally opened?
15. Are there any types of members that you would prefer not to have at your gym?
If so, how would you describe these members?
16. Have you seen any changes in the clientele over the years?
i.e. either in seriousness, attitude, or motivation?

17. Are you pleased with the set up of the gym?
i.e. are there other pieces of equipment that you would like to have?
18. Do you believe that the current focus on fitness is a fad?
If so, why?
Do you think that this trend will last?
If not, why?
19. What do you see your role as for the clients of the gym?
Do clients ask you for advice?
20. How do think that the clients view you?

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