



**Investigating the meaning of ‘gym-going’ in an organisational gym.**

**An ethnographically informed study.**

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by

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## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## **Abstract**

This ethnographically informed study explores what ‘gym-going’ means to people who visit a specific organisational gym (which I call LABFIT) located in Sydney, Australia. Since the mid-1990s, a number of what I term ‘gym studies’ have sought to investigate why people participate in gym-going. A central concept of these studies is the body ideal, which is employed to explain why gym-goers perform work on their bodies when they go to the gym. The main findings of these gym studies suggest that people do bodywork to represent the neo-liberal ideal of a healthy, valuable citizen; that is, to secure and symbolise belonging to a particular social class and hopefully (albeit often unrealistically) to attain the ideal body images depicted in the media. My fieldwork as an ethnographer-trainer in LABFIT revealed that people use this gym for reasons beyond working on their bodies and shaping them according to an ideal. Conducting ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies with selected gym-goers of LABFIT enabled me to gain a detailed understanding of why and how people used gym equipment in their gym going and how people personally experience their ‘exercising bodies’. A central finding of my study is that body feelings as opposed to body work, are at the forefront of people’s experience in LABFIT. Supporting this finding are exercise logbooks, earphones, and certain items of gym equipment that act as gym ‘technologies of the self’, which not only assist people to influence their bodies, but also on their memories, minds, thoughts and feelings. The findings also suggest that gym-going is about individuals’ socialising ‘exercising fleshy bodies’. However, despite the fleshy

sociality that constitutes LABFIT, people are able to temporarily create their ‘own’ perceived space (s) in this gym, which in turn facilitates a more ‘individualised’ experience of their gym-going. As such, this thesis provides valuable insight, especially for trainers, to understand that people’s gym-going is neither centered exclusively on their bodywork, nor upon attaining a certain bodily ideal. Instead, gym-going involves how people ‘exercise’ their thoughts and memories, and the degree to which they develop bodily knowledge of how to feel and move their bodies. Based on the central findings, this thesis concludes with recommendation of specific pedagogical strategies that call on gym trainers’ to understand in more depth why people perform certain gym-going practice, how these practices make them feel and how to incorporate their understanding into the prescription and instruction of exercise at the gym.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **Section 1: My world in gyms**

I clearly remember the day when I obtained my first gym membership 13 years ago in Germany. I was 16 years old. To this day, I can still sense my feeling of pride when I walked into the gym to experience my introductory session with a gym trainer. I felt grown up and somewhat serious about becoming a fit person. I had always loved exercising. Gyms to me however, evoked a certain air of seriousness about exercising. The gym that I sought to become a member was a large building complex consisting of a large gym floor equipped with a range of cardio and weight machines, free weights, a spinning room, and a room for other group classes such as step aerobics, body pump, pilates and yoga. In addition to the gym instructors who led group classes, a trainer was present on the gym floor at most times. The trainer on the gym floor was primarily there for supervisory purposes; but, members could also hire her/him for personal training sessions.

I can still visualise the shininess of the mirrors installed on most of the gym walls. Everywhere I looked, I could see myself and other members from different angles in the mirrors. I remember large posters hanging on the walls with pictures of energetic, fit, beautiful-looking bodies that seemingly effortlessly pushed weights. Bodies have always intrigued me. I have always been fascinated by how they are shaped differently, can be transformed, and how they jiggle and move differently, especially when exercising. Hence, I felt that I had ascended to body heaven when I started my gym journey. Within the gym, I

imaginatively grouped bodies into two extreme types. Of course, these types could not account for every existing body shape; rather they were rough divisions of bodies that I observed in the gym. There were the look-a-like fitness models, with bodies that seemed perfect. Their body contours were flawless; there was no sagging skin, and no abdominal fat protruding over the ridges of their shorts or leggings. Their body contours were toned as if drawn, sharply defined by the muscles outlining their bodies. Their postures were erect, like poles. Their bottoms were shaped like two apples cut in half, and their stomach muscles were visible through their tops and t-shirts. But, there were also bodies that slouched, shoulders rolled forward, with large, unshapely, wiggly bottoms, pouches or balloon-like stomachs, and flabby upper arms. Both types of gym-going bodies motivated me to exercise. Bodies that looked out of shape reminded me of what I did not want to look like, whereas bodies that were toned and in shap' convinced me that it was possible to obtain a perfectly fit looking body.

Despite my inner conviction that I would probably never have toned, muscly arms like some, I nonetheless became a gym junky. I spent nearly every day of that year on the gym floor and in the spinning room. Within three years of dedicated gym going, I obtained my qualification as a spinning instructor, taking casual spinning classes in gyms. I also became assistant manager of reception at the gym. My time at reception provided me with an opportunity to gain insight into what people thought of the gym, why they came, and what they did at the gym. For example, through casual conversations, some single male members admitted that they were lonely and liked coming to the gym because it gave them

something to do. Others, particularly females, constantly spoke about their body weight: how they were trying to shed a few more kilos. Some revealed that coming to the gym was part of their routine; if they did not come, something would be missing. After a few months behind the reception desk I was able to identify and memorise patterns of people; for example, what group classes they participated in, what days and at what times they came to the gym, what locker number they requested, and what type of protein shake they ordered after their training. I was also able to observe where people spent most of their time at the gym. Some spent most of their time in the free weights corner, some were obsessed with using cardio machines, and others were dedicated to participating in group classes such as spinning or step-aerobics.

I noticed that there was a lot of body talk amongst members. For example, members (particular men) discussed their new muscle gains and others (particularly women) exchanged their personal findings of what exercises they thought were most efficient to lose weight and tone their muscles. Furthermore, I observed that people secretly glanced at others' gym clothes, bodies, and the exercises they performed. Of course, these observations were made by my untrained eye and were only driven by my interest in gym people and the gym world in its entirety. Altogether, I felt that bodies, in particular their shape, was a strong focus and topic amongst members in the gym. After four years of dedication to this particular gym, I moved to Australia to undertake a Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science, Sport and Management. Once in Australia, I joined a global chain of gyms. When I initially signed up to this global gym chain, I felt confident knowing how to

behave, how things work in a gym, and, most importantly, what to do in a gym (e.g., how to use equipment; what exercise to perform with free weights; and, how to participate in a spin class). However, during my first visit to one of the gyms belonging to the chain, I was astounded by the size of the gym floor space; the number of cardio and weight lifting machines available, the size and number of TVs displayed, the volume of music permeating the gym, the variety and number of group classes available, and entire walls dedicated to details of personal trainers members could hire for one-on-one training sessions.

Despite the obvious difference in spatial size and choice, I realised that these gyms were similarly organised to the gym I experienced in Germany. That is, entering gyms involved scanning my membership card, casually saying 'hi' to the receptionist, using a locker to store my gym bag, checking what time I needed to arrive for a spinning class to secure a spin bike, and what times were peak hours to ensure my preferred gym equipment was available for me to use, and which of my favourite trainers took my selected group classes at what time. Similar to the gyms I experienced in Germany, I felt that the gyms that I visited in Australia also put strong focus on bodies. Members seemed to be obsessed with shaping their bodies in a desired way. On the walls, mirrors, along with promotional posters of fit looking bodies, encouraged people to continue to work and improve their bodies. Furthermore, I noticed that members were predominantly visiting gyms alone. I felt that people utilised their gyms in isolation, focusing on their own performances of exercises (even in group classes) while secretly gazing at others' bodies. Since there was little social

interaction between people (despite the secret body gazing), it seemed as if it was not people who were at the foreground in these gyms but their bodies.

After I had become familiar with the size and choices that this global chain of gyms offered, I sensed a feeling of pride. I saw my gym membership and belonging to this global gym chain as an upward step in my level of seriousness about being a fit person. During my time as a member, I was able to learn new exercises by observing members' interactions with personal trainers and their clients. Since I belonged to a global chain of gyms, I was exposed to and had access to the latest exercise trends. For example, every six months the gym launched a new group of exercise classes that were in line with global emerging fitness trends which often originated in the U.S. On a personal level, I became 'addicted' to spending time at the gym. I tried every group class that was launched and structured my morning and sometimes evening routines according to the types of exercises I performed (e.g., cardio training in the morning and weight training at night). I spent a lot of time studying the gym timetable, identifying the best and most efficient choices so that I could participate in as many back-to-back classes as possible. My dedication to my gym going was supported by the knowledge I gained from my Bachelor's degree. I had acquired sound expertise in anatomy, kinesiology, motor control, physical activity and health, exercise nutrition and psychology. Furthermore, I was educated in how to analyse individual training goals, how to write and instruct exercise programs. Undertaking this degree instilled in me a level of expert knowledge vis-à-vis assessing and understanding at a deeper level the exercises people choose to elicit certain changes in their bodily appearance.

I learned how different exercises improve or maintain the appearance and functionality of the physical body. I remember applying this theoretical knowledge in a practical fashion by observing people in the gym, analysing their gait, assessing their muscle definitions, and identifying for what purpose they might be performing specific exercises.

Similar to my first gym experience in Germany, I grouped certain types of bodies and gym-goers. For example, I identified ‘the girl who wants to be fit but not bulk on the treadmill’, ‘the guy in the free weight corner, doing the same exercises every day for seven days a week’, and the ‘mature aged woman or man who feel she/he needs to do something for her/his health, so they only stayed on the bike to burn some calories’. By no means were these premature classifications based on any sociological classifications or knowledge. Rather, they highlighted that after spending four years in several gyms of the same chain (all of which were very similar in relation to clientele, size and service offers), I had become very familiar with different body shapes, how people dressed in the gym, how they moved around the gym, if they went to group classes or simply used the gym floor; and, when on the gym floor, what kinds of exercises different people chose.

Parallel to my personal gym journey, I conducted a research project for my Honour’s degree, which investigated the psychological factors that influence the general population’s adherence and motivation to exercise programs in gyms. In January 2010, upon completion of my thesis, I accepted the role of gym trainer at a newly-established organisational onsite gym of a pathology organisation upon which this thesis is centered. I was intrigued to learn

whether this type of gym would be different from the gyms I had experienced in the past. By ‘different’, I asked about spatial characteristics. For example, whether it would be different in size? Whether there would be a number of rooms? What kind of gym equipment they would have? But I also asked about the organisation of the gym. Would employees in fact use a gym that was provided by their employer and located in their workplace? If so, I also wondered if people would use this gym in a similar way to those people who I had observed during my years of gym going? And lastly, I was curious if the gym would be permeated by a similar feel of ‘bodies’ to that I had experienced in other gyms? Before I explain in more detail how these initial questions led me to conduct an ethnographic study of this particular gym, I provide more background information about the organisation that offers this onsite gym to its employees and describe the gym’s specific spatial characteristics.

## **Section 2: LABFIT - The gym of investigation**

### ***LABFIT - Background***

The gym that this research is centred on is located onsite in the headquarters of a large pathology company in Australia. This means objectively, this gym can be classified as an organisational gym because it belongs to the organisation and is set on lower ground floor inside the organisation’s building complex. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I treat this gym as a case study and primarily compare and contrast it to gyms that I have personally experienced in the past. This means that for the remainder of this thesis, the focus will be on the gym itself rather than the connection between the gym and the

organisation and the implication of the fact that the gym belongs to an organisation and sits within its building complex. In the next section, I provide more clarification of what gyms are, how they are defined, and how the gyms I had experienced in the past can be classified. Throughout the thesis, I referred to the gym of investigation as LABFIT since the gym has not been given a particular name by the organisation. I also included pictures throughout the text to illustrate what LABFIT looks like.

I now provide more details about distinguishing spatial characteristics and about the ways in which this particular gym is managed. In 2008, when the architectural plans for a new company building of the growing business were being drawn, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the pathology company was determined to allocate space for a gym in the basement. Initially, employees of the organisation suspected that the CEO 'built' this gym predominantly for his own use. However, it was later revealed that he had a private gym at home, which catered for his outspoken personal belief in the benefits of exercise. According to the CEO, the purpose of LABFIT is to 'give something back' to the employees of the organisation; to facilitate their 'well-being' and 'fitness'. In the next chapter, I acknowledge how his views and rationale of the installment of LABFIT could be interpreted as a way to organise and manage his employees. For now however, I offer an overview of the spatial characteristics of this gym.

### *LABFIT – Spatial characteristics*

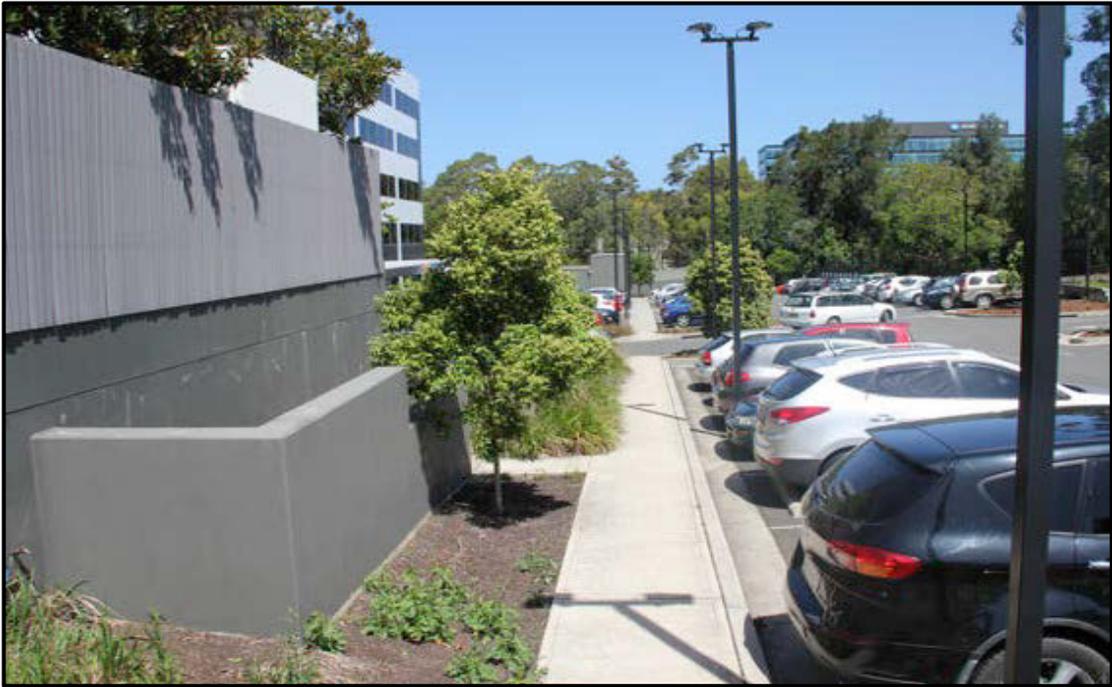
The allocated space for the gym consists of one rectangular 98m<sup>2</sup> sized room which resembles a small box. In line with the aim of creating a gym that is attractive and accessible to all employees in the organisation, the choices and spatial arrangement of equipment were influenced by two factors. First, the CEO aimed to replicate to his best possible capacity what ‘other’ gyms offer in terms of gym equipment and how they lay it out. By ‘other’ gyms, the CEO referred to gyms similar to those I describe in Section 1. For example, cardio machines such as treadmills, stationary bikes, cross trainers and rowing machines in one corner; free weights and weight machines in another, and a stretching area. Second, the CEO and the manager of the pathology company aimed to set up a gym that was accessible and would appeal to ‘every’ employee in the organisation. For example, weight machines which required little to no technique offered an easy option because the organisation consists of employees who varied in ages and cultural backgrounds (including geographical areas where gyms may not be available or accessible). Similarly, drawing on traditional gender notions which suggest that females predominantly use cardio machines (Markula & Kennedy, 2011), and that men prefer to lift weights (Klein, 1993; Olivardia, 2001; Salvatore, 2010), the CEO decided to facilitate both types of exercise equipment.

The CEO arranged to have mirrors installed on all of the walls which aimed to replicate spatial characteristics of other gyms such as the gyms I mentioned in Section 1. However, the manager of the laboratory, who was assigned to be the contact person for the gym, found this installation problematic. He argued that it made the gym resemble a haunted

house, which could potentially deter the employees from using it. He was concerned that the prospect of seeing oneself and other gym users at all times and from all different angles would not appeal to their employees. Subsequently, the CEO decided to replace the majority of the mirrors with a mural displaying a group of musicians. Images 1 to 6 offer a general outdoor and indoor view of LABFIT.



**Image 1 The new building complex comprising the organisation**



**Image 2** Outside view of LABFIT's entrance



**Image 3** Stairs to LABFIT's entrance



**Image 4 View upon entering LABFIT**



**Image 5 View from the back wall of LABFIT**



**Image 6 Wall mural and assisted weight machines in LABFIT**

### ***LABFIT - Organisation***

Thus far, I offered a general overview about why and how LABFIT has been established. Now I provide more details about the ways LABFIT is organised. There are a number of reasons why this information is important. Prior to LABFIT, my own experiences with gyms were similar in the sense that these gyms were organised in a particular way. By organisation I mean the ways these gyms are managed in relation to members' usages and what it offered them. Before I provide more details about the organisation of LABFIT, I briefly reiterate how gyms that I experienced in the past were organised.

Typically, I entered gyms via swiping my membership card. Once inside the gym I was 'free' to choose what to do. This meant that I could either participate in a group class or perform exercises on the large gym floor using exercise machines, free weights or my own body weight. A distinct character of these gyms was the variety of group classes on offer. Up until the present, there has been constant development of new group classes in gyms, e.g., body pump, spinning, body balance (Andreasson, 2014). On the gym floor, I was free to use any exercise machine or free weights or perform own body weight exercises provided machines and weights were available and there was space to perform body weight exercises. In addition, many gym members worked with personal trainers in these gyms, particular in the gyms that I experienced in Australia. I often observed numerous 'member-trainer couples' whereby the trainer instructed and monitored the member while she/he was performing the exercise that the trainer prescribed.

In contrast, LABFIT appears to have its own particular organisation in relation to employees' usages and what it offers them. The organisation of LABFIT, together with LABFIT's particular spatial characteristics (as described earlier), is essential because they influence the discussion of my findings in this study. Lastly, the provision of more insight about the ways this gym is organised helps to convey a 'feel' for LABFIT. The gym is available free of charge to all employees (approximately 1,200) working at the headquarters of the organisation. Employees are required to sign a logbook upon entry and exit of the gym. The purpose of the logbook is not to monitor if and when employees use the gym, but rather to collect evidence regarding the number of employees who use the

gym. The gym's opening hours are limited to Monday to Friday, 6.00 a.m. - 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. - 7.30 p.m. A qualified gym trainer is present during the opening hours. This means all trainers obtained or are in the process of obtaining a degree in relation to human movement, exercise science, physical activity and/or health. The organisation employs three trainers who share cover of the shifts: there is only one trainer present per shift. The trainers' main task is to supervise gym attendees ensuring that they use the equipment correctly. In addition, the trainers provide advice to members on how to exercise safely and efficiently depending on the members' level of fitness, their experience with gyms, and their personal training goals.

Trainers are also in charge of assessing if employees are physically eligible to use the gym. This involves measuring each individual's blood pressure, evaluating a standard questionnaire about her/his general health and fitness, and exploring potential risk factors such as previous injuries or medical conditions. Trainers introduce newly-signed up members to the gym, help to familiarise them with the gym equipment, and explain how the gym is organised. This includes the standard procedures involved when using LABFIT; that is, signing in and out of the logbook (which is placed on the trainers' desk at the point of entry) noting time of arrival, departure, and the department the employee works in. After fulfilling the requirement to sign in and out, members are free to use the gym in any form provided they conform to safety procedures. In essence, employees can choose to pursue their own choice of exercises in LABFIT. Some employees come in only to stretch: others come in during their lunch break for a twenty-minute bike ride or walk on the treadmill.

LABFIT does not offer any specific group classes, however, trainers prescribe a ‘Workout Of the Day’ (WOD) for employees who seek the trainer’s assistance for the prescription of some exercises. This means that trainers design a certain routine of exercises that members complete during their visit. Usually, these WODS vary every day. Depending on the number of employees present at any given time, trainers often design WODs that can be performed in small groups on occasions when employees opt to work out together. In essence, the trainer is there to help, and can be approached by anyone in LABFIT who wishes for professional assistance regarding exercise prescription, instruction and general health and physical activity behavioural pattern

Altogether, LABFIT presents some differences in spatial and organisational characteristics compared to the gyms I experienced in the past. In the next section, I offer a brief description of my observations as a trainer in LABFIT that enabled me to loosely ‘answer’ the remaining questions I asked about LABFIT prior to my employment. These questions were in relation to whether employees of the organisation used LABFIT and, if so, whether they used LABFIT in similar ways to those I had observed in other gyms in the past. Lastly, whether LABFIT permeates a similar feel of ‘body craze’ that I observed in other gyms.

### ***LABFIT – Trainer***

With reference to my first question, I noted that small but significant numbers of employees of the organisation visit LABFIT. During the numerous hours I spent as a trainer at LABFIT, I observed that approximately 50 employees used LABFIT on a regular

basis, i.e., between 2-5 times per week. In addition, approximately 150 employees signed up to use LABFIT; but, their attendance was inconsistent.

During my time as a trainer, I was in an opportune position to observe what people did in LABFIT. Despite a slight tendency in women to spend a little more time on cardio machines compared to men, I noted that there was no distinct ‘separation’ between women and men in relation to the types of exercises they chose. For example, I noticed that women and men were disinclined to be in particular sections of the gym such as the stretching corner or free weights corner. Rather, I found that people somehow use LABFIT in collaboration. Despite pursuing their own exercise routine, people in LABFIT do not appear to use this gym in isolation. Sometimes, people smiled or nodded at each other. They walked constantly from one section of LABFIT to another, depending on what kind of equipment they select to use; and, as they were doing so, people make casual comments to other people in LABFIT. For example, comments such as ‘Geez, you are working hard today’ or ‘I haven’t seen you in a while’, without ‘knowing’ the person from her/his department. There was a lot of movement in LABFIT. People were interacting without causing significant interference to the other person’s workout. Most of the people followed their own routine; but there was a certain level of connection amongst people in LABFIT. I cannot exactly identify the nature of the connection, and it would be too simplistic to view the organisation as the connecting piece. But, somehow there appeared to be a mutual acceptance and respect to use LABFIT in less isolated and ‘body focused’ fashion than I had experienced in other gyms in the past. In short, I noticed that people use LABFIT in

different ways. For example, some came during their lunchtime in their work clothes for a 15 minute easy bike ride, while others visited LABFIT to stretch before work. Some people visited LABFIT and spent more time watching TV or talking to the trainers than actually exercising. Others seemed to be in their own world whereby their body appeared to be present in LABFIT but their minds seemed to be somewhere else. And then, there were some who are focused on their workout but appear to concentrate less on bodily changes and more on the ways their workout made them feel. For example, despite the occasional remark about body weight loss and muscle gain, I felt that people predominantly share with other members or the trainer how they felt after or during their workout; and, whether they felt that their technique of certain exercises has improved.

Altogether, I sensed that LABFIT was more low key in the ways that people focused on working and improving their bodies. I noticed that people sweated less and were less serious or focused on the intensity of their workouts. For example, I observed people playing on their phones, staring at the TV, or having casual conversations with other people or the trainer in LABFIT. Thus, I sensed that LABFIT permeated more of a relaxed gym feel. Despite having had an intuitive sense of space in LABFIT, I did not have the vocabulary to describe and explain succinctly people's gym-going practices in LABFIT and what visiting LABFIT meant to them. To sum it up, during my time as a trainer at LABFIT I was unable to theorise my observations of LABFIT. It was for this reason that I was interested in studying LABFIT in more depth. But, before I can explore LABFIT more academically, it is useful to position LABFIT in the literature of gyms. Thus, the next

section offers answers to the following questions: What are gyms? When did they emerge? How did they develop? What types of gyms exist? Is there a particular type of gym that is more prevalent than others? And lastly, where does LABFIT ‘fit’ in?

### **Section 3: What are gyms? A selective historical review**

My purpose in presenting this brief overview is twofold. First, it is essential to explain where and how gyms originated and how their nature and purpose have changed over time. Second, the overview explains the development of the most common type of gym in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the fitness gym. It is in fitness gyms that I have gained my experience with gyms in the past. Thus, I emphasise key features of fitness gyms to demonstrate in more detail how LABIFT compares and contrasts to them.

The origins of today’s gyms date back to Ancient Greece, to a time when gymnasiums were of great significance (Kennell, 2007). The term ‘gym’ has its etymology in the Greek term *gymnos*, meaning ‘to be naked’. Male athletes aged 18 years and over were trained and competed in the nude to encourage aesthetic appreciation of the male body and as a tribute to the God of public games such as the Olympic games (Golden, 2010). Greek gymnasia were typically large structures containing spaces for each type of exercise. They included a stadium, a palaestra (where wrestling took place), baths, and covered porticos (i.e., covered porches) wherein philosophers frequently assembled to hold talks and lectures. The ancient Greeks subscribed to the notion of a relationship between athletics, education, and health (Kennell, 2007). As a result, in the majority of cases, boys’ education was conducted in

gymnasia, wherein provision was made not only for physical pedagogy, but also for guidance vis-à-vis morals and ethics (Golden, 2010).

The next key historical moment spoken about in the literature is the growth of physical culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, various developments in the ways in which physical activity was conceived and pursued emerged around the world. For example, the Muscular Christianity movement promoted a fusion of energetic Christian activism and rigorous physical culture training in Europe, the U.S. and Australia (Brown, 1986; Baker, 2010). The Puritans, relinquishing the notion that the fates of all humans were predetermined, instead advocated that intentional improvement of the physical body through exercise could result in human perfection (Baker, 2010). The Puritans believed that building a healthy body through physical activity instilled good values and formed strong characters (Putney, 2003). This change of attitude saw physical activity as an instrument to better the individual (Putney, 2003). As a result by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of gymnastics and athletics clubs increased, aiming to create better citizens with strong moral values and character.

In line with the growing interest in physical activity, the number of entrepreneurs of gyms increased. Consequently, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other forms of exercise emerged. This influenced the meaning of why people engaged in physical activity. The belief in physical activity to develop a person into a morally valuable citizen had slightly changed into expressing oneself and exercising for self-realisation (Stoddart, 2008). This

means the purpose of exercising was now centered on one's self-fulfillment and self-gratification (Campbell, 1987; Mrozek, 1989). For example, working class men pursued their desire to work out together by going to informal gyms (Klein, 1993). Their main objective centered on the development and growth of muscle, thus these gyms offered their members very few amenities (Tumblety, 2012). In such gyms, the working class male was able to both reproduce his masculinity and attain masculine dominance. To this day, the focus of this type of gym is on one mode of exercise only; but, they are marginal and their appeal is restricted to working class men who are solely interested in muscle growth (Paradis, 2012).

Another type of gym that emerged particularly in the U.S. in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century took the form of executive clubs (Stern, 2008). Targeting middle-aged male executives, these gyms offered a range of tennis and squash courts, a gym floor, and instructors who helped to keep executives fit (Smith Maguire, 2008a). The idea behind these clubs was to address the increasing rates in premature deaths of executives, and the rising health care costs borne by American companies for their employees (Stern, 2008). This type of gym was the forerunner of onsite gyms and/or reduced memberships of external gyms that companies offered employees between the 1970s and the late 1980s (Tumblety, 2012). Between 1974 and 1988, the number of company fitness programs in the U.S. rose from 30,000 to 120,000 (Stern, 2008). The purpose of these programs was to secure productivity and promote the efficiency and 'durability' of the employees (Stern, 2008; Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). The increase in organisational strategies to encourage

employees to exercise at the workplace was driven by a number of reasons. U.S. employers provided their staff with health insurance, building on the premise that the healthier the employee, the fewer the medical costs incurred by the organisation (Crawford, 1980; Bly, Jones & Richardson, 1986; Edington, Yen & Witting, 1997). Furthermore, if a company promoted the health status of its employees, the incidence of ill-health induced absenteeism was reduced and the productivity of the organisation increased (Cox, 1997; Bertera, 1990; Goetzel & Ozminkowski, 2008).

In conclusion, these studies examine whether the establishment of onsite gyms increases the exercise levels of employees which yields a reduction in health care costs, increase productivity, and decrease absenteeism (Pelletier, 2005; Brown, Gilson, Brown & Burton 2011). Thus, an important aspect of these studies is their focus on assessing the effectiveness of these gyms from the viewpoints of the employers (Falkenberg, 1987; Briziarelli & Perticaroli, 1999; Chapman, 2003; Goetzel et al., 2007). The findings of these studies show, however, that there is too little evidence to prove the effectiveness of these workplace gyms in relation to cost-effectiveness, absenteeism and productivity. The quantitative and one-sided approach of these primarily North American studies of organisational gyms is problematic. These studies focus predominantly on producing quantitative data that assesses potential ‘profit gains’ for the employer and therefore under-researching the perceptions of the ‘users’; that is, the employees. As such, these North American studies disclose little understanding of employees’ thoughts and feelings in relation to using an organisational gym. Thus, besides being limited to a North American

context, findings of these studies are limited to provide insights into understanding what people do in these gyms, why they do the things they do and what it means to them. Furthermore, that the human body may be subject to management and organisation has not been missed by the field of other organisation studies (Hassard, Holliday & Willmott, 2000). Besides the aforementioned North American research studies, other research in this area has, for instance, examined how organisations relate the work performance of employees to their ability to maintain a certain body shape (Hancock & Tyler, 2000). For example, Zoller (2003) and McGillivray (2005) have investigated how workplace health promotion programs, such as the provision of organisational gyms seek to control and construct employee embodiment and their sense of self. Zoller (2003) and McGillivray's (2005) findings were in line with the North American studies, in the sense that workplace health promotion programs typically assume that healthy employees enable organisational efficiency and productivity, and that employees therefore must exercise self-discipline in order to manage their bodies and improve health. Similarly, Torkild Thanem (2014) was interested in investigating how leaders of organisations could facilitate workplace health promotion programs. More specifically, his research looked into the effect that leaders could have to help their employees eat more healthy and do more exercise. He was especially interested in leaders of organisations who were passionate about health and exercising and whether or not these leaders would play a positive factor in improving the health of their employees. His research findings suggest that passionate leadership is not necessarily beneficial to employees health as they tend to 'forget that everybody is not like them' (Thanem, 2014, p. 4). In conclusion, similarly to the quantitative North American

studies on workplace health promotion, organisational studies approach the provision of gyms from the perspective of the organisation interested, and how the organisation influences the management of employees bodies and health. As such, these studies offer minimal insight into the micro occurrences in gyms, people's feelings, perceptions and meaning of their exercising bodies and gym-going in general; and are thus only minimally helpful for the purpose of this thesis.

Specifically from the perspective of a gym trainer in LABFIT, the quantitative approach of these studies reveals little information to help explore the gym-going practices that people perform and what their particular gym-going practices mean to them. During my time as a trainer in LABFIT, I found that people were visiting LABFIT for more 'individual' reasons than the effectiveness their gym going had for the organisation. Drawing on my previous experiences of other gyms and my observations of LABFIT, I could see that the ways in which people used LABFIT varied (see Section 2: LABFIT - trainer). It seemed to me that there was more meaning to LABFIT than being a 'profitable instrument' for the organisation.

Continuing with my selected historical review of gyms, I now shed light on the development of women's exercise salons in the 1960s in the U.S. This is important because exercise salons were highly influential in the establishment of fitness gyms, i.e., the most dominant type of gym in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The emergence of this type of gym paralleled executive clubs. Exercise saloons were exclusively for the use of white middle and upper

class females (Zukin & Smith Maguire, 2004). These gyms were often either run by former dancers, or by gymnasts offering women an opportunity to network and improve their bodies. These salons mainly offered individual visits to classes (Smith Maguire, 2008a): they did not target the general population. Rather, exercise salons were aimed at white, middle and upper class women who possessed sufficient social and cultural capital to participate. Visiting these gyms wearing leotards indicated one's social position and occupational success (Epstein, Wing, Thompson & Griffin, 1980). In similar vein, women who visited these exercise salons signaled their investment in physical capital, which, by extension, highlighted their social position and occupational success.

Women's interest in participating in aerobics increased concomitant with the introduction of a 'new' type of gym that developed in the 1970s: the fitness gym. I illuminate this particular type of gym for two reasons. First, it is the most prevalent type of gym that exists in contemporary society. Second, the gyms which I have experienced, that I described in Section 1 can be classified as fitness gyms. Thus, a more detailed review of how the existing literature conceptualises fitness gyms helps explain the difference between my experience of fitness gyms in the past, and people's gym-going practices in LABFIT. To avoid confusion of terminology, it is worth pointing out that scholars describe 'fitness gyms' in various terms such as health clubs (Smith Maguire, 2001, 2008a,b; Markula, 2001, 2004); fitness clubs (Frew & McGillivray, 2005) or fitness gyms (see Sassatelli, 1999a,b, 2003, 2010). What these scholars have in common, however, is that they link the rise of fitness gyms to the parallel emergence of consumer culture and service economy. They

argue that the development of a consumer culture has influenced the ways in which people think and treat their bodies. By this, they mean that people were starting to consider their bodies as ‘investment projects’, which ought to represent who they are as persons. This development resulted in a growth of products and services that were offered and ‘consumed’ to shape and enhance one’s body. For example, Frew and McGillivray (2005) argue that the fitness club is a key site that allows people to exchange membership costs for the opportunity to create their ‘desired’ body. In essence, they posit that fitness gyms are less about assisting the individual to accomplish their body project and more about promoting endless opportunities to continue to work on their bodies (Frew & McGillivray, 2005).

Since the 1970s, there has been a considerable growth in the number of fitness gyms, particularly in modern cities. This is because the development of a contemporary consumer culture and service economy is more prominent in urban than rural contexts (Sassatelli, 2010). I next illuminate the key characteristics of fitness gyms in an attempt to explain how my experiences with fitness gyms in the past differed from my experience as a trainer at LABFIT.

Fitness gyms focus on promoting exercise for the general population. Instead of targeting specific demographics or genders, a practice pursued by the working class gyms in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and exercise salons in the 1960s, fitness gyms aimed at the masses (Sassatelli, 2010). In their attempts to target a wider population, fitness gyms aim to be accessible and attractive by offering a range of gym equipment and a wider variety of

fitness classes. Another important feature of fitness gyms is their promotion of 'fitness'. In fact, the appeal to fitness is not merely rhetorical; rather, it seems to define the goal of modern fitness gyms (Sassatelli, 2000). Unlike traditional working-class gyms that focus primarily on muscle growth, fitness gyms offer activities for fitness, a term that scholars define differently. For example, sports scientists view it as a set of physical abilities: it is about maintaining and improving the body's wellbeing and qualities (Smith Maguire, 2008a). Others, who are more critical of the purpose of fitness, argue that it is less about being physically fit than about having a fit looking body (Frew & McGillivray, 2005). Most scholars, however, agree that the fitness gym was conceived as the main site wherein 'fit bodies' are produced (Sassatelli, 2010; Smith Maguire, 2008b; Chance, 2009). This is important because possessing a fit looking body has become a powerful icon in contemporary consumer culture and service economy (Sassatelli, 2010; Smith Maguire & Stanway, 2008). In contrast to the 19<sup>th</sup> century belief that exercise ought to be pursued to build moral values and strengthen the character, in contemporary times, a toned and dynamic-looking body has become a powerful symbol signaling an individual's value and worth. Another common feature of fitness gyms is that they are commercial institutions; in other words, for-profit enterprises that offer paid memberships to individuals. Some scholars argue that membership of a fitness gym can convey the status of the individual, demonstrating that she/he cares about self and has the financial means to do so (Smith Maguire, 2008a). Since the fitness boom of the 1970s, the number of fitness gyms worldwide has increased significantly. As a result, a greater variety of gym memberships

are available to individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds (Smith Maguire, 2001).

Today, most of the modern world's fitness gyms are unisex (Sassatelli, 2010). However, it is important to stress that some gyms are 'female only' fitness gyms. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on unisex gyms. Furthermore, fitness gyms are non-competitive environments (Dworkin, 2003; Sassatelli, 2000). Of course, one may argue that within fitness gyms people indirectly compete with each other's looks or performances (McGillivray & Frew, 2002). However, the nature of fitness gyms is tailored for the enjoyment of the individual. In essence, gym-going is marketed as a leisure activity that ought to bring individuals' joy and fun, it also connotes the idea of work whereby individuals take up gym-going as a project of the self whereby people focus on improving their body and own sense of self. In order to fully understand what project of the self means, it is important to clearly define how I use this term throughout this thesis. In doing so, I draw on Markula's (2006) interpretation of Foucault's (1972) definition of the body and self. According to Markula, Foucault considers the body as the site for the workings of power. The body, he claims, is 'directly involved in a political field' (p. 25) because power was invested in, as well as transmitted by and through, the body. For him, especially in his early writings, it was less about the individual but rather about the body. The individual or subject, according to Foucault (1980), was the effect of the workings of power and not of some inner essence. He argues that it is through the productive abilities of power 'that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be

identified and constituted as individuals'. In short, for Foucault, an individual is not a stable physical entity, rather an individual's sense is constructed through a variety of acts of and upon the body.

Due to their non-competitive nature and broad approach to fitness, gyms usually offer different types of exercises. While they show variations in the size and amount of fitness services offered, common services include:

- cardio theatres including treadmills, cross trainers, stair masters, rowing machines, stationary bikes;
- stretching areas, often an empty room with aerobic mats for use when stretching;
- rooms for group classes such as pilates, spinning, zumba, body pump;
- weight machines such as a leg press; and
- free weights such as dumbbells and kettle bells.

Most fitness gyms are open seven days per week with continuous opening hours. Upon entering the reception area, members usually swipe or scan their membership cards to gain access to the gym. Members can typically purchase water, isotonic drinks and protein bars in the reception area. Gym instructors often take group classes; but, members usually have the opportunity to hire personal trainers who make themselves available at the gym. A common feature since the late 1990s is fitness gyms offering a variety of personal trainers to members at extra cost (Smith Maguire, 2001). This service includes one-on-one training;

i.e., personalised designing of exercise workouts and monitoring during their performances. While the decoration and colour schemes vary between fitness gyms, one common feature is the number of TVs installed and mirrors displayed. Typically, cardio theatres are equipped with a number of TVs installed on the walls, playing either music videos or showing sports programs. In addition, most of the walls in commercial fitness gyms are furnished with numerous mirrors, allowing members to watch not only themselves, but other members, as well.

While I illuminate the most important characteristics of fitness gyms, I would like to stress that there are still variations and differences among them. For example, fitness gyms offer different group fitness classes (different in size) and different opening hours. And, of course, fitness gyms are not the only type of gym currently operating. Table 1 shows a landscape of contemporary gyms. While it is important to recognise that other types of gyms exist, I particularly draw attention to the characteristics of fitness gyms (i.e., the type of gyms I experienced in the past, see Section 1) and LABFIT in this thesis. As well as evincing some similar elements, the table show different characteristics between these two types of gyms (i.e., fitness gyms and LABFIT).

**Table 1 Landscape of modern gyms**

Features/Types	Fitness gyms	LABFIT (i.e., organisational gym of investigation)	Gyms/ Studios focused on one type of exercise (e.g., boxing, yoga, crossfit)	Health clubs, wellness/ centres, fitness centres, hotel gyms
<b>Sex</b>	Unisex (female only fitness gyms exist but are in the minority)	Unisex	Unisex (certain types of exercise traditionally have a greater appeal for single gender, for example boxing for males)	Unisex
<b>Membership</b>	To be paid on a regular basis; for example, fortnightly or monthly. One day memberships are possible but rare (membership fees typically vary depending on the length of the contract, size and services offered)	Free of charge; user must be an employee of the organisation and complete a medical history and physical activity questionnaire, and measurement of blood pressure	To be paid on a regular basis, for example, fortnightly or monthly: single or multiple day member passes are common	To be paid on a regular basis; for example, fortnightly or monthly: single or multiple day member passes are common (or for free if used by hotel visitors)
<b>Focus</b>	'bodywork': fitness/fit 'looking' bodies, body shaping, body transformation	A space available for employees to use	Skills work: improvement of functionality and appearance of the body	'bodywork', well-being, fitness, relaxation
<b>Target members</b>	General population	Employees of the organisation	Individuals who are interested in a particular element that the type of exercise offers e.g., individuals who are interested in stretching choose yoga or pilates	Typically individuals from a higher socio-economic status (Except for the YMCA or fitness centres that are run by universities)
<b>Structure &amp; Services</b>	Large gym floor with multiple strength machines often divided into machines targeting specific body parts. For example: back area, leg area, arm area; cardio theatres, free weights; and, multiple rooms for group classes such as yoga, zumba, spinning	One large room with a variety of strength and cardio machines and an area with aerobic mats for stretching or other floor work, such as abdominal exercises, and some free weights	Typically one room wherein classes of the specific type of exercise are conducted including the equipment needed. For example, aerobic mats or other props.	A gym floor including multiple strength and cardio machines, sometimes a room for group classes such as spinning, pilates or body pump. A swimming pool, sometimes tennis, badminton, and squash courts. Sometimes, massage and/or physiotherapy services are offered
<b>Trainers</b>	Gyms typically recruit multiple trainers who are available for members to hire at extra cost for one-on-one training at the gym	A trainer is available during open hours. Supervises, monitors correct techniques when attendee is exercising; assists with exercise programming & constructing	A trainer conducts the class	Trainers are available to supervise; and limited numbers of trainers are available to hire at extra cost for one-on-one training
<b>Opening hours</b>	Typically 7 days a week 5.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. (opening hours vary slightly depending on location and size)	Monday-Friday 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m.; 3.00 p.m. to 7.30p.m.	Limited opening hours: classes run usually for 1 or 1.5 hours in the morning and at night	Typically 7 days a week 5.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. (opening hours vary slightly depending on location and size)

In my first attempt to understand what people do in LABFIT I turned to the scholarship of the ‘new’ public health. This approach to public health approach is considered ‘new’ because health is no longer approached on a population level. Rather, since the 1970s, the ‘new’ public health has considered health to be the responsibility of the individual. Key to this ‘new’ approach are discourses about health which act as ‘prescriptions’ showing individuals how to become ‘healthy’ individuals such as expert knowledge that conceptualises health through the body. This means that ‘new’ public health has directed its attention towards the ‘conduct’ and ‘appearance’ of the individual body, which is seen to reflect one’s health. Discourses about health suggest certain strategies that aim to assist individuals to look after their bodies. For example, the literature on ‘new’ public health emphasises exercising as one effective strategy to care for one’s body and thus one’s ‘health’. The following section explores in more detail how notions of the ‘new’ public health may offer an understanding of people’s gym-going practices in LABFIT.

#### **Section 4: LABFIT – An organisational gym to create ‘healthy’ bodies?**

‘Lose weight!’ ‘Avoid fat!’ ‘Stop smoking!’ ‘Reduce alcohol intake!’ ‘Get fit!’ ‘Practice safe sex!’ (Petersen & Lupton, 1996 p. ix)

In this quote, Alan Petersen and Deborah Lupton, core scholars of ‘new’ public health, exemplify common discourses about health that individuals hear or read about on a daily basis in contemporary society. According to Lupton (1995), in its most simple form, the

‘new’ public health is considered to be a discourse of the body. In this thesis, the definition of discourse is drawn from Markula’s (2006) interpretation of Foucault (1972) who considered discourses as more than linguistic phenomena and maintained that they should be treated as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (p. 49). Here Section 3, where I discussed Foucault’s definition of the body and self, helps understand and contextualise the meaning of discourse. This is because discourse, body and the self are interlinked in the sense that discourses can be considered as power acts on the body, and thus influential on one’s sense of self. More precisely, for Foucault (1972, p. 101), discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it’. For Markula (2006), this means that discourse can be regarded as constraining or structuring the order of things or perceptions of reality including knowledge of oneself and others. Employing a Foucauldian view, Markula argues that the self is produced via the constructed and contingent workings of multiple and, at times, competing discourses. According to Markula (2006) this means that in a Foucauldian sense, the self is not one single entity; rather it is constructed and influenced by discourses. In essence, the self is produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices (Andrews, 2000). For the purpose of this thesis, the self is used in a Foucauldian context; and the body is considered as constitution of the self.

Central to ‘new’ public health is the idea that individuals are expected to take responsibility for the care of their bodies. Scholars claim that since the 1970s, influenced by neo-liberal notions of governmentality, this ‘new’ approach to public health has assigned individuals with a new set of obligations and rights; that is, ‘active participation’ in relation to the pursuit of health (Crawford, 1980, Bunton & MacDonald, 2002; Fullagar, 2002; Fusco, 2006; Lupton, 1995). According to Markula (2014), neo liberalism is defined by its emphasis on control, discipline and self-monitoring. Theorists of ‘new’ public health predominantly draw on Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’, which according to Lupton (1995, p. 9), ‘incorporates both techniques or practices of the self - self-government - and the more apparent forms of external government – policing surveillance and regulatory activities carried out by agencies of the state or other institutions for (neo-liberal) strategic purposes’. The notion of governmentality in a neo-liberal state depicts the diffusion of power. This means that the state is not seen as an overarching coherent repressive authority that intends to constrain the liberty of its citizens (Gane & Johnson, 1993). Instead, the notion of governmentality implies that power is exercised from a variety of institutions, agencies and experts which govern individuals at a distance through their discourses about health and the body. In essence, people are expected to follow discourses on health promoted by a neo-liberal government, their choices are in fact not freely chosen.

Foucault’s concept of governmentality is connected to discipline, knowledge and technologies which serve to help the individual to conduct herself/himself as a ‘healthy’

citizen. Alluding to earlier in this section, the notion of governmentality is connected to a liberal state, which promotes individuals' responsibility and 'freedom' to look after their own bodies and thus health. Lupton (1995) argues that governmentality depends on a system of knowledge and truths which relates to the 'network' of expert knowledge and advice on how to be a 'modern healthy' self. Within a neo-liberal government, the individual is thus expected to conform to the goals of the state voluntarily. This means that individuals are not coerced to follow discourses about health and the body. Instead, Petersen and Lupton (1996, p.64) argue that a 'healthy' individual is required to exercise 'self-discipline' and 'self-control' which 'underpin contemporary assumptions of what it means to be human and what the ideal modern "self" should be'.

Petersen and Lupton (1996) call this process 'self-governance' whereby expert knowledge on health and the body assists individuals to conform to neo liberalists' agenda of promoting 'healthy citizens'. A by-product of this 'new' approach to health has been a proliferation of expert knowledge and practices 'prescribing' what individuals need to do to achieve optimum health (Petersen & Lupton, 1996). However, as viewed through the lens of 'new' public health, a 'healthy' individual is not only disciplined, responsible, and self-controlled, but is also considered to be a 'healthy' citizen of society.

A key feature of this 'new' public health approach is the idea of a 'healthy' citizen (Lupton, 1995, p.7). According to Petersen and Lupton (1996), individuals are expected as part of

their responsibilities of citizenship, to manage their own health. Each citizen has become morally obliged to become a healthy citizen by governing herself/himself through participation in health promoting activities for the body (Petersen, 1997; Nettleton & Bunton, 1995). This means that individuals are encouraged to follow expert knowledge on how to be a 'healthy' citizen. According to neo-liberalists, a healthy citizen is a good citizen due to her/his contribution to society. For example, instead of burdening society with her/his ill health and subsequent medical costs, absence from profession and social life, a healthy citizen fulfills her/his duties of citizenship by, for example, being a productive employee.

Connected to the notion of citizenship in the 'new' public health approach is a morality system. In contrast to the 'old' public health, whereby the state exercised control over the health of its populations, health is now classified as a person's moral obligation. As described earlier, the expert knowledge that underpins the notion of health encourages individuals to conform to the moral society determined by neo-liberalists. According to Lupton, a healthy body is defined by culturally formed aesthetic standards in modern society (Lupton, 1995, p. 7). An underlying notion of the 'new' public health movement is to regard the body as a project mirroring the authentic inner self (Fullagar, 2002). The body is viewed as an instrument that can be controlled and disciplined. Employing discipline can become a tool for expressing the powerful mind of its 'owner' (Grosz, 1994, p. 8; Turner, 1994). Displaying a strong, trimmed and toned body becomes a tool for communicating

one's ability to be a disciplined, rational, functional, healthy citizen (Lupton, 1995; Petersen & Lupton, 1996). Whereas a healthy citizen is an asset to society, an unnatural state of ill health is a sign of individual failing. It exerts pressure on the individual's care of the body (Tinning & Glasby, 2002). The body is not only an expression of health, but has concomitantly become a marker of social status. Conversely, signs of sickness indicate personal failing, low social status, and one who is essentially a burden on the public (Elliott, 2007).

Scholars including Lupton challenge the view that notions of the 'new' public health are universally good by drawing on Foucault's (1980) theory of power and the body. For example, Lupton argues that any expert knowledge about how to live a healthy life represents a system of power between the 'expert' and the individual who is morally obliged to live a healthy lifestyle. Fusco (2006) argues that people are not completely free of government and instead remain governed 'albeit at a distance' despite being encouraged by expert knowledge to exercise responsibility and control over their own health. This means that as long as medical and other health experts offer knowledge to individuals guiding them to 'choose' what body practices to engage in, individuals are still governed. According to Lupton and Petersen (1996), professional 'experts' or authorities have increased their potential to intervene in people's private lives, justifying their 'truth claims' about how to live a healthy life in the name of medical and sports science. For example, Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour guidelines, designed and promoted

by the Australian Department of Health, recommend that individuals ought to engage in 2 ½ to 5 hours of moderate intensity physical activity or 1 ¼ to 2.5 hours of vigorous intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013). In addition, the Department of Health recommends that individuals should engage in muscle strengthening activities twice per week (ABS, 2013). Thus ‘new’ public health theorists such as Peterson and Lupton are critical to interpret ‘new’ public health as a ‘universally good’ approach that seeks to promote health as a liberating project for the individual. In effect, health promotion activities are embedded forms of power that shape the thoughts and actions of individuals, making individuals more useful and governable. Nonetheless, despite the indirect control of individuals’ practices through ‘expert knowledge and truth claims’, Petersen and Lupton (1996) argue that there is still scope for the individual to choose whether or not to follow or pursue expert advice.

Exercising is a key strategy promoted by discourses on health and bodies. A popular site for pursuing this healthy body practice exists in the form of the gym (Neville, 2013). More precisely, gym going has been depicted as the panacea for a healthy and fit body. Examined through the lens of the ‘new’ public health approach, gym going could be considered as a strategy for the individual to act responsibly by taking care of her/his own body. Thus, the emergence of the ‘new’ public health approach in the early 1970s may be linked to the rise of fitness gyms. In the beginning of this section I turned to the scholarship of ‘new’ public

health to see if notions of ‘new’ public health could help me understand people’s gym-going practices in LABFIT. However, notions underpinning the ‘new’ public health do not offer sufficient potential to explore the practices people engage in on an intimate and personal level when they visit LABFIT. Thus, I argue that studying LABFIT through the lens of ‘new’ public health would be insufficient to explain what it means to people to visit this gym. More precisely, it does not enable me to understand in detail what people do in LABFIT and what, what they do, means to them?

Of course, during my time as a trainer at LABFIT I recognised some elements of discipline and motivation of people’s gym going that appear to be derived from the notion of morality to look after one’s health. However, my overall observations prior to commencing my study made me aware of the diversity of practices people seem to pursue in this gym. For example, sometimes I saw people in control of their movements and exercises; I saw them being disciplined in the sense that they attended the gym regularly even though they sometimes expressed that they do not feel like being in the gym. I also saw member of LABFIT working hard, whereas other times I saw them laughing, complaining, relaxing and chatting with each other. Attempts to conceptualise gym-going practices in LABFIT as a form of ‘new’ public health, whereby individuals aim to become healthy citizens and morally worthy persons, suppress the diversity of gym-going practices. As a result, looking at gym-going through the lens of the ‘new’ public health under-theorises people’s meaning of their gym-going practices in LABFIT beyond a means of self-discipline and self-control.

In essence, it suggests that individuals share the same meaning of gym going, i.e., to be healthy.

Having worked and 'lived' in gyms for many years, I noticed that people's visits to LABFIT, and the ways in which they use this gym, are more personal and, by extension, more meaningful than the literature on 'new' public health sought to explain. I thus found analysing people's gym-going practices through the lens of 'new' public health too simplistic. As a consequence, I realised that in order to gain a conceptual understanding of what gym-going in LABIFT means to people, I needed to take an interdisciplinary approach. First, this realisation has led me to the literature on gyms. I needed to investigate how gyms are conceptualised in the literature and what existing researchers have investigated in and about gyms. Second, I was guided to the literature on the body. Of course, over the last two decades there has been a vast interest in the concept of the body amongst sociologists. In order to narrow this extensive set of literature on the body, I selected to employ concepts of the body by key authors who have investigated the exercising body, particularly in a gym context. Extending on this notion of exercising bodies in the gym, I was guided to explore how gyms are conceptualized as a particular space, especially since members of LABFIT referred to this gym being different from other gyms. Thus, I realised that I needed to look at geographical literature on the concept of space. Lastly, because my observation as a trainer helped me become aware that certain mundane appearing practices and equipment in the gym are part of members' regular

experience in the gym, I wondered how important these practices and equipment are to them. Consequently, I decided to draw on Foucault's technologies of the self, which has been used by scholars of gyms studies, in order to further investigate how certain practices and equipment/tools that people use in the gym are influential to what 'gym-going' means to them. In addition, I recognised that an enhanced understanding of what people do in LABFIT and what, what they do, means to them may contribute to gym trainers knowledge about the people they supervise and instruct. In turn, I aimed that a more holistic and in-depth understanding of people's gym-going practices beyond gym trainer's declarative knowledge may refine their existing strategies used to prescribe and instruct exercises in gyms.

I was confident that this selected assortment of theoretical concepts and disciplines, i.e., gyms, space, technologies of the self and space I would be able to advance my understanding of the overarching research question of this thesis which is to gain an in-depth understanding of what gym-going in LABFIT means to people; and thus conclude this thesis by offering pedagogical practices for gym trainers that are derived from empirical research as opposed to theoretical and scientific knowledge about exercising. More background information about existing pedagogical gym trainer strategies is disclosed in the first section of the second chapter. I start this next chapter by turning to existing gym studies which enables me to understand how scholars have studied gyms, how they conceptualised them and what they found about gyms. Particular focus is on the ways

they conceptualise what people do in gyms. I also provide details about existing pedagogical strategies used by gym trainers to provide background information to the ways people are supervised and instructed in gyms. The literature of technologies of the self, exercising bodies in gyms, and gym spaces is specifically reviewed in the beginning of chapters four-six, respectively and in conjunction with an analysis and discussion of my data. However, before I start with the first piece of literature review in Chapter 2, I provide a detailed overview of all chapters of this thesis in the following section.

## **Section 5: Thesis overview**

**Chapter 2** of this thesis positions the study within the literature of what I call gym-studies. Since I have deemed the literature on ‘new’ public health insufficient to answer my research question, I first review core authors who have published extensively in the field of fitness gyms and fitness culture. This will help me examine how other scholars have theoretically and methodologically approached the study of gyms. The chapter concludes by posing the following research questions: (a) How do people use LABFIT? (b) What do people’s use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going? (c) How do people’s gym-going practices in LABFIT differ from/fit in with the literature on gyms? (d) How can gym trainers’ pedagogical strategies benefit from the study’s findings? In **Chapter 3**, I then outline the methodology employed in this research study. I first explain why and how I chose ethnography as a research methodology; then, I describe the methods used and provide a description of how my data was analysed and interpreted. This chapter provides an overview of the research design, including a timeline and Tables portraying several steps of the data analysis. **Chapters 4, 5 and 6** present the empirical findings from my fieldwork and from the ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies I conducted in LABFIT. In **Chapter 4**, I investigate the role of gym technologies in LABFIT. I show how using exercise logbooks, ear phones, and gym equipment shape the ways people experience their time in this organizational gym. I argue that the above gym technologies can be conceptualised through Foucault’s (1988) concept of ‘technologies of the self’. My data indicated that exercise logbooks are ‘technologies of the self’ that act mnemonically on

gym-goers, triggering memories of their performed work. This is important because it enables people to feel ‘in charge’, that is, able to evaluate how their ‘bodywork’ is progressing, which in turn benefits their motivation to continue to exercise their selves. I also argue that logbooks operate on an individual’s feelings and emotions. Being able to re-live emotions and feelings is critical to experiencing a sense of transformation of one’s body without apparent physical change. I also demonstrate that plugging in earphones enables individuals to consider time spent in LABFIT as individual time; i.e., time they use to exercise power over their thoughts and bodies. Lastly, in contrast to Magdalinski’s (2009) contention that technology interrupts the natural body, I argue that ‘merging’ with gym equipment facilitates the production of power for the individual. My data shows that items of gym equipment, for example the treadmill, barbell, and rowing machine, act as facilitators allowing the individual to experience a certain sense of control and transformation of her/himself. **Chapter 5** offers a new way of analysing and understanding ‘exercising’ bodies in gyms. More precisely, in this chapter I combine the notion of embodiment (Crossley, 2006; Sassatelli, 2010) with that of a fleshy, messy body (Longhurst, 1999). This allows me to expand on the work of core authors of gym-going bodies who predominantly conceptualise the body either from a Foucauldian (Markula, 2006, 2011) or a Bourdieuan (Smith Maguire, 2008) perspective. My findings show that people experience their ‘exercising bodies’ in a fleshy social way contrary to the perfect isolated bodies depicted on the stretching posters in LABFIT. This means that people’s gym-going is not primarily centred on attaining a ‘body ideal’; rather, they experience their

‘exercising bodies’ through feelings and fleshy, sweaty sensations. In essence this means that individuals become familiar with and learn how to feel their fleshy bodies which in turn helps them to ascribe meaning to their ‘bodywork’ beyond wishful shaping of their bodily physique. I suggest that people’s ability to experience a sense of knowing ‘through their bodies’ results in a more encouraging and motivating experience for them when exercising in LABFIT. Lastly, my findings show that LABFIT is constituted by a fleshy sociality. The data demonstrates that often people socialise in order to exercise. Again, these socialising ‘exercising bodies’ extend the meaning of their gym-going practices beyond simply focusing on their ‘bodywork’. In fact, socialising underpins some gym-goers’ motives for exercising in LABFIT. **Chapter 6** focuses on how people use, constitute and shape the character of LABFIT space. My findings suggest that individuals’ energies can co-construct energy spaces with other people in the gym, assisting them to temporarily transform their perceptions of LABFIT. My data also shows that individuals can deploy space makers and specific interaction rules in order to constitute a ‘perceived’ temporary ‘space capsule’ within the collective of LABFIT space. Another key finding suggests that one’s individual body can dip in and out of different spaces through various non-human and human interactions, enabling one to experience different aspects of gym-going that extend beyond ‘bodywork’. Lastly, the data reveals that bodies which are muscular and tall, elicit a dominant, impulsive demeanour and perform fast-paced, powerful exercises ‘give off’ space, temporarily constituting a masculinist micro-geography in LABFIT which transforms the character of the space. As a result, the fleshy sociality of LABFIT is

interrupted. In **Chapter 7**, I reiterate the key findings of this study, followed by a discussion of how visiting LABFIT means more to people than simply bodywork to shape their bodies to meet a certain ‘ideal. In fact, the findings show that visiting LABFIT is not exclusively about people exercising their bodies. Rather, it is about ‘exercising’ their minds and thoughts in ways that allow the creation of a sense of control; that is, control over, for example, how their bodywork is progressing, their thought patterns, and/or their bodies. More precisely, the mundane gym-going practices people perform are more meaningful vis-à-vis the ways people experience their bodies and selves in LABFIT. Based on my key findings, I offer practical strategies that will enhance gym trainers’ pedagogies; that is, help them to become more effective through a new understanding that people’s gym-going may for some mean more than simply shaping one’s ‘body’. I conclude this thesis with a brief epilogue, providing a reflection of my personal and academic experience with this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In the previous Chapter I showed that approaching my study of LABFIT through the lens of ‘new’ public health offered me insufficient insight into how people experience this gym. Thus, I turned to the scholarship of gyms. I realised that there is an existing field of studies that have focused on investigating gyms. Key scholars of what I call ‘gym studies’, have contributed significantly to the understanding of why people go to the gym, how gyms are part of a wider socio-cultural process, and how gym spaces are produced. In this Chapter I emphasise the different approaches that key scholars have employed to study gyms and their key findings. This is helpful as it informs the methodological and theoretical approach I selected to investigate the different gym-going practices of people in LABFIT.

### **Section 1: Gyms under the microscope of a Foucauldian feminist**

First, I turn to Finnish social theorist Pirrko Markula, a well-published scholar who has studied gyms since the early 1990s. Markula was one of the first scholars to investigate what she calls the ‘postmodern aerobicizing female body’. In her early studies, Markula (1993, 1995, 2001) investigated how women’s experience of aerobics is influenced by images of the feminine body ideal. Her research interest fitted the concurrent aerobic craze that was influenced by the ‘era of Jane Fonda’, between the 1980s and the mid 1990s. According to Markula, this era was influential in shaping the discourse of the feminine ideal body image described as ‘layered with long, sleek, unbulky muscles’ (1995, p. 436).

More specifically, in her early studies, Markula (1995, p. 425) sought to determine if women were 'single-mindedly' occupied with improving their bodies in aerobics classes: or, if female participants, were in fact ignoring the feminine body ideal portrayed in the mass media; or, if they struggled to disregard the image while at the same time exercising to reshape their bodies. Markula drew on a multi-method approach to find answers to the questions raised above. Besides ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, Markula included an analysis of exercise magazines and videotapes, positing that 'aerobicizers often reflect their understanding of aerobics against the widely circulated media images of aerobics and aerobicizers' (1995, p. 431). This approach proves helpful as it allows her to understand the difference between how the aerobicising body is depicted in the media compared to how female participants viewed their 'real' aerobicizing bodies; and, their views on how their participation in aerobics is influenced by images of the 'body beautiful' (1995, p. 450).

To interpret her findings, Markula employs a Foucauldian perspective to show how the discourse surrounding the ideal feminine body image is part of a complex use of power 'over' women in contemporary society. She draws particularly on Foucault's concept of 'panoptic power' to explain how discourses on feminine body ideals seek to regulate an individual's body. Markula contends that employing Foucault's (1980) notion of a panoptic power arrangement suggests that women are preoccupied by discourses on the 'feminine body ideal' during their participation in aerobics. This means that women neglect to think about why they are 'actually' participating.

Drawing on Foucault's panoptic power, Markula argues that women control themselves on behalf of the 'powerful' image while the 'power source' (i.e., discourses on the feminine body ideal) remain invisible. Her early research challenges this 'depressing' view of the panoptic power arrangement, whereby women discipline themselves to engage in aerobics to obtain the feminine body ideal. In addition to her Foucauldian approach, Markula assumes a feminist perspective that assigns an active role to the women who participate in aerobics to question the power arrangements associated with body discourses. Here, she differs from traditional feminists who deemed that women's participation in aerobics constitutes a disservice to them (Bordo, 1990; Bartky, 1988; Wolf, 1990). According to her, these scholars suggest that the sole purpose of participation in this form of exercise is to change their bodies to 'resemble the narrowly defined feminine body ideal.

In contrast to these scholars, Markula assigns an active voice to female aerobicisers. She argues that women in fact question the body ideal and are sceptical about the media presentation of the feminine ideal body. However, this questioning leaves women confused: they want to conform to the ideal, but they also find the 'whole process ridiculous' (Markula, 1995, p. 450). As a result, Markula concludes that women's relationship with the body ideal is contradictory. This means that Foucault's notion of panoptic power does not completely explain women's participating in aerobics. Rather, women may participate in aerobics for other reasons than to 'obey' the 'official discourse. Consequently, Markula (1995) argues that public discourses pertaining to the ideal female

body are not the only reason why (and how) females participate in fitness activities. In her early studies Markula (1993, 1995, 2001) finds that women often participate in aerobics for reasons other than improving their bodies. For example, her findings show that aerobics is a source of enjoyment for women, not only because it improved their bodies (Markula, 1993). She also found that aerobics classes provided females with a safe environment for being physically active, allowing women to spend time on themselves and offering an opportunity to meet and make new friends (Markula, 1993). Furthermore, she argues that participation supplies women with increased energy to pursue their working lives (Markula, 1995). In short, her earlier studies show that women's participation in aerobics does not entirely serve as a vehicle for the oppressive dominant discourses on the body.

Markula's (2004, 2006, 2011) later research moves away from aerobics focusing on mindful fitness classes such as yoga and pilates. In these later studies, she examines how participation (especially for women) in these activities is as much about the quest for the ideal body through self-surveillance as it is about resisting disciplinary arrangements. Different from her earlier work, she drew on Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self'. In doing so, she is interested in investigating how participating in these fitness classes may serve as 'practices of freedom' (Markula, 2003, p. 104). For Markula, 'practices of freedom' are 'conscious, critical problematizations of the boundaries of the female athletic self' (Markula, 2004, p.105). By this she means that engaging in exercise has the potential for individuals (particularly women) to contest the limitations of how femininity is depicted

discursively. She argues that certain forms of exercise may be conceptualised as ‘technologies of the self’ if they encourage participants to be critically aware of dominant body discourses.

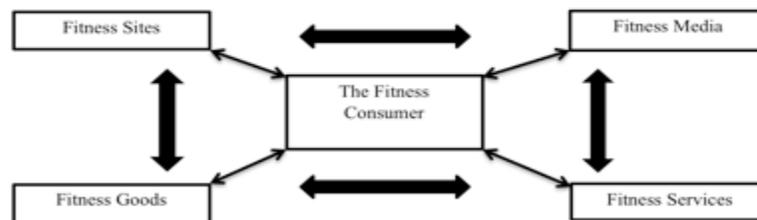
She interprets Foucault’s concept in the way that only through acknowledging that a certain body ideal exists individuals can re-invent themselves. In other words, it is only when individuals are critically aware that the culture they live in promotes a certain body ideal that they can create themselves at the level of the micro-physics of existence. What this means is that certain forms of exercise may assist the individual to experience a certain sense of transformation of themselves on their own. Markula argues that the individual is able to question what is seemingly natural; for example, the existing discourse of certain ideal body images. By employing Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’, Markula challenges traditional views that conceptualise exercise as a disciplinary technique whereby the individual is governed by discourses on the body and health. However, she recognises that employing ‘technologies of the self’ to investigate how the individual can reconceptualise herself/himself is complicated. She maintains that not all forms of exercise can be conceptualised as ‘technologies of the self’. Furthermore, she argues that there is no clear formula that will detect which exercise practices serve as ‘technologies of the self’. Rather, she stresses that particular conditions need to be met by individuals in order for them to experience a certain ‘freedom’ from the control of disciplinary practices. In Chapter 4, I elaborate in more detail on Markula’s interpretation of ‘technologies of the self’. This helps

to assess what kind of ‘technologies’ assist people to experience ‘freedom’ from dominant body discourses in LABFIT. To sum it up, Markula helps one understand that the reasons why participation in exercise for individuals, in particular women, cannot be explained by simplistic views of discursive forms of power, that is that women engage in exercise to obtain a certain body ideal. Instead, she emphasises that participation in any kind of exercise can potentially ‘free’ individuals - not just women - through ‘technologies of the self’. Markula further argues that individuals may indeed feel ‘free’ from dominant body discourses which can result in transformation and own creation of their own sense of self. This raises the question of whether discourses on health and the body are the only influence contributing to an individual’s engagement in exercise/gym going. In other words, I ask if there are perhaps other factors or processes that help explain why individuals participate in exercise. In an attempt to answer these questions, I now analyse how Smith Maguire looks at the socio– cultural and historical processes embedded in the fitness culture.

## **Section 2: Fitness culture dissected by socio, cultural and historical influences**

Jennifer Smith Maguire (2008), an American theorist of consumption and communications published for almost a decade extensively on ‘fitness culture’ and its associated ‘features’ such as gyms, media, and personal trainers. In her most significant book titled *Fit for consumption: Sociology and the business of fitness* she maps fitness culture in the U.S. ‘as a field’. The foundation of this approach is grounded in Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘cultural field’, which Smith Maguire interprets as ‘a network of sites, texts, producers and

consumers that generate practices for and meanings of the body’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 5). In contrast to Markula, Smith Maguire studies the wider field of fitness, not gyms in isolation. She analyses gyms in relation to their position within the current fitness culture. For Smith Maguire, a comprehensive analysis of fitness acknowledges that elements of the fitness field (i.e., health clubs, fitness texts fitness producers and consumer) and wider social processes are connected and thus should not be studied in isolation. Figure 1 shows how Smith Maguire views the fitness field and how different elements cooperate and compete with one another. The arrows demonstrate that interconnection between these field ‘players’ creates ‘an overall web of fitness consumption and production’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 9). For example, she explains that health clubs reinforce the importance of fitness services such as personal trainers and exercise magazines promoting fitness equipment.



**Figure 1 Mapping the fitness field (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 9)**

In order to offer a comprehensive analysis of the dimensions of the 'fitness field', she employs a multi-method approach combining a historical analysis of gyms, an overview of different modern fitness gyms (which she terms health clubs), interviews with fitness producers and consumers, and discourse analysis of a wide variety of fitness texts. In addition, Smith Maguire used an ethnographic approach, observing and interviewing members and trainers in various gyms in the U.S over a three year period.

However, in the foreground of Smith Maguire's (2008a, p. 33) analysis lies the fitness field participant, who for her, is both producer and consumer of the fitness field and is, by extension, involved in the 'social legitimacy of fitness as a mode of self-investment'. Her argument is that participating in the fitness field is not 'universal'. She argues that the taste for the fitness field is patterned by an individual's habitus. Here she draws upon Bourdieu (1984, p. 190) who argues that the habitus is one's 'embodied, class-bound disposition'. In other words, Smith Maguire suggests that the fitness field makes not only more sense to some people than others but it also influences whether or not they participate in a field. The reason for this, she argues, is that not everyone has the same taste for each form of body work. It is precisely the classed habitus that is reflected in people's ways to work on the body. In other words, Smith Maguire draws on Bourdieu (1984) who suggests that class mediates the ways in which individuals take up the project of the self. She argues that fitness participants reflect the ways in which the body (that is, its health and appearance) is taken as a project by the middle class (Bourdieu, 1984; Crawford 1984; Shilling, 1993).

Smith Maguire argues that for Bourdieu, it is particularly the middle class who is characterised by a sense of unease about its social position. This is expressed in an ‘uneasiness’ towards their bodies. Drawing on Featherstone (1987), she further explains that because members of the middle class possess little of the economic and cultural capital in comparison to the established and wealthy dominant class, they adopt an investment attitude towards their bodies. For the middle class, the body is their unconditional asset through which they can take up the project of the self. Smith Maguire further explains that the middle class is intensely aware of their bodies as they watch others and correct themselves accordingly. This is important for creating better opportunities in the job and relationship markets which, she argues, are greatly influenced by people’s looks and bodies.

Smith Maguire (2008a, p. 53) claims that the middle class invest in their ‘body-as-symbol’. In turn, this makes them natural consumers for practices that improve the health and appearance of the body (e.g., dieting, exercise fads, health foods). She emphasises that members of the middle class are not simply concerned with their bodies and their improvement through consumer goods and services. Rather, they treat their bodies as a sign rather than an instrument through which status and social position may be communicated and reinforced. Thus, Smith Maguire argues, the middle-class body is best understood as an ‘enterprise’; and, participation in the fitness field is a means of ‘investment’ in it. In short, for Smith Maguire, the fitness field is particularly a pursuit of the middle class. She further suggests that one’s class is not the only contributing factor to the formation of the habitus,

which influences the type of cultural fields people participate in and the ways of doing so. For example, she recognises that gender is a relevant factor that influences one's participation in the fitness field, for example. She argues that gender mediates both access to and the experience of participation. For example, she suggests that women's rates of participation in the fitness field are greater than those of men. Furthermore, she argues that gender influences the kind of body rewards people strive for (i.e, slimming down for women versus bulking up for men) and the type of guidance people seek for their participation in the fitness field.

This has the effect that women and men may draw from different kinds of elements in the fitness field more extensively (see Figure 2), such as women perhaps participating more in exercises classes whereas men invest in exercise equipment. In her opinion, the notion of ethnicity tends to be superfluous: at best it should be considered in relation to the fitness field, given that Smith Maguire views it as a pursuit of the middle class, which assumes a 'whiteness' of the field. As a result, she acknowledges that while ethnicity - like gender - shapes the ways in which individuals access and experience the field, her key argument is that the fitness field is predominantly stratified by class. In addition to drawing on Bourdieu's work on the cultural field and its associated notion of habitus, Smith Maguire includes broader issues of 'individualisation' in her analysis. More precisely, she draws on contemporary literature to explain that processes of individualisation permeate the fitness field. For her, these processes are 'those ways in which individuals have come to be held

responsible for the production of their own identities' (Smith Maguire 2008a, p. 18). In support of her argument, Smith Maguire quotes from sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000, pp. 31-2) who writes: To put it in a nutshell, individualisation consists in transforming people's sense of self from a given into a task and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side effects) of their performance'. She emphasises that crucial to any understanding of the fitness field is an appreciation of how the decline of an 'ascriptive' sense of self and the process of individualisation has intensified individuals' relationships with themselves. What this means is that traditional descriptors that define one's sense of self are no longer valid. Instead, through the process of individualisation, individuals are encouraged to turn to their own bodies in order to 'craft' their own body and sense of self.

Smith Maguire (2008a) suggests that due to the increased pressure to create their selfhoods by choosing from a multitude of options, individuals turn to and rely upon expert knowledge. As Smith Maguire (2008a, p. 19) maintains, the more we are 'free to choose, the more we turn to guides and objects to provide a sense of security and to anchor a sense of self against the churning tumult of choice'. It is precisely this personal dilemma that Smith Maguire (2008a) uses to illuminate the importance of the body which, according to Simmel (1950, p. 34), is 'our first and most unconditional possession'. In other words, she argues, that to work on the body is to work on the self; and, because our bodies are reflected back to us through the lens of products and services, consumption is promoted as

the primary arena in which we are to make and remake our bodies. Smith Maguire (2008a, p. 20) suggests that ‘through consumption we are “free” to choose, create, and control ourselves’. As a result, it is ‘not coincidental’ that consumer culture has become predominant in the age of individualisation.

Nonetheless, Smith Maguire contends that the task of self-production is not reserved for everyone: the processes of individualisation are particularly pursued by the middle class. In other words, according to her, the middle classes have epitomised self-work as a form of consumer leisure. By this she means that it is in the realm of leisure that individuals undertake the ‘obligatory’ production of the self. Thus, Smith Maguire (2008a) positions the fitness field in the sphere of leisure, where individuals (especially the middle classes) are offered opportunities to make the most of oneself. But, she also stresses that the development of a consumer culture, i.e., the mass production of consumer goods, played a pivotal role in transforming the mission of self-improvement into a mass, middle class project. Prior to a consumer culture, only the upper classes possessed sufficient resources of time, money, and knowledge to improve their self through physical culture, education and self-reflection.

The question of the self has become the question of the consuming self. Here Smith Maguire brings together the notions of individualisation and consumption, implying that through consumption the individual is able to find ‘answers’ for herself/ himself. In other

words, consumption facilitates the individual to create her/his own body and sense of self. In the midst of this equation is the body as the project of the self. In effect, an individual's body showcases her/his consumption. More precisely, she suggests that it is through the consumption of products and services that individuals create their body projects which in turn represent their body and sense of self. Lastly, she emphasises that it is only in the context of an increasingly sedentary way of life that permeates contemporary western societies that participation in the fitness field can be classified as individual choice. Only if there is a choice to be unfit or inactive can individuals' pursuit of fitness be considered the fulfilment of their task of self-production. In essence, Smith Maguire's (2008a) provides an insightful analysis of fitness as a 'cultural field' (Bourdieu, 1984). In doing so, she positions gyms in the context of other elements in the fitness field such as fitness media and services. She stresses that these elements do not work in isolation, but rather in cooperation and competition. In the foreground of her analysis of the fitness field lie the participants. Elaborating on Bourdieu's field approach, she states that participation in the fitness fields is characterised by an individual's habitus.

In essence, Smith Maguire (2008a) offers a valuable understanding of how broader socio-cultural processes influence an individual's participation in the fitness field, but has under-researched the 'lived experiences' of the participants. By this, I mean that her approach offers little insight into the feeling and thought processes of participants in the fitness field. I argue that while acknowledging that gyms are embedded within a wider field, her analysis

glosses over detailed information about how people experience gyms. In other words, her work under-theorises the fitness participant from a micro perspective. Her approach provides little acknowledgment of the variety of experiences and reasons why people may go to the gym. In order to gain some insight into how scholars have studied people's lived experiences in gym, I now turn to Roberta Sassatelli, an Italian theorist of culture and consumption who focuses on studying the 'insides' of fitness gyms, i.e., the internal processes and spatial structures.

### **Section 3: Fitness culture as a lived experience**

Roberta Sassatelli's work centres on the 'gym world'. She specifically focuses on the embodied experiences of gym-goers, which she claims, range 'from frustration to joy to fatigue and embarrassment' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 7). In her book titled *Fitness Culture, Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun* (Sassatelli, 2010), Sassatelli provides a detailed overview of the 15 years of ethnographic fieldwork she conducted in gyms in Italy and the UK. During this period of her ethnographic studies, she explored many different types of gyms and fitness centres, ranging from large fitness chains to smaller, local gyms. She also participated in a multitude of fitness activities offered by contemporary fitness gyms (or what Smith Maguire refers to as health clubs). In the process and, in contrast to Smith Maguire's work, Sassatelli examines the lived culture of gyms.

According to Sassatelli, lived cultures are constituted by ongoing social practices. She includes in these lived cultures the energetic nature of gyms. In other words, she does not conceive gyms to be predominantly shaped by wider sociocultural processes (see Smith Maguire) or by dominant discourses about body ideals (see Markula). Rather focusing on the social practices in gyms, she emphasises the social process, including behaviours that constitute gyms. In order to capture these ongoing, ever-changing processes, Sassatelli argues that gyms are best examined naturalistically. In her role of ethnographer, she was able to immerse herself in the world of gyms, gather people's impressions on the spot, and explore the local organisation of experience. By local organisation of experience, she means that the social practices occurring at the gym constitute people's experiences in the gym. In other words, since people are locally organised gyms, they experience change in this space.

In order to investigate how people's experiences in the gym change, Sassatelli studies the situated interaction rules of gyms. By situated interaction rules, Sassatelli means the face-to-face sphere of action maintained primarily by 'implicit rules about how to proceed, express one's desire and emotions, present oneself and behave with others' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 8). She suggests that it is the local organisation of interaction rules, that is, the underlying social features of a gym, that determine how people sense the reality of a gym. It is worth stressing here that this means there is no single reality of gyms. Sassatelli argues that each gym is distinguished by its own reality which is shaped by the interaction rules

that occur inside a gym. For example, she explores how people get close to one another, how they share their experiences and learn ways of interacting. The latter is manifested through ceremonial rules, i.e., implicit scripts for participants to show, through body demeanour, glances and speech, their mutual respect or relative social position. Sassatelli (2010, p. 43) claims that these ceremonial rules are influential for the projection of 'local identities in interaction'. She recognises that gym-goers follow implicit and tacit 'scripts' of behaviour in the gym. In addition, she emphasises that interaction between people is dynamic and locally produced. She argues that unspoken rules are in fact embedded in gym environments; however, they are non-universal. Rather, they are shaped by space, time, relationships and bodies which constitute the inside world of gyms. Sassatelli further contends that gyms provide a dedicated space wherein the gym's reality is created through people's experiences that are shaped by negotiations between 'local' interactions in the gym and broader cultural values of fitness.

Her view of gyms as a lived culture assigns a certain level of activity and creativity to fitness participants' contribution to the meaning of fitness. As I suggested in Chapter 1, Section 3, the notion of fitness is a strong feature of fitness gyms. Discourses on fitness and fit looking bodies have shaped the ways in which people understand and interpret the meaning of fitness. In other words, a fit person is expected to be a fit looking person who has achieved the 'fit body ideal' promoted in the media. Furthermore, a fit individual encourages the impression of being a responsible, disciplined and worthy individual.

However, according to Sassatelli, acknowledging participants' lived experiences and their contribution to the reality of gyms presents a threat to the stability of the 'meanings' of fitness. She suggests that locally organised resources in the gym, that is, space, time, relationships and bodies, offer meaningful experiences to people. But, not everyone will define or experience fitness in the way it has been discursively depicted. Rather, by illuminating the local resources of gyms, Sassatelli hints that people may ascribe different meanings to fitness through their 'gym-going' experience. The fact that people's experiences in gyms are varied and dynamic challenges fitness discourses that depict a rather superficial picture of gyms as sites wherein fit, beautiful, healthy bodies are produced. However, Sassatelli contends that it is, in fact, the ever-changing reality and dynamic that takes place in gyms that appears to be a fundamental ingredient in the success of gyms. In short, Sassatelli argues that the gym is a meaningful world due to the local patterns of embodied interactions and relational dynamics that typify the gym environment.

Unlike Smith Maguire, who explores the wider socio-cultural structural influences of fitness, Sassatelli's focus is on understanding individuals' experiences with fitness in gyms. Both scholars position the culture of fitness in a contemporary consumer culture. Sassatelli maintains that the social sciences see the voluntary nature of consumption as typically associated with the notion of rational choices. This suggests that individuals act according to clear, well-defined needs, and that in order to satisfy these needs, individuals are capable of identifying and evaluating various alternatives and remain faithful to their own

preferences (Sassatelli, 2007). In other words, she argues that by rationally choosing a gym in which to exercise, individuals first objectively identify their need to exercise, and then logically narrow down possible options based on their preferred activities, specific fitness aims, costs, and access. Sassatelli argues that any action besides sustained participation threatens to reflect an individual's lack of will. By this, I interpret Sassatelli to mean that if the consumption of fitness is considered under the banner of rational choice, it disregards what people experience when they participate in exercise and how their experiences in fact influence their choice to continue with their consumption of fitness. Thus, in her work, Sassatelli argues that choice is a situated process rather than a cost-benefit decision; a transformative, ongoing practice rather than an accomplished rational calculation.

With reference to people's participation in gyms, Sassatelli suggests that consumption takes place in less instrumental and linear ways than the idea of rational choices. Rather, she contends, the choice to participate in gym-going is a hybrid' calculation. People are influenced by a mixture of 'decisions, constraints, habits, contingencies, aspirations, interactions, and relations - each of which may be more or less satisfying, and may or may not lead to further consumption of "gym-going" (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 196). This means that the reasons why gym-goers take up gym-going and adhere to it are not as clear-cut as suggested by the 'rational choice model' that has dominated exercise research and health promotion. Here, it is useful to pause and reiterate the point I stress in Chapter 1, Section 5 where I explain that the literature on health promotion did not assist me sufficiently to

understand people's actual experiences in LABFIT. Sassatelli's argument is similar in the sense that she finds it problematic to accept that people's gym-going is based on 'rational choice'. That is, people are influenced by discourses on health which include 'normative reference(s)' to widely accepted body ideals as incentive to exercise participation. In effect, Sassatelli argues that once inside a gym, the local organisation of practice is central to providing 'internal rewards' for participants.

A key point that differentiates Sassatelli from Smith Maguire is that the former perceives consumption as a social practice. She claims that it is people's use and not simply the acquisition of fitness products and services. This requires moving beyond associating consumption with the idea of purchase, and instead considering its situated character. This suggests that an individual's consumption is shaped by her/his particular social context. In other words, people's gym-going is realised through social relations inside gym spaces, wherein gym-goers continuously mobilise their identities and materiality. Furthermore, Sassatelli recognises that gym-going includes processual and learning-like elements. In other words, people's consumption is shaped by the ways they learn to use what is 'on offer' in the gym, what attaches them to it, and the kinds of exercises they participate in. Gym-goers learn to recognise their need for exercise through actual practice. Their participation in the gym, as a form of consumption, is realised through actual practice. Ultimately, gym-goers 'consume' via the concrete practices they engage in when attending the gym.

Here, Sassatelli alludes to the specific ways people use or exercise in the gym. A corollary of this is that she argues that individuals discover their own essential need for fitness in one particular gym. Sassatelli, highlighting how a general need to exercise is constructed through particularity, maintains that the local organisation of gyms, i.e., the locality of resources and the social interaction rules, shape individuals experiences, giving meaning to their gym-going. In effect, she argues that it is less about exercising and more about what people experience when they exercise. This means that consumption of fitness in the form of gym-going depends on the situated practices individuals' experience, and on the meaning they give to the gym.

Sassatelli (2010, p. 203) further argues that a gym constitutes itself as a meaningful world of meanings by (partially) cutting itself out of ordinary life. In other words, access to this world requires more than merely the purchase of a membership or the payment of a fee. Sassatelli suggests that most people do not participate in exercise or 'gym-going' despite having the means to do so, and displaying a vaguely positive attitude towards physical activity. Sassatelli argues that a supply driven explanation is insufficient for explaining its consumption. Further to this, she adds that locally realised resources, that is, space, relationships and bodies, are essential to developing the need for fitness and its actual realization into practice. As Sassatelli suggest, the importance of a gym is always a result of its use.

Driven by her interest in lived experiences, Sassatelli contends that gyms can filter body ideals. She further suggests that the gym is not experienced as a solution to create a perfect body, but as a place which has its own rules and wherein a vast array of identities and meanings are negotiated. Body ideals, she argues, are but a small part of the meaning that individuals ascribe to their gym-going. She does not dismiss the existence of ‘powerful utopias’ of body ideals, she claims that gym participants contribute to the negotiation of broader fitness ideals and images, stressing that it is particularly through actual gym-going that people realise that it is important to feel well, and to accept yourself and improve what you have. Sassatelli maintains that people learn that they may never obtain the perfect body. They can however aim for a more harmonious, proportioned physique. This differs from depictions in fitness magazines or adverts where the focus is on weight loss, muscle tone or growth. The reality, according to Sassatelli, is that gym training is far more varied.

Sassatelli stresses the plurality of gyms in relation to body or training objectives. In her ethnographies, participants agreed that gyms may respond to a multitude of different, specific and personal body objectives: “everyone [...] has their own goal” (Sassatelli, 2010, 157). She found that novices typically reiterate a number of stereotypical descriptions such as “the body builder who wants to develop muscles” or “the older women who want to relax”. Her regular participants mentioned more nuanced questions such as who “wants to get rid of their stomach” or who “wants to feel more energetic or more supple” (p. 157). Nonetheless, she argues that despite different body objectives, gym participants seem to be

united in their capacity to discuss body objects and thus cope with broader body ideals. The negotiation of body ideals is particularly facilitated by the ways people locally experience their gym training and the local organisation of the gym.

Like other scholars, Sassatelli associates fitness with an ideal of personal liberation by means of traditional middle class values like self-control and self-determination (Maguire, 2011; Nash, 2011). However, unlike Smith Maguire, who positions class and structure as the centrepieces of her analysis of the fitness culture, Sassatelli refrains from analysing gyms as a reproduction of class. Instead, she argues that experiences in the gym are highly local, situational and flexible. She suggests that people's experiences in gyms are not universal; this means that people experience gyms differently and that they may not always experience the same when they visit gyms. She also suggests that people's experiences are influenced by other people in the gym, and that interactions between people vary each time they visit gyms. Sassatelli is also interested in exploring the social personas of fitness consumers, i.e., their different gym-going personalities and the notion of choice associated with said personas. For Sassatelli (2010, p. 196), participation in gyms is 'a transformative, ongoing practice rather than an accomplished, rational calculation'. In other words, Sassatelli suggests that gym goers' reasons for taking up fitness training are complex in the sense that they vary and are not fixed but rather evolve and change over time. Thus they cannot be simply explained by their individual habituses (Smith Maguire, 2008) or their resistance to power (Markula, 2004). According to Sassatelli, a gym's local organisation is

what shapes an individual's experience of the gym. Influential in these processes, are for example, the design and layout of contemporary fitness gyms. Sassatelli describes in detail how gym entrances help consumers to get into the right frame of mind for their workouts, transforming the gym into a space unlike the outside world, 'away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, doing different things and focused on other concerns' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 47). Her key point here is that gyms are experienced as separate spaces from the 'outside' world, spaces wherein individuals can filter their external identities.

Finally, Sassatelli proposes that it is the construction of different meanings in a gym that assists people to filter bodily ideals. She sees gym participation as a mixture of habit, self-challenge, emotional release, light sociability and, broadly speaking, a culturally approved way of coping with one's own shortcomings. As a lived consumer culture, gyms are transformative environments; they change subjects as much as – and indeed more than – they change bodies. The effect of the local organisation of gyms is that gym regulars come to view their bodies differently, placing less emphasis on weight and size and more on tone and commitment.

In short, Sassatelli offers a detailed examination of the fitness culture, especially its main institution the fitness gym. Her research reveals that fitness participants engage in constant negotiation not only with their environments, but with the people around them. Her work under-researches details about how people experience gyms differently, and how the ways

in which people experience the gym differ perhaps assist them to create their own felt sense of reality and space. Sassatelli emphasises that gyms have local' realities, but she views them as one single indoor place. In order to investigate further how gym spaces are produced and how perhaps more than one space can be created in the gym, I turn to a group of scholars who have employed a theoretical approach to gym spaces.

#### **Section 4: Gym spaces mapped theoretically**

Before I turn to the group of scholars who theorised gyms as spaces, I reiterate how both Smith Maguire and Sassatelli have examined the physical or what they also call material characteristics of the gym. For example, Smith Maguire (2008a) examines how health clubs can be stratified based on the services they offer, their membership costs, and their interior design. Similarly, Sassatelli (1999a, b) argues that spatial division in the gym shapes the social interaction processes of and between members. In addition, she assigns a special role to the changing room, arguing that this space is special as it assists members to transition into the world of gyms, to let go of their external identities. While Smith Maguire stresses that gyms possess different 'auras' based on their décor, clientele and physical setting, Sassatelli (1999b) emphasises that gyms are non-universal spaces. The effect is that their writings describe gym spaces as confined and pre-existing.

I find this conceptualization of gym space problematic. During my time as a trainer in LABFIT, I felt that while people were exercising in the same 'physical' space, they seemed

to be in different ‘mental spaces’. However, I had insufficient theoretical knowledge about how to academically explain my observation. To understand better how space is produced, I turned to a group of scholars who focus is on theorising the space of gyms. What these researchers propose is that spaces in gyms are not preexisting, fixed and static; they are flexible, ever changing, and produced through a number of gym-going practices. Public health theorist Caroline Fusco (2006) is interesting because she theorises how gym spaces are sites for the inscription of discourses of ‘new’ public health (see Chapter 1, Section 5). More precisely she examines how ‘techniques of ‘self- and other - governance’ help to inscribe and ‘prescribe’ ‘new’ public health in locker rooms. In doing so, she aims to show that discourses on health and the body are inscribed on spaces and individuals.

Fusco, who critiques previous studies on ‘locker rooms’ as being as ‘fixed and container-like’ spaces, contends that little research has focused on theorising locker rooms as spaces in which people practice a ‘new’ public health discourse. According to Fusco (2006, p. 77), locker rooms are spaces that are essential for the maintenance of a ‘healthy’ and ‘clean’, ‘social’ and ‘exercised’ body. In other words, locker rooms are spaces that assist individuals to prepare for - and clean up after - their participation in exercise. Similar to my description in Chapter 1, Section 5, Fusco (2006) draws on Lupton (1995) to highlight that exercise is an important element of discourses of ‘new’ public health. Participation in exercise is considered to be an essential strategy for the individual to demonstrate that she/he is an active, ‘health-conscious’ citizen.

Fusco argues that locker rooms can be conceptualised as spaces of risk. As a space where people are naked, where people can watch and compare other bodies, and where body fluids are present (for example, blood, urine, sweat), a locker room has the potential to 'harm' the individual with for example embarrassment or germs. Drawing upon other scholars of 'new' public health, Fusco further maintains that in a neo-liberalist government, individuals are taught to believe that health risks exist at every corner (Lupton, 1995; Armstrong, 1995; Petersen & Lupton, 1996). In a neo-liberal government, emphasis is placed upon control, discipline and self-monitoring As Lupton (1999, p.91) states, 'risk behavior, therefore, becomes viewed as a moral enterprise relating to uses of self-control, self-knowledge and self-improvement'. Fusco writes that risk avoidance behaviour in the locker room is thus seen to be a form of self-government; or, as Lupton (1999, p. 91) states, as a 'technology of the self'. Fusco (2006) argues that as a risk potential space, it requires individuals to regulate themselves by performing practices of personal hygiene. During her work, Fusco (2006) interviews participants who are responsible for the basic maintenance of locker rooms in gyms used by gym members. For example, one cleaner referring to her duties, says that she and another girl take care of the locker room 'in order to maintain the locker, to be clean, to replace the toilet paper, to sweep in the shower, to take the hair up, to clear the plastic containers (...)' in order for the space to be safe (Fusco, 2006, p. 72).

However, Fusco emphasises that not only cleaners perform discursive and material practices to avoid risks in the locker room as a space of 'new' public health. Rather, she

argues, locker rooms in general are directed towards the regulation of the one's body, its fluids, and how it moves and interacts with other bodies (and their fluids) and surfaces. For example, as another participant says: 'I have a thing with body hair. I am disgusted by it. I hate to see clumps of hairs and so I make a point not to step in the hair. I also wear flip flops. There are things you can catch from wet floors, and these floors are constantly wet' (Fusco, 2006, p. 73). Fusco argues that these narratives exemplify how discourses of risk are imperative to 'self- and other-governance'.

In conclusion, Fusco shows that the locker room - as a space in the gym - has inscribed notions of 'new' public health that further help to understand how people are encouraged to regulate and govern themselves in relation to exercise. This however raises similar problems to those I described in Chapter 1, Section 5. Any analysis of practices in the gym through the lens of 'new' public health assumes that all people act in the same way and for similar reasons; that is, to avoid risk and become 'healthy' responsible individuals.

Social theorists Judith Lavery and Jan Wright (2010) examine the role of fitness gyms in relation to how individuals (in particular young people) mobilise their identities discourses on health and the body. More precisely, they employ the notion of space to reflect the interplay between exercise, the body and notions of the self. Similar to Fusco (2006), these scholars do not approach the study of space from a geographical perspective; rather they theorise space in relation to individuals' understandings of their bodies and selves Lavery

and Wright (2010) argue that the theorising of gym spaces has moved from traditional feminist writings that conceptualised gyms as spaces that reproduce and contribute to stereotypical notions of the female body as slim, toned and youthful. They suggest that gyms are now conceptualised as diversified spaces, emphasising that gym spaces vary in size, services and atmosphere. They specifically mention commercial gyms, and women only gyms, well-being centres (see also Chapter 1, Section 3, Table 1). Lavery and Wright (2010, p. 78) add that gyms, the meaning of them, and the ‘kind of work that happens in gyms is now much more varied’. They see gym spaces as linked to healthism discourses, that is, as part of a ‘repertoire of possibilities’ that people are expected to take up to become healthy. They claim that similar to discourses on health and the body, gym spaces have become part of people’s ‘weekly repertoire’ to become ‘fit’ and ‘healthy’.

Lavery and Wright (2010) claim that gyms have become an everyday space; that is, they can be defined as the perfect neo-liberal urban space. In these spaces, individuals ought to assume personal responsibility for minimizing health risks through self-monitoring and self-regulation (Lupton, 1997). Drawing on Markula and Pringle (2006), they claim that gyms are essentially about surveillance, measurement and the disciplining of bodies; ‘bodies towards normalcy’, towards the ideal male (increased muscularity) or female (thin and toned) body (Lavery & Wright, 2010, p. 83). In addition, their findings reveal that gym spaces are flexible spaces. They note that people perceive gym spaces in various ways and thus attach different meanings to these spaces. For example, they demonstrate that some

participants see the gym as a source of autonomy or as a space for socialising and, more importantly, for ‘staying off drugs’.

Similar to my argument in Chapter 1, Section 5, Lavery and Wright (2010) suggest that viewing gyms as spaces of ‘new’ public health offer predominantly ‘unified notions’ of selves’. This means that participation in gyms is built around individual improvement, regulation, and a ‘fit’ body that is privileged and promoted in a neo-liberal context. However, their work generates an awareness that the constitution of gyms needs to cater for a more diverse and flexible approach. They argue that gyms ought to expand the range of ‘self models’ available to individuals; for example, offer non-commercial or less expensive commercial institutions that promote exercise. Similar to Fusco, Lavery and Wright are limited in their explanation of how space is ‘actually’ produced. In order to shed more light on the dynamic construction of space, I turn to Derek McCormack, a geographer whose work is centred on the hybrid spaces that individuals form with gym machines.

In his study, McCormack (1999, p. 173) examines how individuals monitor their own ‘body (s)pace’ through the display of ‘flickering LEDs and bio-informational figures on the control console of the treadmill’. McCormack refers to the governmental network between humans and non-humans traditional categories such as subject/object, nature/culture. For example, he alludes to a particular treadmill which automatically adjusts the incline and speed based on the user’s entry of height, weight and desired heart rate. Here, the human

becomes the object of machinic action: that the non-human controls the action of the human. In other words the individual has no other choice but to run to the set pace of the treadmill belt. As I previously suggest, McCormack (1999, p. 168) argues that subjectivity and objectivity may be considered as co-productions, neither embodied completely in the non-human, nor in the human. His thesis that both actors (i.e., non-human and human) are involved in processes of quasi-objectification/subjectification can be extended to mean that within hybrid worlds, neither humans nor non-humans are only ever conceptualised as objects or subjects.

McCormack writes to the effect that machines appear to be facilitator assisting the individual to feel to in control of her/his own 'being'; for example, through monitoring her/his own heart rate. At the same time, however, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that the machine has some control over the human in the sense that there is little choice but to run once she/he steps on it. McCormack further contends that geographies of hybrids are embedded within a particular sexed geographical imagination. This implies that the fusion of humans and non-humans in gyms represents the 'traditional Western epistemology of female-flesh-nature-problem, male technology-culture-solution'. For example, certain gym machines are designed to target the 'natural problems' of the female body, a body which, McCormack argues, is conceptualised as an object that refuses to keep in proper shape. He further suggests that gym equipment manufacturers understand that 'women get out of shape and put on weight differently than men do' (McCormack, 1999, p. 169). Viewed

from this perspective, gym equipment is tailored for women to view their bodies as ‘territories to be mastered’. In other words, women who are “in control of their lives” are able to control their bodies whilst the others are out of control. Thus, gym machines that are specifically designed for women are regarded as a technology of empowerment, as a means of strengthening their ‘suppliant, feminine nature’ (McCormack, 1999, p.156).

One of McCormack’s key argument is that geographies of fitness are located in an imaginative masculinist landscape of natural purity. Once fused with machines, individuals imagine themselves as masters of a pure, natural corporeal landscape. In other words, they imagine that their relations with non-humans will assist them to ‘control’ their natural corporeal space. I find McCormack’s (1999) work useful for understanding how individuals and gym machines create hybrid spaces. A key argument of his study is that humans give machines what he calls machineness, while machines simultaneously give humans humanness. In effect, bodies and machines simultaneously exercise and are exercised as particular transhuman-machinic beings. However, while McCormack’s work is useful for understanding how individuals and machines create space, he under-researches how the spatial characteristics are influential in producing and shaping the gym as a space.

Geographer Patricia Vertinsky (2001, 2004) focuses on the various ways in which architecture shapes disciplinary politics, social relations and practices in gyms. She examines how the physical structure, equipment and social environment of a gym enables,

molds, informs and shapes people's conceptions of - and activities in - gyms. There are two key arguments to her work. First, she suggests that there is no single sense of place shared by all. Rather, she contends, one builds her/his own sense of space and creates her/his own theatre of memory by 'reading' gym spaces in very personal and often contradictory ways. Second, in her work on a war memorial gym at a university, Vertinsky shows that the materiality (that is, the spatial characteristics) of a space can be connected with the social and power relations among members. According to her, modernist architectural gym spaces deliberately attempted to reflect stereotyped gender roles in their spatial arrangements.

Vertinsky (2001) suggests that modern architecture is deeply masculine. Gyms that are built according to this type of architecture project the notion of what it means to be masculine: 'to embody force, to embody competence, to occupy space, to have physical presence in the world' (Vertinsky, 2004, p.17). Vertinsky (2001, 2004) argues that in a Foucauldian sense, gyms became one of the major disciplinary means of power by which modern bodies were to be produced. But, due to gyms' inherent masculine architectural characteristics, certain bodies were encouraged to move and relate in prescribed ways whereas others become excluded from the action. As a result, she suggests, women's bodies became estranged from gym spaces. Nowadays, however, most modern gyms are unisex spaces (see Chapter 1). Vertinsky's work is fruitful given that it emphasises that architectural spaces have been used as a central means to exert control over bodies across gender in a myriad of ways. The extant literature on gyms shows that women's bodies

returned to gym spaces, particularly to fitness gyms. In the final analysis, Vertinsky's work may be helpful to further assess how architectural features of contemporary gyms influence the ways people use gym spaces.

In essence, the group of scholars who theorise gym spaces are helpful because they show that gyms are not static pre-existing containers. Drawing on scholars who connected gym spaces with notions of 'new' public health, they show that gym practices in gyms can be analysed from a discursive perspective. Scholars including Fusco, Lavery and Wright emphasise that notions of governmentality are inscribed on gym spaces and thus help explain the purpose of people's gym-going practices. However, what these scholars gloss over is the variety of gym-going practices, and the fact that one cannot assume that individuals participate in 'gym-going' due to a moral obligation to a neo-liberal government.

Furthermore, these scholars have under-researched how space, is in fact, produced. Here, geographers who employed a geographical notion of space to study gyms have proven more helpful. For example, McCormack shows how individuals form 'material' and 'metaphorical' spaces with machines. He acknowledges that these geographies are located within a network of power. However, his work raises further questions about control and power in relation to people's exercising with gym "objects"; more precisely, I personally wonder who or what has power over whom? Does the machine conquer or control the

human body or does the human exercise control over the machine? Or, is there a dynamic ‘power’ play between human and non-humans? What McCormack advocates is that geographies of space are never static. They are a combination of embodiment and environment, one that is always being worked out. This invites future investigation to assess how machines and humans interact, how and what kinds of (imaginary) geographies of spaces their interaction creates, and, more importantly, if so, what kinds of effects do these spaces have for humans’ experiences in gyms?

Finally, Patricia Vertinsky is helpful by demonstrating that there is perhaps no single sense of space. Rather, she argues, people create their own sense of space. She also shows that spatial characteristics are connected to the notion of power and thus shape the ways people access and experience gym spaces. In brief, while scholars underpin their theories of gym spaces with different approaches, in the main they draw attention to the fact that gyms are spaces that are dynamic and inscribed by notions of power. In the following Section, I briefly review the main findings of my review of literature on gyms. I conclude this Chapter by elucidating the key research questions of my study of LABFIT.

## **Section 5: Conclusion**

In this Chapter, I first review Markula’s extensive work on women’s participation in gyms. Her early work challenges traditional feminists’ views of women’s participation in aerobics as a ‘disservice’ to women. In her work, she provides her participants with an active voice.

She finds that women participate in aerobics for reasons other than dominant discourses on health and the body. She emphasises that participation in any kind of exercise can potentially 'free' individuals through Foucault's 'technologies of the self'. She argues that through exercise individuals may indeed feel 'free' from dominant body discourses which can result in transformation and own creation of their identities. In contrast, Smith Maguire's analysis of the fitness field provides an understanding of the wider socio-cultural elements that constitute the field. Different from Markula, who draws on a Foucauldian view of power, Smith Maguire predominantly draws on Bourdieu's notion of habitus to argue that it is a particular question of class that influences an individual's participation in fitness. She argues that in effect it is particular one's 'embodied class' that 'obliges' her/him to participate in practices that facilitate working on oneself through the body.

As far as this study is concerned, perhaps Sassatelli's work is the closest and most influential. I agree with her view vis-à-vis conceptualising fitness culture as a 'lived culture': it stresses the importance of delving into the world of gyms as an ever changing and dynamic cultural phenomenon. Her approach to conceptualise fitness as a 'lived culture', has led her to ethnographically examine its main sites; that is, fitness gyms. Her work is particularly dedicated to exploring individuals' experiences of gyms. She argues that investigating locally produced interaction rules helps identify that people ascribe different meanings to gym-going. However, while she argues that gyms are not static – that they are flexible environments – she neglects to cast more light on the differentiated ways

in which people use gyms. In this chapter, I also review the works of scholars who focus on theorising gym spaces. Fusco, Lavery and Wright's works confirm that notions of 'new' public health are inscribed in gym spaces. More precisely, these scholars argue that gyms can be defined as spaces of 'new' public health space. However, despite theorising space, the extant literature does not capture the individual experience of people in gyms. The extant body of literature works under an assumption that all people act in the same way for the same reasons, that is, to discipline, regulate and govern their own bodies to become morally worth, healthy citizen.

Finally, I review the works of scholars who employed a geographical approach to the study of gyms. The findings of these studies reveal how space is, in fact, produced. McCormack's work proves especially helpful: he shows that individuals' interaction with gym equipment produces 'hybrid' spaces. In contrast, Vertinsky's work is useful because she demonstrates that spatial characteristics influence the ways people access and experience gym spaces under notion of power. Finally, she argues that people experience different 'spaces', by extension contending that there is no single space. All of the above leave me with the following question: how do the gym-going practices that people perform in LABFIT differ from or coincide with what the existing literature on gyms suggests about what people do in gyms and why? So with reference to my overarching research question which is to gain an in-depth understanding of what it means to people to visit LABFIT, I am now asking more precisely:

(a) How do people use LABFIT?

(b) What do people's use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going?

(c) How do people's gym-going practices in LABFIT differ from/fit in with the literature on gyms?

And finally, I ask:

(d) How can gym trainers' pedagogical strategies benefit from the study's findings?

The reason for including the last research question in my thesis is explained by the 'so what' question. I recognised that while I was extremely intrigued by LABFIT, wanting to understand in more depth and complexity why people do the things that they do, I asked myself how I, as a gym advocate, lover, trainer, and researcher could use this advanced knowledge. The question lent itself to my role as a gym trainer. I acknowledged that an enhanced understanding of the meaning people's gym-going practices may enable trainers to prescribe and instruct exercise in a more individualistic fashion. By this, I refer to courses and programs which have been increasingly more academic (i.e., the focus lies on learning declarative knowledge about the functioning of the human body and its movement) (Andreasson & Johansson, 2014) . This means that gym trainers are generally supervising and instructing people at the gym based on factual knowledge derived from the natural sciences such as anatomy, kinesiology, motor control and exercise science (Armour & Chambers, 2014). In other words, gym trainers are experts in theoretical knowledge of how the body moves, however, their pedagogical strategies lack focus on embodied learning. According to Tanning (2010, p. 17), pedagogy is not as commonly thought of

about the transmission of education; rather, it is about the production of knowledge, values, disposition and people's sense of self. As such, I argue that answers to the thesis' research questions a-c contribute to offering new pedagogical strategies for gym trainers in order to help communicate to individual gym members and within society that gym-going may mean more to people than about creating an ideal body.

In attempt to address the above questions, I now turn to the research design of this study.

This will explain how I generated data that offers an understanding of what people 'do' in LABFIT and what it means to them.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In the last Chapter, I showed that the current literature on gyms offers an understanding of how dominant discourses on bodies, as well as socio-cultural processes, influence why people pursue gym-going (Markula, 1995, 2001, 2004 and Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a,b). However, these approaches gloss over the actual social practices that people perform in a gym. Here, Sassatelli (1999b, 2010) starts closing this gap by illuminating that people ascribe different meanings to gyms based on gyms' 'local organisation of resources'. Sassatelli's work is useful to understand that people experience gyms differently, it is however limited in offering a detailed analysis of the 'actual' gym-going practices of people and what they mean to them. For example, she offers some understanding of the interaction rules between people in the gym, but she under-researches the interactions that people have with gym-equipment and what it means to them.

To this end, this thesis aims to explore: (a) How people use LABFIT? (b) What people's use of LABFIT reveals about the meaning they ascribe to gym going? (c) How what they do in LABFIT differs from or fits in with the current literature on gyms? and, (d) How can gym trainers' pedagogical strategies benefit from the study's findings? In the following Section, I provide details of the research design which helps position my study in the current field of gym studies.

## **Section 1: Ethnographic principles**

Most of the scholars that focus on conceptualising the fitness culture or, more specifically, fitness gyms, have included an ethnographic account of their research design (for example, Markula, 1993, 1995, 2004, 2006; Smith Maguire, 2008a; Sassatelli, 1999a,b, 2000, 2010 Andrews, Sudwell & Sparkes, 2005 van Ingen, 2003; Lavery & Wright, 2010; Fusco, 2006; Johnston, 1996). As Roberta Sassatelli (2010, p. 199) argues, this is because ‘ethnography is widely credited with the merit of depth’. According to Harris (1968, p. 16), a culture ‘comes down to behaviour patterns associated with particular groups of people, that is to ‘customs’, or to a people’s way of life’. In essence, when investigating culture, an ethnography invariably proves helpful as it allows the researcher to spend a significant amount of time in the cultural field of investigation.

In addition, it facilitates close examination of the ways in which members act and interact with each other, and exploration of other social, material and perhaps hybrid processes that constitute the cultural field. When developing an insight into a culture, the ethnographic researcher aims to examine, understand and explain any ‘regularities and variations in social behaviour’ (Spradely, 1979, p.10). In effect, the principal purposes of adopting an ethnographic approach are to give meaning to the actions of people in a particular cultural setting (Spradely, 1979), and to explore the events that constitute their daily lived reality. Traditionally, according to Gobo (2008), an ethnography is defined as a specific research methodology that comprises concrete research practices. Critics, however, argue that

researchers have applied the term ‘ethnography’ in a myriad of ways over the past three decades so that its traditional meaning, i.e., attaining deep insight into the process that constitutes a cultural field, has become diluted (Skeggs, 2004). Section 2 will reveal the extent to which this study has followed the principal guidelines of ethnography to develop an ‘insider’ perspective of people in an organisational gym, the ways in which they use it, move in it, think about it, and express their feelings in it. The section is structured by alternating between describing the key ethnographic principles and explaining how said principles were applied in this study.

## **Section 2: Ethnographic processes**

The main purpose of an ethnography is to gain insight into a particular cultural setting (Markula & Silk, 2011; Silverman, 2005; Schwartzman, 1993; Spradley, 1979). This is mainly achieved by means of observation (Gobo, 2008). Here, the researcher plays an important role; by immersing herself/himself in the cultural setting, the researcher is in a position to closely observe a community’s social behaviour, actions, and routines in the field. It is precisely these observations of ethnographic researchers that help generate a deeper insight into the processes that occur in the cultural field. Observations are made using all five senses; the ethnographer engages in interpretive practices as she/he strives to uncover and explicate the ways in which people come to understand, take action, and manage their experiences (van Maanen, 1979; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In the process, ethnographers themselves become instruments in the research process (Longhurst, Ho &

Johnston, 2008). Ethnographers become tools that generate data through their active and direct involvement with the cultural setting; and, as such, they generate insight and knowledge (Neyland, 2008). Before I offer a more detailed account of how I personally generated, collected and analysed information in this study, I will explain in more detail the central role of the researcher in an ethnography and its implications for this study.

Before adopting an ethnographic approach, the researcher needs to first gain access to - and negotiate her/his exit from-the cultural setting (Neyland, 2008). This is often complicated and difficult to achieve because some cultural organisations are often hesitant to accept people from the 'outside world'. This is mainly due to members, for example managers, being protective regarding the ways in which their 'inside world' is structured and organised. If access to the desired field is granted, the ethnographer is often subjected to certain time constraints. This frequently results in members, managers or 'leaders' of the cultural setting determining when and for how long the ethnographer may spend time in the 'field' (Mason, 2011; Cook, 2004).

In my case, due to my previous involvement with an organisational gym as a trainer, I was able to establish a relationship with the organisation, in particular with the manager who was the contact person for the gym. As an advocate of LABFIT and a regular attendee, I informed him about my observations during my time as a trainer at LABFIT. For example, I disclosed to him that the environment of LABFIT felt different from that of other

commercial fitness gyms I had worked in and that the ways in which people used, acted, dressed and behaved in it indicated that people visited and used LABFIT for reasons other than shaping the perfect body or improving their physical fitness. In short, I suspected that the meanings that people attached to LABFIT, why they attended it and how they used it, were more varied and intimate and constituted by dynamic micro hybrid processes (i.e., a combination of material, social and bodily processes) than those explored by the current literature. With all of the above in mind, I approached the manager to conduct an ethnographic study of LABFIT, to explore more deeply why its members attended it, how they used it, and lastly how the ways they used it would perhaps help to explain what going to this gym meant to them. The manager was supportive of my undertaking and I duly gained written permission from him to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in LABFIT.

Forming relationships with members of the cultural field is another imperative for the ethnographer (Silverman, 2013; Cassell & Symon, 2004). Once the researcher has gained access to the cultural setting of interest, it is important to start to get to know and to earn the trust and respect of the people in the field (the locals). Learning their language, or at least the specific words, expressions or terms they use in their setting is essential. Thus, the following questions must be posed: do they perform any routine movements in the gym? What do they do when they enter the gym? Is it always the same? What exercises and equipment do they choose? Are they always the same or do they vary? What do the members wear? Do they have certain modes of dressing? And, do they do the same warm

up exercises every time? The more the researcher is able to communicate and deal with members on a friendly and open basis, the easier it is for the researcher to see and experience the field through the members' eyes (Sands, 2002). It is equally important to ensure that members act and move naturally in the field. Consequently, the researcher's aim is to blend in and be treated and respected as an accepted member of the group (Markula & Silk 2011).

Through my role as a gym trainer, I was able to form friendly relationships with the members of the gym. My immersion in the field of study prior to commencing my ethnographic fieldwork helped me to familiarise myself with the people using LABFIT. As their trainer, I had earlier had the opportunity to work with them, to get to know their behavioural patterns, their preferences in terms of exercise choice, what they usually wore, and which departments they worked for in the organisation. And, often members revealed details of their personal life stories. Due to her/his central role, the ethnographer contributes to the construction of meaning; an ethnographic study is, therefore, not value free (Gilbert, 1994).

The extant literature argues that the ethnographic researcher cannot be without preconceptions vis-à-vis the cultural setting of her/his investigation (Blaikie, 2003; Neyland, 2008). According to Bolton (2010), the notion of reflexivity describes the process whereby the researcher constantly analyses and evaluates her/his own actions in the

research process. It is an ongoing process in ethnography whereby the researcher continues to return to the questions ‘What do I know?’ and ‘How do I know it?’ in order to maintain continual questioning regarding the sources of the information. By allowing reflexivity to occur, the researcher is able to negotiate her/his pre-existing knowledge, presumptions, and new data generated in the field. This background has shaped my understanding of gyms; that is, the way people use gyms and why they use them, an understanding gained prior to conducting this study. Building and extending upon this knowledge, I was able to ascertain that LABFIT differed from past fitness gyms that I had experienced. For example, I noticed that people did not seem to be as focused on their exercise routines: people were taking their ‘exercises’ easier. This means they took longer breaks between different kinds of exercises, did not look as ‘puffed’, ‘flustered’, and sweaty, and their clothes appeared less ‘specialised’. This means I noticed that people in LABFIT were generally dressed in comfortable, subtly-coloured clothes compared to the mainly bright, colour-coordinated gym-goers in fitness gyms I had experienced. This was helpful when I started exploring how and why they differed from fitness gyms, however, I needed to engage in a constant process of reflexivity to negotiate how I knew what I was exploring during my collection of data in the cultural field. In the following section, I provide more details about the method I employed to collect data during my fieldwork.

### **Section 3: Recruiting participants for ethnographic fieldwork**

In compliance with standard ethical regulations, ethics approval was sought and gained from the University of Technology, Sydney (Ethics Approval HREC 2011-338A). The participants in my fieldwork were members of an organisational gym (what I call LABFIT). All of the gym members were invited to participate in this study. One week prior to the commencement of my fieldwork, members were informed about the study through the distribution of information sheets left at the front desk of the gym. In addition, signs were put up in easily accessible and visible places throughout the gym, e.g., next to the water fountain and in the toilets (see Appendix 1). During the recruitment phase, I was present during all opening hours, available to answer questions appertaining to participation requirements.

Upon entry to the gym in October 2012, members were handed an information sheet (which was identical to the signs, i.e., see Appendix 1) and a participant agreement form (see Appendix 2). Some members completed these forms immediately: others returned the completed form when they visited the gym the next time. Agreement forms were available at the front desk for the entire duration of my fieldwork to ensure new members' consent to participate in the study. Agreeing to participate in this study placed little requirement upon the members. They were asked to act as usual, and to permit me to observe and chat with them during their gym visits. Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, 50 members consented to participate. Not one member asked to be excluded from my ethnographic

fieldwork. This allowed me to generate data about every person who visited the gym during this time. The information sheet also addressed the subject of anonymity in this study. Participants were informed that their identities, as well as the identity of the organisation, would be excluded from the compilation of the study. All participants in the study were assigned pseudonyms.

#### **Section 4: Conducting ethnographic fieldwork**

In Section 1, I discuss how the central role of the researcher impacts on the process of conducting an ethnography. This Section provides a description of the main method of ethnography-observation, and how it was conducted and organised in this study. Existing gym studies also influenced the reason why I chose ethnography for this study. That is, most of the scholars that I drew on in Chapter 2 employ an ethnographic approach to their study of gyms. For example, Sassatelli (2010) argues that ethnography is the most appropriate research methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of how people experience a gym.

##### ***Observation***

There are two specific types of observation: non-participant observation and participant observation. In the former, the researcher observes the participants without interacting with them. By adopting this approach, ethnographers are less likely to interfere in the actions of individuals, i.e., to maintain the natural setting of the research site (Gobo, 2008). In contrast,

participant observation requires the ethnographer to establish a direct relationship with the individuals, whereby the ethnographer interacts with participants in their everyday rituals and habits. In this study, in order to develop an understanding of how people viewed, acted, and used the gym, I employed both forms of observation (non-participant and participant observation).

My aim was to gain insight into their perceptions of LABFIT, and to understand why they did what they did in LABFIT, by directly and actively engaging with them as their trainer. I spent my time in LABFIT between immersing myself in the field as an observer, sitting in a corner of LABFIT, and being a what I call trainer-ethnographer (i.e., participant observer) by fulfilling my role as the gym trainer. In other words, sometimes I collected data as a trainer-ethnographer (i.e., while I was working as a trainer), other times, I visited LABFIT as a non-participant observer in my own time. During the times when I visited LABFIT as a non-participant, I sat in a corner observing the field (see Table 2 on page 92). In order to gain a rich and complete understanding of the activities in LABFIT, I structured my observation by focusing on particular aspects of its social setting. For example, in the beginning, my observation consisted of processes in relation to my immersion in LABFIT. I observed how members reacted to my study, how they reacted when they saw me for the first time in LABFIT, and how those who had known me from my time as a gym trainer reacted when they saw I was back at LABFIT. To this end, in my field notebook I recorded examples of when people inquired about what I would be observing, when they instantly

shared with me their perceptions of LABFIT, and when people gave me ‘advice’ concerning what they thought I would be interested to explore.

After the immersion phase, I started to focus on the design and physical environment of LABFIT, and the ways in which people interacted within it. For example, I focused on the type of lighting, the colour of the walls, the type of equipment available, the positioning of the equipment, and the preferences of people regarding their use of certain equipment. As well, I focused on whether men and women used the same equipment, if, when, and for how long members looked at the stretching posters, how often they filled up their water bottles, where they spent most of their time, how often they disappeared into the change room, where the trainer spent most of her/his time, and how many mirrors there were. I questioned if people looked in the mirrors, and, if so, was there a difference between men and women? When did they look? What did they focus on? What was showing on TV? Were people looking at TV? When did they look at TV? and, did they sing along with the music playing on TV?

Once I had collected enough data about the physical environment, I shifted my focus to observation, specifically to the equipment and other technologies in LABFIT. Here I questioned how people used the equipment, i.e., did they look confident when putting weights on the barbell? Did they use correct form on the rower? Were they running at full speed on the treadmill? Where did members spend most of their time? Which was the most

popular equipment, and, did individual members have favourite equipment and exercises? Did females and males use the same equipment, did they look apprehensive when stepping on the cross trainer, and, how did they control the treadmill? Were they unsure about what buttons to press or did they look competent when regulating the machines? Did members use earphones or any additional 'tools', for example? Did they use their mobile phones: were some wearing headphones?

After two weeks, I moved on to focusing on people's body shapes and their appearances. I observed different types of body shapes; slim figured, chubby, people whose body contours were solid, and those who had bumps or rolls of fat around their waists and thighs. I noted if bodies looked 'muscular' or 'skinny', and if people had 'sagging' skin protruding veins, or pumped up chests (particularly male participants). In addition, I was interested in what people were wearing, i.e., the type, material and colour of their clothing. For example, did people wear singlets or t-shirts? Were they made of climate proof material or were they simple cotton t-shirts with or without prints? Were people wearing shorts or leggings or long pants? What kind of shoes were they wearing? Was there a difference between females and males? What did their hair look like? Was it sweaty/moist, wound into a bun or a ponytail, and, did males wear hats? Were they carrying towels? If so, were they using them?

I then moved on to look at the ways in which bodies moved and performed in the gym. I looked at the participants' techniques, and at the intensity with which they performed their exercises. I noted if they were strolling around the gym or going from one exercise to another without any breaks. Were they taking several breaks between exercises? I sought to discern if they only used one kind of exercise, for example running on the treadmill. If so, how did they run on it? Were their body positions erect? Did they slouch? Did they walk around the gym with their chests proudly extended or with drooping shoulders and heads. I noted their gait, if their hips were in balance, and/or if their buttocks swung left and right when they walked.

Lastly, I focused on forms of routine behaviour. For example, did people always choose the same treadmill? Did they perform the same exercises? Wear the same clothes? Did they use the same gym machine? Did they always arrive and leave at the same time, and, did they engage in similar conversations with the trainer or other members? An overview of how I structured my observation is provided in Table 2, which also shows how I organised the time I spent in the gym as both a non-participant observer and participant observer.

**Table 2 Structure and organisation of ethnographic fieldwork**

Week (Dates, Year)	Field site visits as (days)		Observation focus
	Participant observer (Trainer)	Non- participant Observation	
<b>Recruitment</b> (10 <sup>th</sup> – 14 <sup>th</sup> Oct. 11)	4	6	<b>Immersion:</b> posting information signs about the study in the gym; informing participants; distributing participant agreement forms
<b>1 &amp; 2</b> (17 <sup>th</sup> – 21 <sup>st</sup> Oct. 11)	6	2	<b>Immersion:</b> Anything I could possibly observe and note; people, what they were doing and saying; summaries of conversations
<b>3 &amp; 4</b> (24 <sup>th</sup> – 4 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 11)	4	4	<b>Gym design/physical environment:</b> Anything I could possibly observe and note about the interior of LABFIT, any props, signs, posters, lighting, windows, TV, music, other trainers; changing rooms; equipment and members' interaction with it
<b>5 &amp; 6</b> (7 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 11)	8	2	<b>Gym equipment:</b> Members' attire, make up, accessories, tools, machines, equipment
<b>7 &amp; 8</b> (21 <sup>st</sup> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Dec. 11)	6	4	<b>Gym equipment:</b> Members' attire, make up, accessories, tools, machines, equipment
<b>9 &amp; 10</b> (5 <sup>th</sup> – 16 <sup>th</sup> Dec. 11)	6	2	<b>Body looks/shapes:</b> moving bodies, gazing bodies, talking about bodies
<b>11 &amp; 12</b> (19 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> Dec. 11)	6	4	<b>Body moves/performances:</b> moving bodies, gazing bodies, talking about bodies
<b>13 &amp; 14</b> (9 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> Jan. 12)	4	2	<b>Gym routines:</b> their routines', what they are doing, where they are going

### *Field conversations*

Field conversations are often included as a supplementary method in ethnographies (Neyland, 2008; Silverman, 2011; Gobo, 2008; Spradley, 1979; Schwartzman, 1993). The immersion of the ethnographic researcher in the social setting invites conversations to occur between the researcher and participants. Including information conversation in an ethnographic approach is thus a useful complementary method to observation for a number of reasons.

First, informal field conversations allow the researcher to pose ‘descriptive’ or ‘grand tour’ questions that focus on ‘what’ as opposed to ‘why’ (Spradley, 1979, p. 86). The researcher has the opportunity to gain insight into a general understanding of what people do and think in a particular setting. Second, by engaging in informal conversations, a large sample of the speech of the participants is collected and allows the researcher to identify key terms in the context of their usage (Schwartzman, 1993). This is important because ‘responses that build on terms, expressions, or experiences’ used by the participant are much more likely to produce in-depth data responses to questions (Schwartzman, 1993, p. 59). Third, informal chats help to establish rapport with participants who are less likely to disclose often surprising and intriguing information that assists the researcher to understand peoples’ behaviour and actions in the particular setting (Neyland, 2008). Lastly, it enables ethnographers to engage with field participants who are less involved in the ethnography than other members so their views may be sought (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

Nonetheless, a number of theorists of research methods urge ethnographic researchers not to treat these informal conversations as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behavior (Neyland, 2008). This suggests that words and conversations should not be interpreted as exclusive accounts of members' experiences in the gym. Instead, field conversations ought to enable the researcher to gain more insight into the conformities of behaviour, and the words and differences between them.

In this study, I interpret field conversations as any spontaneous, unstructured, informal conversations that occurred during my periods of observation. I included any chats that occurred without specific intention or planning. These chats or conversations were non-guided and were sometimes initiated by people in the gym and sometimes by myself. Often these conversations occurred when I was a non-participant observer, sitting in a corner of LABFIT. Members came up to me and started conversations that sometimes extended my observations. Table 3 outlines some sample questions and themes of these field conversations. I was able to generate a more complete and detailed picture of what people thought of LABFIT, what was going through their minds, and what they wanted to talk about while they were at LABFIT. Often these conversations revolved around members questioning me about what I was writing or what conclusions I had formed; but, on other occasions, these conversations proved insightful as members shared their progress and struggles or goals in relation to their training and time spent at LABFIT. Other times, these

field conversation led to conversations that disclosed intimate information about the participants which assisted in deepening the context and meaning of my observations.

**Table 3 Samples of questions and topics of field conversations**

<b>Questions in field conversations:</b>	<b>Topic of responses/answers:</b>
<b>Me:</b> You came more than your regular times this week? Any particular reasons?	<p><b>Themes of members' responses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling extra motivated</li> <li>Killing time to beat traffic</li> <li>Nothing else to do</li> <li>Work is very busy - takes mind off it</li> <li>Something occurred at work/at home - feelings of anger</li> </ul>
<b>Me:</b> How do you enjoy coming to the gym?	<p><b>Leading to themes such as:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Battles with personal health issues: e.g., cancer, depression, body image distortions, bullying</li> <li>Battles with personal issues: e.g., divorce, work</li> </ul>
<b>Me:</b> How is your training going?	<p><b>Member:</b> Well. I feel so much better since I have been coming. I only changed my diet a little bit and I lost 10kgs in three months. I am just consistent with my training. Not like other people here, they 'brag' upstairs how they cycle for 45 minutes and then I look at the resistance they are paddling under, and it's almost zero.</p>
<b>Member:</b> How are you? What have you found yet? Do you want to know what I think of this space? (This question was rhetorical, i.e., I did not have an opportunity to answer this question and felt the member simply wanted to talk to me and tell me their opinion of LABFIT)	<p><b>Member:</b> Exercise is important for one's health, especially mental health. Some people can't afford to exercise. LABFIT allows great opportunities for employees</p>

### ***Reflexivity during ethnographic fieldwork***

My own responses to observation made during my ethnographic fieldwork greatly influenced the type of generated data (see Section 1). Before I discuss my analysis of the data, I provide a reflexive account in order to be transparent about the ongoing process of negotiation involving my own beliefs about gym spaces, my responsibilities and tasks as a trainer, and my knowledge and interests as a researcher. According to Markula and Silk (2011), employing reflexivity in the methodology offers the researcher a means of critically exploring the social forces that have shaped their own involvement in the practices observed and data collected. My ethnographic fieldwork challenged me to embody several roles, some of which were naturally embedded in myself while others were adopted during the research process. The roles I had played earlier, and the expertise I had gained, already contributed to the knowledge I accumulated during the research process. Prior to entering the field I was a trainer at LABFIT; thus, I had a keen interest in the world of LABFIT. I was keen to understand what was going through peoples' heads when they were exercising, what they were feeling, and why they attended LABFIT. Why did they do the things they were doing at LABFIT? What was their real reason for coming to LABFIT? What were the little things that 'made or broke' their gym experience? What was their reality of the LABFIT? How did they perceive and explain their gym going? Did they ever think about why they attended LABFIT and did this match what they were doing or how they used LABFIT? What aspects, actions, routines and constructs constituted their experience at the

gym? In short, I was interested in understanding the meaning of the processes in LABFIT that shaped the ways in which people used and experienced the facility.

A central lesson I learned during my fieldwork was the need to identify the richness in my seemingly trivial notes. In the weeks during my fieldwork, I was uncertain whether I was collecting the ‘right’ data, i.e., whether I was observing the ‘right’ behaviour. I also felt challenged when it came to maintaining a balance between my dual role as an ethnographer and trainer. I remember feeling like a hypocrite, despite being an overt ethnographer. I was fearful that I was exploiting my participants’ trust. But as I became more familiar with the field site, I could foresee the gym members’ steps and behaviour. I felt that I knew this field from its ‘inside out’. I had eased into the role of an insider, a role facilitated by the different personas that I presented in LABFIT; the trainer-ethnographer, the observer, the student, the friend, the counselor, the motivator, and, the ‘punisher’. Drawing on this insider knowledge, I will now detail my analysis of the data collected during my fieldwork.

### ***Analysis of ethnographic fieldwork***

My analysis of the ethnographic data in this study builds explanations through grounded and interpretive analysis which is underpinned by my understanding I gain from existing gym studies that I reviewed in Chapter 2. This Section details an analysis of the ethnographic field notes I made during observation and field conversations. Field notes were recorded in a notebook, electronically transcribed weekly, and saved as a protected

Word document. My analysis was shaped by four research questions: (a) How do people use LABFIT? (b) What do people's use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going? (c) How do people's gym-going practices in LABFIT differ from/fit in with the literature on gyms? (d) How can gym trainers' pedagogical strategies benefit from the study's findings?

With these questions in mind, I assigned 'in vivo codes' to recurring words, expressions and descriptions as they pertained to the above research questions. The first step in this analysis revealed seventeen codes that reflected data relevant to the occurrences in - and the characteristics of- the particular social setting. I then applied axial coding (Saldaña, 2013) to determine if codes may correlate and reveal information about a similar theme. This process reduced the number of codes to ten: e.g., the code for treadmill was combined with the code for other equipment and objects used in the gyms e.g., earphones (see Table 4).

**Table 4 Initial themes of fieldwork data**

1. Own world-special spaces within spaces	2. Mirrors
3. Routines and habits	4. Treadmills, other equipment, water fountain, TV, music, headphones
5. Member interactions	6. Motivation to come to the gym, mood prior, during and post attendance
7. Gym as a space	8. Body, performance, movements, attitudes, fantasies, weight loss
9. Feelings, attitudes and perceptions of exercising in the gym	10. Appearance, clothes, shoes, hair, facial expressions

The codes represented prominent themes that transpired through my analysis of the field note transcripts. The third step consisted of an extended write-up of these themes. The write-ups reflected my interpretations of the data and were, therefore, influenced by the reflexive process that occurred during the weekly electronic transcriptions. In addition, I included any direct quotes from my participants that exemplified or highlighted certain views, perceptions or feelings shared in informal conversations. My write-ups of the ten themes disclosed gaps in the data vis-à-vis why participants did what they did in the gym. For example, the write-up did not reveal why people chose to use certain equipment, or why they moved through the gym in a specific sequential order every time they visited. Again, the data was not rich in describing how people felt when sweating, when they used the treadmill, or moved about the gym. Similarly, there was a lack of information about their thoughts; for example, what went through their minds when they entered the gym, and what exactly they were thinking about. In other words, the data lacked insight into people's embodied experiences in the gym. It was for this reason that I decided to include "walk-and-talk ethnographies" in my research design. My gym 'walk-and-talk ethnographies' followed the same principles as Sarah Pink's (2007) 'video ethnography'. I walked alongside each participant while she/he talked me through a usual gym visit.

## **Section 5: ‘Walk-and-talk’ ethnographies**

As discussed in Section 1, the ethnographer aims to make meaning of viewpoints expressed by members in a specific social setting. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the entirety of their LABFIT visits, I conducted ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies (Pink, 2007). I asked members to walk-and-talk with me; that is, to take me step by step through their LABFIT experience. For example, I asked them what they did first when they came in, how they felt, what they did next, and why? Whether or not they always carried the same gym bag? Wore the same t-shirt, and why they chose this particular t-shirt? Did they feel a certain elan when they wore particular t-shirts, shoes or their hair in a specific way? What was their favourite exercise machine and why? Why did they always choose a particular treadmill, and how would their gym experience change if one day the treadmill was not available? I was keen to ascertain why they always started on the treadmill or the cross trainer as a warm up; and, to learn what went through their minds when they were on the machines. Whether or not they were conscious of their bodies? By pursuing this tactic, I aimed to discover whether it was the accumulation of these steps that shaped the construction of meaning ascribed to their gym going. I aimed to resist any simplistic taxonomies that had been discussed previously in ethnographic accounts of gyms; for example, female bodies in the gym and body-building (Klein, 1993; Johnston, 1996; Wacquant, 1995; Monaghan, 1999, 2001; Paradis, 2012).

### ***Recruitment and structure of 'walk-and-talk' ethnographies***

I selected nine members to participate in the 'walk-and-talk' ethnographies and contacted them via e-mail. They were chosen on the basis of a trusting rapport (established during my time as a trainer at LABFIT and my fieldwork) and because they appeared to be able 'to talk at length outside the usual confines of their day-to-day work in the organisation' (Neyland, 2008, p.110). The selection process was influenced by whether the members evinced certain characteristics which showed their potential to help develop the themes that emerged in the field notes (Mason, 2011). The 'walk-and-talk' ethnographies were conducted individually, and lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. Employing this method enabled me to gain access to the participant's perceptions, rather than being restricted by more structured conversations and observation. By walking-and-talking me through a typical gym visit, participants retraced their feelings and thoughts and were able to reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour and actions in the gym. This form of ethnography allowed me to get a one-on-one close-up view of members' experiences in the gym. As Spradely (1979) suggested regarding the ethnographic researcher, I was able to view the cultural setting, i.e., the gym, through the eyes of the member. The gym 'walk-and-talk' also enabled gym-goers to engage in 'mutual learning'; that is, about gaining a better understanding of the gym-going practices they perform in LABFIT and what they mean to them (della Porta, 2008). This meant that by consciously 'walking-and-talking' through their routines, gym-goers could reflect on what they 'naturally' do; that is, their habits, without necessarily having been aware of them.

### *Analysis of 'walk-and-talk' ethnographies*

After first obtaining permission from each participant, each 'walk-and-talk' was electronically recorded using a Sony ICD-UX512F recorder. I then electronically transcribed the recordings and saved them in a protected Word document. Neyland (2008, p. 21) suggests that 'time spent with the data should involve reading though observational materials many times, developing possible ways of ordering, categorising or producing themes for the data'. For the purpose of this study, I followed his proposition. After the transcription process, the accounts were read and re-read several times. This facilitated the identification of possible themes and concepts that the data contained. After reading and re-reading the data, 'in vivo codes' were employed to develop an initial overview of themes that transpired from the walk-and-talk transcripts (Saldaña, 2013).

The next step was to establish any correlating codes (i.e., axial coding, see Section 4) within each transcript (Shagoury Hubbard & Power Miller, 1999). I then selected five excerpts or quotes that depicted the essence of each code in each walk-and-talk transcript. Following this, I collated all of the selections from each transcript and organised them using assigned codes. This process resulted in five themes (see Table 5), each of which had several sub-themes that consisted of the codes assigned earlier. The number of excerpts and direct quotes exemplifying the themes and subthemes was progressively reduced. This elimination process, which was dictated by the level of clarity and insight the data revealed

about the particular theme, resulted in the selection of eight to twelve excerpts and direct quotes representing the five themes including the sub themes.

**Table 5 Themes of ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies**

Theme	Theme key words
1	Disposition/habitus/routine
2	Rower/music/headphones/attire/mirror/treadmill/ownership
3	Body, sweat, pain, mind, brain, running, fitness, health, warm up, feelings, chemical release, performance
4	Special roles in the gym
5	Social, commonality, awareness of ‘others’

The identified themes and sub themes, with their respective selected coded data, were further revised, analysed, and cross checked against the written-up themes identified in the field notes. Revising and working with both sets of analysis (i.e., field notes and walk and talk transcripts) allowed the construction of a more complete understanding of the data in order to answer what it means to people to visit LABFIT. More precisely: (a) How people use LABFIT? (b) What people’s use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going? (c) How what they do in LABFIT differs from or fits in with the current literature on gyms? and, (d) How can gym trainers’ pedagogical strategies benefit from the study’s findings?

## Section 6: Research design overview

Figure 2, which provides an overview of the research process, displays the time frame and research process relevant to this study.

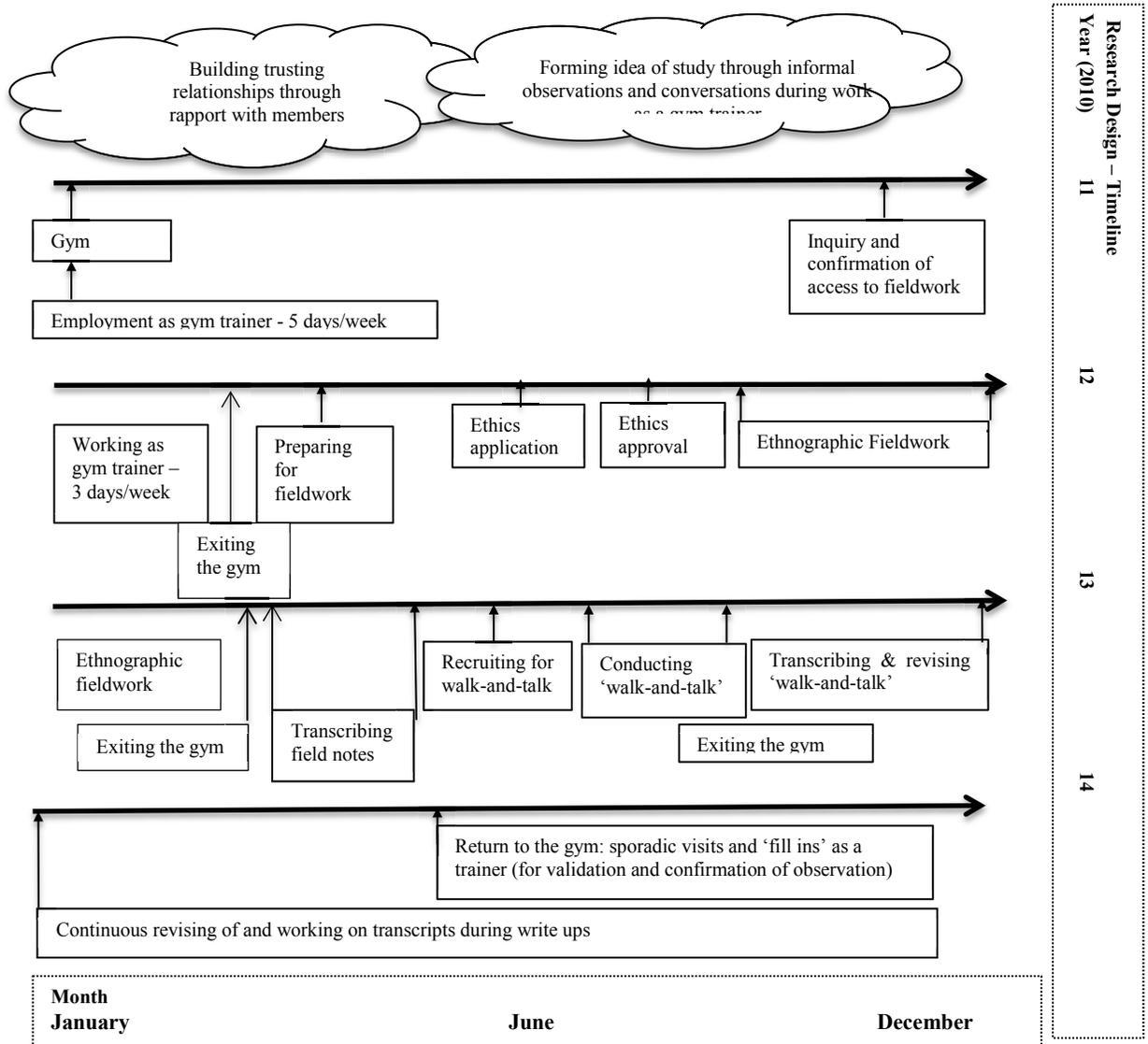


Figure 2 Research design

## **Brief introduction to the participants in the gym ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnography**

Before I start with my data Chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), I introduce nine key people from LABFIT with whom I conducted one-on-one ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies. These nine people play a vital role in helping me to accentuate the findings of my study. The following offers a brief introduction of their names, ages, roles in the organisation, and general characteristics of their gym-going practice. This allows for a better understanding when I draw on their accounts and provide ethnographic descriptions of their gym-going practices. The introductions are written from my observation and all names are pseudonymised.

**Nadine**, in her early thirties, does not like the idea of going to gyms and being in pain. Nadine only makes ‘guest’ appearances at LABFIT (at night time) when special occasions are on her agenda; for example, a holiday. During her occasional gym visits, she usually approaches the trainer to guide her through an ‘exercise routine’. In Chapter 6, I offer an ethnographic description of Nadine’s LABFIT experience derived from my observation, conversations, and ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnography during my fieldwork.

**Jenna**, in her late twenties, is a regular attendee at LABFIT. She usually visits LABFIT 3-4 times per week (altering morning and night time sessions). She does not have any set days. She usually stays for 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Jenna alternates between following her own exercise routine and approaching the trainer to ask for a 'WOD'. In Chapter 4 and 5 I offer an analysis of Jenna's account of her 'walk-and-talk' ethnography in regards to her relationship of gym equipment and her own body, respectively.

**Lisa**, in her mid-twenties, works with Rachel. They often visit LABFIT together. She usually visits LABFIT 3-4 times per week (mostly at night time). She warms up with 10 minutes on the cross trainer or a run on the treadmill. Lisa often follows her own exercise routine which includes both cardio and strength exercises. Other times, she may approaches the trainer to design a 'WOD' for her and her colleague Rachel. In Chapter 4, I offer an analysis of Lisa's account of her 'walk-and-talk' ethnography.

**Matt**, in his late twenties is a regular gym-goer, who typically visits LABFIT on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays (altering morning and night time sessions). Matt warm-ups up with a 10 minutes run on the treadmill. Then, he often approaches the trainer to ask for a 'WOD'. He usually stays at LABFIT for 1 hour to 1.5 hours. In Chapter 4, I offer an analysis of Matt's account of his 'walk-and-talk' ethnography. Chapter 5 offers an ethnographic description centred on Matt's body and the ways he uses LABFIT.

**Neil**, in his mid-thirties, regularly visits LABFIT on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights. He usually stays for 50 minutes to 70 minutes and follows his own exercise routine. But, occasionally, he approaches the trainer for some general training or nutritional advice. For example, one time he inquired about advice on ‘eating plans’ for body fat loss. In Chapter 5, I offer an ethnographic description centred on Neil’s body and on the ways he uses LABFIT.

**Paul**, in his mid-thirties, visits LABIFT on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights. Sometimes he and Neil lift weights together. Paul usually follows his own exercise routine, which mainly includes strength exercises. However, he often engages in conversation with the trainer to inquire about their lives, training, and any advice on specific exercises or supplements. For example, one time Paul asked the trainer her opinion of fish oil tablets. Chapter 6 offers an ethnographic description of Paul’s LABFIT experience derived from my observation, conversations, and ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnography during my fieldwork.

**Rachel**, in her mid-twenties, typically visits LABFIT 3-4 times per week (altering morning and night time sessions). Rachel warms up with 10 minutes on the cross trainer. Then, she alternates between following her own exercise routine and asking the trainer to design a ‘WOD’ for her and her colleague Lisa. When she follows her own routine, she mixes cardio and strength exercises. In Chapter 4, I offer an analysis of Rachel’s account of her .walk-and-talk. ethnography.

**Sean**, in his early thirties and a previous state rowing champion, body builder, and mixed martial arts athlete, is finding his way back into training after an injury-induced break. He visits LABFIT irregularly (mostly at night). Some weeks he visits LABFIT everyday, others he does not use it at all. Sean typically exercises intensely for around 30-45 minutes. Occasionally, he approaches the trainer to inquire about some specific exercise training questions. For example, one time he asked how to ‘work’ his neck muscles. Other times, Sean pursues his own exercise routine. Chapter 6 offers an ethnographic description of Sean’s LABFIT experience derived from my observation, conversations, and ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnography during my fieldwork.

**Vera**, in her mid-forties, she visits LABFIT regularly three times per week (altering morning and night time sessions). Vera predominantly uses the treadmill and typically runs for 45 minutes. Occasionally, after her run she performs a couple of strength exercises with free dumbbells. She stays for approximately 60 minutes. Chapter 4 offers an analysis of

Vera's account of her 'walk-and-talk' ethnography and Chapter 6 offers an ethnographic description of her use of LABFIT.

Before I turn to the analysis and discussion of the data collected in my field and my 'walk-and-talk' ethnographies, I would like to elucidate why I did not analyse my data through a gendered lens. My initial observation during my time as a trainer at LABFIT focused on trying to understand why I felt that LABFIT meant something different to members than I experienced with gyms that were more 'body' focused. I was genuinely interested in exploring what it meant to people to visit LABFIT and, in the process, I was asking: (a) How do people use LABFIT? (b) What do people's use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going? (c) How do people's gym-going practices in LABFIT differ from/fit in with the literature on gyms? (d) How can gym trainers' pedagogical strategies benefit from the study's findings? In retrospective, it may be that I should have employed a more gendered lens when analysing my data. Furthermore, I draw on critical feminists such as Markula, but I predominantly focus on scholars that study fitness gyms. As I suggest in Chapter 1, Section 3, in general, gyms have been investigated from a 'consumption' viewpoint (see Smith Maguire, 2008a & Sassatelli, 2010). Contingent to the above, the following three data Chapters (4, 5, 6) are not specifically discussed in relation to a notion of gender in LABFIT. I start my data Chapters by emphasising on the kinds of 'technologies' people use in LABFIT to perform their gym-going practice. This is a useful start as it illuminates techniques and strategies that people 'do' when they visit LABFIT.

## **Chapter 4: Gym ‘technologies of the self’ in LABFIT**

To start addressing what visiting LABFIT means to people, I first focus on exploring what people actually ‘do’ in this gym. This means I was interested in understanding what kind of gym equipment people use, how they use it; and, what other ‘strategies’ people deploy, and how they deploy them as part of their gym-going experience in LABFIT. In my analysis, I specifically draw on Foucault’s (1988a) concept of ‘technologies of the self’ which he defines as assemblages of mundane techniques, strategies, and practices which

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 19)

Considering my said focus of this chapter, employing Foucault’s (1988a) concept is helpful to investigate in more detail how, for example, gym equipment acts as ‘technologies of the self’, assisting people to ‘work’ on themselves by themselves. Most key scholars of gym studies have employed this Foucauldian concept of ‘technologies of the self’ to examine how exercising works on people’s bodies, and thus transforms their ‘selves’. However, during my field conversations and ‘walk-and-talk ethnographies’ people told me less about how using certain gym equipment helps them transform their bodies, but rather how it

helps them feel a sense of exhaustion, elation and self-achievement. In this chapter, I focus specifically on investigating three ‘gym technologies’ in LABFIT: exercise logbooks, earphones, and gym equipment (i.e., the treadmill, barbell, and rowing machine). The reason for this selection is threefold. First, during my fieldwork, I observed that people were using these gym ‘technologies’ regularly during their visits. Second, the meaning of using these specific gym ‘technologies’ is under-researched in the literature. This means scholars of gym studies have not yet drawn their attention to examining how exercise logbooks, earphones, and gym equipment act as Foucault’s concept of ‘technologies of the self’. Third, during my field conversations and ‘walk-and-talk ethnographies’ people offered interesting descriptions about the role these ‘technologies’ play when they visit LABFIT. Thus, this chapter aims to explore why and how people deploy these gym ‘technologies’, and the implications for their relations with themselves during their gym-going in LABFIT.

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly question why scholars of gym studies employ Foucault’s (1988a) concept of ‘technologies of the self’. Then, I offer an overview of key principles of ‘technologies of the self’, which provides a comprehensive context to proceed with a more detailed review how key scholars of gym studies use ‘technologies of the self’ in their analyses of people’s exercising (in gyms). Lastly, I provide an analysis of how exercise logbooks, earphones, and the gym equipment, e.g., treadmills, barbells, and rowing machines acts as ‘gym ‘technologies of the self’ for people in LABFIT.

## **Section 1: Key principles of Foucault's 'technologies of the self'**

Since the mid-1990s, writers in scholarly gym and sport studies have turned to Foucault's (1988a) 'technologies of the self', an idea which features in one of his later works. Prior to this, sport feminists in particular employed Foucault's earlier writing in which he assumes the body as a site where power can be executed through disciplinary, normalizing practices. These sport feminists suggest that discourses on women's ideal body 'dominated' women, which leads them to suggest that women's participation in sport and exercise disciplines their female bodies into 'docile' bodies (Cole, 1993; Duncan, 1994; Markula, 1995). These feminists argue that women are anchored into a 'normalising web of domination', wherein they were pressured into participating in sport and exercise primarily to reproduce the 'ideal' image of a woman's body onto their own bodies.

However, other scholars of gym (and sport) studies find this 'application' of Foucault's view on power and the body limiting in the sense that it does not recognise that individuals can experience some sense of 'agency' when participating in sport/exercise (Markula, 1995; 2004; Rail & Harvey, 1995; Johns & Johns, 2000; Chapman, 1997). Thus, as mentioned earlier, post the mid-1990s, there was an increase in gym studies employing Foucault's (1988a) concept of 'technologies of the self' to analyse how exercise assists individuals to discipline themselves, rather than being 'dominated' by discursive body ideals. However, before I review in more detail how key scholars of gym studies have used 'technologies of the self' in their research, I explicate the core principles of this concept.

According to Flowers and Swan (2012), Foucault describes how power is exercised through everyday mundane activities and processes through what he calls 'technologies'. This means in Foucault's view power 'operates' through technologies, rather than technologies 'possessing' power. In line with other scholars, Flowers and Swan (2012) help explain that power is relational and productive rather than oppressive and coercive (Fox, 2000; Rose, 1999). In other words, if power is exercised through 'technologies', they can be seen as what Flowers and Swan (2012) call 'vehicles of power' through which individuals are enabled to govern their being and to shape or fashion their conduct in desired directions (Rose, 1996). In a similar vein, Flowers and Swan (2012, p. 547) suggest that 'technologies' 'bring to view more indirect and everyday ways through which people intervene in their own ways of acting, being and living which connect back up to political strategies'. In short, they maintain that this freeing produces a new form of control which is centred on the notion of self-care and self-discipline as ethical and civic.

Foucault's defines different types of 'technologies' which work together. Scholars of gym and sport studies have focused most on 'technologies of power' and 'technologies of the self'. According to Rose (1996, p. 26), both technologies embody distinct 'presuppositions and objectives about human beings' and distinct forms of domination that involve changing or training the self (Burkitt, 2002). Technologies of power, or what other scholars call 'technologies of domination', describe how external institutions or discourses attempt to dominate the individual through examining, normalising and classifying their behaviour

(Markula, 2003; Smith Maguire, 2002). In contrast, ‘technologies of the self’ are mechanisms whereby the individual imagines to exercise power over her/himself. In other words, ‘technologies of the self’ in a Foucauldian sense are described as assemblages of ‘mundane’ and often ‘micro’ practices or strategies which assist people in constituting their relation to their selves. Since I specifically investigate exercise logbooks, earphones, and gym equipment as ‘technologies of the self’, I draw on Dean’s (1999) who describes ‘technologies of the self’ as material and mundane. In essence, both ‘technologies of power’ and ‘technologies of the self’ are understood to operate at improving the individual, i.e., they produce effects that constitute the self (Cruikshank, 1993). But, for the purpose of this thesis, I am particularly interested in Foucault’s concept of ‘technologies of the self’ because it helps me explore how certain gym equipment and other strategies people deploy in the gym ‘assist’ them in producing a relation to their selves. Helping in this process is the knowledge that is embedded in ‘technologies’.

For Foucault, power and knowledge are not separate. This means that if power is exercised through ‘technologies of the self’, knowledge is embedded within this exercise of power. Flowers and Swan (2012) suggest that Foucault’s view on power and knowledge means that power works through all forms of knowledge, for example, bottom-up, top-down, scientific and lay. Drawing on McHoul and Grace (1993), they argue that particularly for Foucault, self-knowledge has embedded power. This means that ‘technologies of the self’ are in fact what Flowers and Swan (2012) call ‘knowledge-in-practice not generalised

approaches. This means that the mundane practices and strategies people deploy are comprised of specialised forms of knowledge which teach individuals how ‘to estimate, to calculate, to evaluate, to discipline and to judge’ themselves (Cruikshank, 1993, p. 329). This means that rather than through punishment and coercion, ‘technologies of the self’ enables individuals to perceive that they are learning about themselves and thus constituting a certain relation to their selves.

## **Section 2: Exercising (in the gym) as ‘technologies of the self’**

I first return to Markula as she is a scholar who primarily draws on Foucault’s theories in her gyms studies. Markula (2003, 2004) argues that the ‘discursive construction of the ideal body’ in fitness has led scholars to conceptualise exercise as a disciplinary technique designed to produce a docile body (see for example, Cole, 1993 and Theberge, 1991). In contrast, in her studies, she employs Foucault’s concept of ‘technologies of the self’ to analyse if and how exercise can assist individuals to ‘free’ themselves from the extant fitness discourse on ‘body ideals’. She maintains however that not all forms of exercises are ‘technologies of the self’. But, she recognises that it is difficult to determine when a form of exercise in fact acts as ‘technologies of the self’ rather than as technologies of domination (i.e., by producing a docile body). Her reading of ‘technologies of the self’ is unique and different to most other scholars as she suggests that practices that act as ‘technologies of the self’ are in fact practices of freedom. Acknowledging that there is no single formula to identify if practices can be conceptualised as ‘technologies of the self’,

she turns her attention to three of the characteristics of this concept. For Markula (2004), it is Foucault's concepts of 'ethical care of the self', 'critical self-awareness' and 'aesthetic stylisation' which are critical 'features' that help to identify if practices of exercise can be conceptualised as 'technologies of the self'. She argues that the latter can only be considered practices of freedom if the above three concepts are 'included' in their practice. In the following section, I demonstrate more explicitly how Markula (2003, 2004) interprets Foucault's concepts, and evaluate how she understands that exercise practices 'free' the individual from dominant discourses. She argues that Foucault's concept suggests that individuals act according to her/his own morality system as opposed to a system of 'legal' norms and rules.

In other words, by performing the ethics of care of the self, individuals not only interpret their own norms of behaviour, but also take responsibility for their own actions. Markula (2003, p. 98) aims to emphasise that while individuals 'possess certain freedom to choose practices to create themselves their bodies are defined strictly within the limits of the dominant discourse of body ideals'. She suggests that individuals' practices are in fact controlled by the 'scientific truth games' of exercising. By 'scientific truth games' she means that individuals' practices are influenced by expert knowledge of sport scientists and gym trainers that provide advice on how individuals should exercise. But, drawing on Foucault's concept of 'ethical self-care' (1988b), Markula (2004) argues that an ethically

‘good’ person chooses to behave in a caring manner towards others and in the process assumes personal responsibility for her/his own actions.

Furthermore, she claims that an individual who performs ethical self-care aims to achieve ‘self-mastery’. In other words, individuals engage in practices whereby the individual gains mastery over the self as opposed to ‘obeying’ to scientific truth games. She observes that Foucault (1988b) drew inspiration for this concept from Greek society wherein individuals used letter writing as a form of active self-examination through which to gain mastery over their selves. Thus, in her view for exercising to act as a technology of the self, individuals should be encouraged to use it as a strategy of examination of one self. Furthermore, Markula (2003) argues that no practice is inherently good or bad: its ethical value depends on how it is used. For example, she suggests that women’s weight management in itself is neither good nor bad; but, because it has been effectively used to mould women’s bodies into a certain shape, it has become a disciplinary practice.

Markula (2004) maintains that theoretically speaking, weight management can serve as an ethical practice. But, it requires individuals to use it as a practice whereby they analyse and develop ‘the self’ (Markula, 2003, p. 99). What Markula is delineating here is the difference between one’s constant self-surveillance and obsessive exercise as a form of disciplinary technique undertaken to comply with dominant discourses (such as a high performance body), and using weight management or exercise whereby one ‘tries to work

out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault, 1988b, p.2). In general, Markula argues, exercise allows the individual little flexibility to interpret her/his own ethical values; thus, it is difficult to envision self-examination or writing a training diary as 'technologies of the self'.

Besides ethical self-care, Markula (2004) emphasises critical self-awareness and aesthetic stylisation as important concepts in identifying if exercise practices act as 'technologies of the self'. Drawing on Foucault (1988b), Markula (2011) defines critical self-awareness when individuals start 'creating' their own selves by becoming more self-reflexive. For her, individuals who are critically self-aware constantly question what is seemingly "natural" and inevitable in one's sense of self and as a result, creates one's own sense of self (Markula, 2003). She maintains that only critical self-reflection can result in a change of one's condition' (Markula, 2003). This means that instead of accepting dominant discourses, individuals start questioning their ability to resist or challenge said discourses. So as a first step for individuals to experience the self more 'freely', they should apply critical self-reflection. For example, Markula (2004) suggests that the main purpose of lifting weights is to shape one's body. This means that individuals use lifting as a disciplinarily technique are not actively engaging in critical, reflective self-work. In order for weight lifting to function as a practice whereby the individual challenges the dominant body ideal discourses, she/he needs first to be critically aware that certain body ideals exist before engaging in a reflective process as to why she/he engages in weight lifting.

In essence, Markula (2006) stresses that individuals must reflect upon of the purpose of their participation in the exercise because it is pivotal to challenging the discursive domination of the body ideal. According to Foucault (1984, p. 388) ‘thought is freedom in relation to what one does (...)’. In similar vein, Markula (2003) argues that through thinking, individuals are able to question what is seemingly ‘normal’ in relation to one’s behaviour and thus starting to shape their ‘own’ conduct and sense of self. In other words, she suggests that self-reflexive individuals are able to experience ‘new types of subjective experiences’ through which they can re-invent themselves. However, she emphasises that ‘re’-creation of one’s own sense of self requires an aesthetic element.

Markula (2003) maintains that an individual’s participation in exercise must be grounded in ‘aesthetic self-stylisation’. By ‘aesthetic self-stylisation’, she is alluding to practices such as wearing the latest fashion, make up, hair style, or building a new body in yoga classes. With said practices, she argues that individuals (particularly women) can actively produce their ‘selves’. So in relation to exercising, she suggests the individual needs to embrace the nature of exercise; that is, to work with and through one’s body to create a self. This, in turn, ‘denotes a self that is open to change and the constant re-creation of changing conditions in society’ (Markula, 2003, p. 307). Applying her interpretation of Foucault’s concept of aesthetic stylisation to exercise, she argues that the body is like ‘a piece of art’.

This means the relation to one's self is more like a creative activity, a constant process of invention' (Markula, 2004, p.307). Basing her approach on Foucault (1988b), she claims that one cannot ignore the fact that processes of aesthetic stylisations are and should be part of exercise. Drawing on studies that examine the practices of bodybuilders (Wesley, 2001), gymnasts (Johns & Johns, 2000) and rowers (Chapman, 1997) she argues that all of them perform a type of aesthetic self-stylization by actively creating athletic bodies through dieting and weight training practices. However, Markula (2004) states, it is difficult to assign their practices as 'technologies of the self' as the scholars did not consider the aspect of critical awareness in their analysis of gymnastic practices as 'technologies of the self'. While Markula (2003) recognises that Foucault does not explicitly mention critical awareness as a condition for 'technologies of the self', she argues that participants in these studies did not actively resist dominant sporting or exercising discourses. Rather, the participants in these studies said that they felt good about conforming to the requirements of the ideal body, for example, through maintain a required weight category in their respective sport.

To put it briefly, Markula (2004) argues that apropos of reading Foucault's 'technologies of the self' as a practice of freedom, she expects a critical voice from individuals who participate in exercise/ sport. She further suggests that by virtue of being embedded in critical awareness, 'technologies of the self' can stimulate political activity. By this she means that 'technologies of the self' can potentially result in a 'political statement' that

questions the dominance of body discourses in relation to gyms/gym-going. She further contends that participating in exercise must not be solely about docile bodies and reproducing the ideal body. Rather, individuals are encouraged to consider exercise as an art through which the individual creates a unique body and self. Nonetheless, Markula's theorising of 'technologies of the self' under-researches other techniques, strategies and technologies related to individuals' gym-going practices. For example, she omits to investigate 'how' individuals exercise; that is, what kinds of technologies, techniques, strategies or practices they perform when they go to the gym; and, most importantly, how these concrete strategies can be conceptualised as 'technologies of the self'. In other words, her research is limited in offering an understanding of the concrete technologies people employ in the gym to operate on themselves, and how these technologies help individuals to feel like 'masters' of themselves.

Different from Markula, Smith Maguire investigates how fitness magazines and manuals can be conceptualised as 'technologies of the self'. In her work *Fit for consumption*, Smith Maguire (2008a) examines how fitness magazines and manuals may act as 'technologies of the self' for individuals. She observes that fitness magazines act as 'enlightened experts' (p. 123) which promote a certain lifestyle that depict fitness and the fit body as an effective strategy to improve the self. Analysing it through Foucault's original definition of 'technologies of the self', she claims that lifestyle media is:

implicated in identifying, codifying and legitimating not only a certain number of operations by which individuals may work on themselves, but also the ends (happiness, success, empowerment) to which such work is directed, and the specific forms of expertise ('the help of others') to which the self-managing individual can, and indeed should turn. (Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 114)

In other words, she argues, these magazines offer a particular formulation of expertise that motivates the reader to participate in fitness. She further suggests that fitness media may be conceptualised as strategies whereby (a) the individual is educated about the rules of the fitness field; and, (b) she/he learns how to become a self-managing, self-improving subject. In effect, fitness media act as sources of guidance that assist individuals to participate in the fitness field in order to work on themselves and their identities albeit within a certain set of rules and regulations. However, Smith Maguire (2006) is transparent about the predicament in which producers of fitness magazines find themselves. For while on the one hand they reproduce the body ideal, on the other, by publishing readers' letters that criticise using 'ideal body models'. Thus, they show that they are self-reflexive and care, instead arguing that these pictures of 'ideal body models' act as motivation for individuals to start or continue to exercise.

Exercise manuals, like fitness magazines, construct motivation as a central problem of the fitness field. This has had two consequences. First, Smith Maguire (2008b) argues that to

define something as a problem is to impose an essentialising framework upon a complex phenomenon, identifying who or what is a ‘problem’ and thus casting what is outside the frame as unquestioned and unproblematic. By taking motivation as their problem, the authors of exercise manuals individualise the question of physical fitness. But, Smith Maguire argues, these manuals neglect to acknowledge the social context of activity out of the equation. As a result, fitness media convey to the individual the message that he or she is the problem and that ‘they’ (i.e., the magazines or manuals) have the solution. Second, she argues that by identifying motivation as a problem, fitness magazines and manuals reify their positions as ‘enlightened experts’ by offering solutions and thus a host of practices, benchmarks, and forms of assistance.

Fitness magazines and manuals deploy two sets of discourses to entice individuals to participate in the required self-work. For example, fitness manuals highlight the associated health benefits of exercise; i.e., they reduce the risk of illness as well as increase confidence through improved bodily appearance. For this reason, Smith Maguire (2008a) identifies these manuals as governmental technologies that ‘knit together’ ‘self-work’ and advocate broader political, economic and social agendas and goals’. For Smith Maguire, as with other scholars, ‘technologies of the self’ intersect with technologies of domination, through which individuals are governed via surveillance. This perhaps explains why she does not attempt to offer a formulaic way of identifying whether or not fitness media may be considered a ‘freeing practice’. In fitness magazines and manuals, exercise is depicted as a

disciplinary activity. Consequently, if individuals aim to engage in it, they need to employ self-discipline, clear timetabling and continual body measurement. According to Smith Maguire, this has the effect of making readers continually reflect upon their behaviour, honestly confessing any shortcomings, and engaging in proper activity. Thus, in a way, exercise manuals act at a distance, encouraging readers to adopt certain behaviours and practices through enticements rather than commands (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 133). For example, manuals suggest that control of movements through time (such as through schedules, logs and timetables) facilitates the observation, measurement and training of bodies relative to established norms.

In essence, Smith Maguire's recognises that there is perhaps a fine line between employing self-discipline and shaping one's own conduct, and simply 'following' the advice of exercise manuals as a form of domination. But, similar to Markula, she under-researches how concrete technologies deployed by individuals in the gym act as 'technologies of the self' for these individuals. In other words, Smith Maguire glosses over the techniques and strategies that individuals perform 'at proximity' as part of their gym-going practices and, most importantly, what these techniques and strategies mean to them.

Another scholar who offers an interesting view of exercise and 'technologies of the self' is scholar/artist Veronique Chance (2009). Her work is mainly photography and video-based while illuminating links between sculpture and performance practices. Chance's interest

lies in examining the relationship between the physical presence of the body and its presence as a screen image. Using exercise as a process and methodology in her artwork, she considers exercise gestures and movements in terms of sequences and actions in their own right. Using photography and video footage, she explores the body's relationship with the equipment and machinery involved in the process of transforming and perfecting the human body. Her visual art involves two series: first, she examines the individual fitness machinery and equipment used to train the body. Here, she views the machinery as 'a powerful, desirable sculptural object and a prop in waiting that also becomes a replacement for the human body' (p. 93); second, she uses a series of looped video performance sequences that focus on the particular movements made by the body when used to train. Chance's work is suited to this thesis because she sheds light on the interaction between the exercising body and machines.

Chance (2009) elucidates that 'typically', the body is forced to move in a particular way by a (gym) machine (see McCormack, 1999). In other words, similar to McCormack, she maintains that one can say that in a gym, the machine 'controls' the body and its movements. But, Chance (2009) argues these movements are in turn also shaped by the body's operation of the machine. For example, the body controls the machine through the selection of different levels and programs of training, different levels of speed, and different levels of weight or resistance. She further claims that the operation of the machine is performed through the intentional and (en) forced movement of a specific part of the

body and the practice of a particular technique assigned to it. However, she cautions that this technique has to be learned and perfected in order for the machine to operate safely and effectively and for it to do its job (which, Chance argues, is the (re) building and (re) forming of the body) (Chance, 2009, p. 97). In effect, her writing suggests that there seems to be a dynamic exchange of control between machines and bodies. It appears that she argues that while machines appear to control bodies, neither machine nor body has complete control over the other. In fact, her argument suggests that the machine's control over the body is dependent on the individual's ability to control herself/himself.

When elucidating how to exert control over oneself, Chance brings in the notion of discipline. Drawing on Foucault, she argues that the idea of being 'disciplined' invokes obedience and complicity together with enforced punishment if one does not obey the rules. She argues that often individuals talk about exercises as a punishing regime in the sense of 'self-punishment or masochism', something less imposed by others but more by oneself. She further elucidates that in the production of the ideal body, there appears to be a suggestion of the body being made docile in order to maximise its efficacy and its utility. With reference to Foucault's (1972) view, Chance (2009, p. 100) argues that the body is conceptualised as being controlled and manipulated to enhance its efficiency and make it work 'machine-like'. As a result, she maintains that 'machine bodies' keep mind and body separate (Chance, 2009, p. 100). This means that in order to achieve the ideal body, movements, exercises and gestures are repeated, learned, remembered, and practiced so

that an individual does not even have to think to be able to perform them to perfection. In essence, body exercises become an 'aptitude' (Chance, p. 100). The individual manages her/himself, the effect being that the individual subjects her/himself to the machine. In essence then, the individual is being dominated by the machine: but, this domination is facilitated by the discipline she/he exerts over the self.

Drawing on Sassatelli (1999a), Chance (2009) states that gyms have become a contemporary cultural phenomenon where the body is produced. Chance suggests that the gym is a site where a range of disciplinary body techniques and activities are practiced and performed. For example, individuals are assessed and given 'programs' of activity to follow. These programs are monitored, measured, quantified and periodically reassessed to 'suit' individual body requirements set by the institution. Chance (2009) observes that individuals strive for the body ideal only by force, i.e., as a perfection of the discipline and not at the level of desire. Therefore, when employing Foucault's technologies of domination, individuals are believed to discipline themselves as a pursuit of perfection rather than to take any pleasure from it. However, while Chance elucidates that control and power are still in the hands of the fitness gym, more emphasis is placed on individual consumer 'choice'. This means that individual gym-goers experience more responsibility for their own bodies in terms of 'maintenance' and 'self-preservation' within a regime of fitness and exercise. This means that the body is no longer viewed as a site where discipline is exercised upon, rather the body is proclaimed as a vehicle of pleasure and discipline.

Based on the idea that individuals take pride or pleasure in one's body, Chance (2009) brings in Foucault's 'technologies of the self'. She elucidates that Foucault (1988a) calls it 'technologies of individual domination', through which individuals act in a kind of self-mastery fashion upon themselves.

In her work, Chance focuses on the importance of 'self-discipline' as the mastery of oneself. Drawing on Foucault (1980), she contends that mastery and awareness of one's own body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment in the power of the body through, for example, gymnastics, exercises, muscle building, nudism, and glorification of the body beautiful. Exploring 'self-discipline' through the lens of Foucault's concept, Chance (2009) realises it as a strategy that helps the individual to experience the self. To work on the body is to control his or her body, not to achieve a certain body ideal, but rather for his/her own desire to experience the self. Based on Foucault's premise, Chance also sheds light on how other artists have started to use their own bodies to investigate how specific sensual experiences are connected when working on the body for oneself by the self.

On the surface, fitness gyms appear to be disciplinary institutions. Nonetheless, Chance argues, gyms also tailor to the needs of the individual client by offering choice. This promotes a certain autonomy and freedom set within the confines of responsibility and self-control wherein individuals are invited to 'work diligently and with humble determination toward their own goals, in short, to discipline themselves' (Chance, 2009, 103). Chance

further observes that ‘in a gym the body is made to ‘act directly’ on itself by means of its own strength and physical movement even when it involves the use of exercise equipment or machinery or, as Foucault suggests, is ‘artificially induced’ (Foucault, 2000, p. 240). Therefore, exercise is considered to be, what Chance terms, ‘natural’ because it demands that the actual ‘action’ of the body becomes involved in a process that depends on physical effort, capability and willpower. Drawing on Sassatelli (2000), Chance also claims that the ‘naturalness’ of fitness ‘alludes to an authenticity and willingness to “act” and to endure fatigue for self-improvement’ (Sassatelli, 2000, p. 405). Chance considers that the function of a fitness machine is to train or ‘work’ a specific part of the body, working with the body’s ‘natural’ movement to improve its strength and physical characteristics.

Another scholar who expresses concern about the relationship between the human body, technology and exercise is Tara Magdalinski. A widely published scholar in the area of sports studies, whose focus is on the cultural construction of performance, technology and the body, she illuminates how technology can interrupt the ‘natural’ exercising body and thus potentially ‘threaten’ the value of ‘exercising’. In her book titled *Sport, technology and the body: the nature of performance*, Magdalinski (2009) explores the relationship between the ‘natural’ body and performance technologies. In this work, she recognises that while performance technologies are firmly embedded in contemporary sport and exercise, they have also elicited ‘fear about the disruption of the established categories of “nature” and “technology” (Magdalinski, 2009, p. 5). In her work, she defines ‘performance

technologies’ as a ‘collective term that encompasses a range of mechanical and chemical interventions designed to alter the body and improve the physical performance of an athlete, [e.g.,] equipment, physical manipulation training methods and techniques’ (Magdalinski, 2009, p.16). Her investigation of the relationship between technology and the body is mainly from the viewpoint of athletes. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on her arguments that are relevant to non-athletes.

A key debate in her work surrounds technology and its usefulness and appropriateness for exercise. Madgalinski is interested in the ‘profusion of machinery’ in the fitness gym designed to adjust the size, body, shape and capacity of individual bodies. It is in these spaces, she argues, that casual participants are encouraged to submit their bodies to the ‘tyranny of exercise equipment’ (Magdalinski, 2009, p. 14). Her choice of words here suggests that gym machines ‘govern’ bodies in a ‘cruel, arbitrary’ fashion. This attaches a ‘painful’ connotation to the idea that exercise machines work and transform bodies in gyms. Madgalinski (2009), without explicitly saying so, suggests that machines may exert a certain power over bodies in gyms. She argues that rather than being simply an amusing diversion, exercising is expected to be conducted with the expectation of physical modification and augmentation achieved through discipline, hard work and, in many ways, the body’s capitulation to the rigors of the machine.

The problem with this notion of subjection to a machine is that it may challenge the ‘neat binary couple’ of nature/artifice. Without submitting to arguing for a particular position, Magdalinski (2009, p. 19) observes that one can only regard technology as damaging for the qualitative value of exercise when technologies are juxtaposed against the ‘natural (and morally superior) human body’. In other words, when we regard exercise as a natural activity in which the human body is of central concern, technology, as an artificial product, corrupts the body. Magdalinski (2009, p. 8) further argues that an exercising body using some form of technology is thus ‘neither wholly natural nor completely technological’.

In fact, Magdalinski (2009, p.21) maintains that ‘organic/inorganic hybrids’ emerge. Drawing on Reid (2006), she argues that exercising performances are only considered of value if they represent an expression of a body’s natural capacity and are the visible results of hard work, discipline and sacrifice. In contrast, using technologies is typically regarded as employing ‘shortcuts’. It does not engender as much respect as the hearty physical exertion that generates a ‘good sweat’ (Magdalinski, 2009, p. 36). This is why Magdalinski argues that performance technologies are targeted for particular criticism if they are determined to be an ‘unnatural’ or ‘artificial’ way of enhancing one’s performance. Magdalinski (2009) dismisses the simple conclusion of viewing ‘nature as good’ and ‘technology as bad’. Instead, she recognises that technology has been seamlessly incorporated into many aspects of sport without generating anxiety. She specifically draws attention to technologies that are required as part of the actual activity itself such as

racquets, bats, clubs, balls, tennis players, baseballers and golfers. Technologies that are regarded as intrusive include any that ‘threaten to fundamentally alter the body and its capacity’ (Magdalinski, 2009, p.11).

Magdalinski sees technologies as problematic ‘when they constitute an ‘unnatural’ or ‘artificial’ way of enhancing performance’ (Magdalinski, 2009, p. 12). In other words, she clearly distinguishes between ‘accepted technologies’ and those threatening the body’s natural ability to perform. She further contends that the line between the two is ever shifting, and that there is remarkably little consistency in determining which innovations acceptably assist the body and which are considered thoroughly inappropriate. Magdalinski (2009) argues that bodies will always remain subject to the basic laws of physics so that, regardless of their preparation, sprinters will never be able to complete one hundred metres in no time at all. This means that the emerging belief in the ‘malleability of the body’s biological capacity’ is limited after all (Magdalinski, 2009, p. 37). In effect, bodies may not be taken over by technology completely. Magdalinski’s work is helpful in the sense that she casts light on the problematic relationship between technology and the exercising body. Through her work, she makes clear that there are certain fears involved in using performance technologies. These fears involve concerns about technology interrogating the natural body and invalidating the value and qualitative meaning of physical ‘bodywork’.

To put it briefly, my review shows that Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self' has been drawn upon extensively in the literature on gyms and exercise. Scholars argue that this concept is helpful to employ in exploring how exercising, for example, assists individuals to imagine that they are in 'mastery' over themselves as opposed to being purely dominated by dominant discourses on body ideals, expert knowledge in fitness magazines or gym machines. However, while scholars offer conceptual details on how 'technologies of the self' can be applied to studies on gyms, they under-research this empirically. In the following sections, I aim to explore in more detail how using exercise logbooks, earphones, and certain items of gym equipment (such as the rowing machine, barbell and treadmill) act as 'technologies of the self', facilitating people to discipline their own conduct in the gym and learn about themselves, their bodies and performances. In an attempt to answer this question, I ask more precisely why and how do people use these gym technologies in LABFIT? How does using these gym technologies affect how people experience themselves in LABFIT? Lastly, I ask how gym trainers' pedagogy can benefit from understanding in more depth what it means to people use certain gym technologies.

### Section 3: Exercise logbooks

During my fieldwork, I noted that people often wrote in their ‘small’, ‘little’ exercise logbooks exercises they performed during their visits to LABFIT (see Image 7). These exercise logbooks are usually ‘ordinary’ DIN A 5 notebooks that people purchase in supermarkets or news agents. Some wrote in their exercise logbook every time they visited the gym, others only did it sporadically. In other words, they only made notes about their exercises in their exercise logbooks on some of their visits to LABFIT.

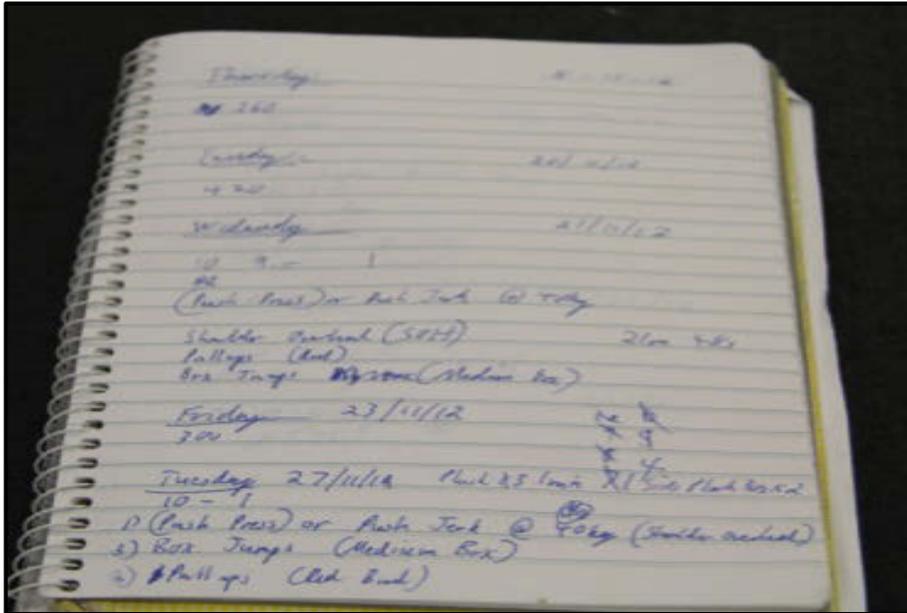


Image 7 Matt's exercise logbook

I wondered why people wrote down their exercises and what the practice meant to them. Matt, a regular gym-goer in LABFIT, caught my attention during my fieldwork due to his consistent use of his exercise logbooks. In his late twenties, Matt typically visits LABFIT on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays for 1 hour to 1.5 hours. In his gym-bag, he always brought along his ‘little’ exercise logbook. Matt usually kept one in the side pockets of his gym bag.

**Then I go and get my little book (see Image 7) where I record my workouts. For me I don’t remember what I did last week. I remember generally what I have done but I don’t remember the specifics, what weights I have used, how many reps I may have done and sometimes it helps to have a record to see if I have improved. Like when I first started I couldn’t do pull ups without an elastic band. Now I can do ten without an elastic band. It really helps just as a motivation because without that you can feel a bit stale and static.**

What is evident in Matt’s description is that his exercise logbook assists him to remember specifics about his ‘bodywork’ in LABFIT. It is important for him to remember specific details about what he ‘did’ or rather ‘accomplished’ in LABFIT. Thus, I suggest that using an exercise book as a ‘technology of the self’ act mnemonically, enabling Matt to remember the specifics about his ‘bodywork’. So in line with Foucault’s definition, the exercise logbook assists Matt to perform exercise power over his memory, helping him to recall the work he has performed on his body/self. According to Markula (2003), ‘technologies of the self’ is grounded in Foucault’s concept of the ethics of self-care. She

suggests that instead of following ‘legal’ rules or norms, individuals take responsibility for their own actions by applying their own morality system. In doing so, she argues, individuals perform active self-examination. In some way, Markula’s point is reflected in Matt’s description of why he uses an exercise logbook. For him, it is less about following checking what the gym trainer has prescribed and more about his ability to evaluate the type of exercises and weights he has performed. Most importantly, it allows him to examine his progress. So here, although my data is in line with Markula’s argument, it builds on it by emphasising that: (1) the exercise logbook operates on Matt’s memory and enables him to ‘actively’ examine himself (or his performed ‘bodywork’); and, (2) remembering ‘specifics’ of one’s work is effective for individuals to perceive a sense of self transformation. Building upon Smith Maguire’s argument, I suggest that the fact that exercise logbooks operate mnemonically on Matt motivate him to keep exercising. Smith Maguire (2008a) argues that exercise manuals act at a distance on individual’s behaviour, I instead argue that keeping an exercise logbook entices Matt to keep exercising.

Matt’s notes demonstrate that being able to remember specifics of his ‘WODs’ enables him to see proof of the progress in his ‘bodywork’. He said that knowing he has improved benefits his motivation to keep exercising. The quote shows that people may not always ‘feel’ or ‘see’ progress occurring within or on themselves. But, because the exercise logbook, as a ‘mnemonic practice’, helps Matt to remember specifics, it reinforces in him that he has, in fact, progressed. Thus, in contrast to Smith Maguire (2001, 2008a), who

conceptualises contributors to fitness magazines and manuals as ‘enlightened experts’, in a sense, Matt becomes his own ‘expert’ regarding his performed work and progress. Thus, I suggest that his exercise logbook enables him to become a ‘self-managing’ individual who receives pleasures his progress against his own ‘benchmarks’. Smith Maguire (2001) further maintains that pictures of ideal ‘fit’ bodies in magazines and manuals are designed to act as motivators for individuals to participate in exercise.

More specifically, she argues that the fitness media deploy two sets of discourses to entice individuals to participate in the requisite self-work. First, she observes that the fitness media stress the associated health benefits of exercise; second, they depict increased confidence through improved bodily appearance. However, in contrast to media pictures of ideal ‘fit’ bodies that aim to increase motivation to exercise, I suggest that it may be more effective if ‘seeing pictures’ of an individual’s own progress assists her/him to feel sufficiently encouraged to continue to exercise. This is particularly important because as Matt’s account has shown, often individuals may not be able to ‘see’ physical changes in their bodies. Thus, it is essential to be more mindful of how the memory of the specific ‘bodywork’ regimes people perform in gyms has meaning vis-à-vis the way they feel about their ‘transformation’ and motivation to continue to exercise.

This next excerpt further examines how Matt uses his exercise logbook: the excerpt is from his ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnography. I asked him about his relationship with his exercise logbook.

**S: Do you tap yourself on the shoulder when you look at your book?**

**M: Yeah, there is sometimes when I think jeez that was I kind of lazy or I think jeez, how the hell did I do that so yeah it is good to look back on just to reflect and see how you have progressed. I think that’s the main motivation for me to write it in the book.**

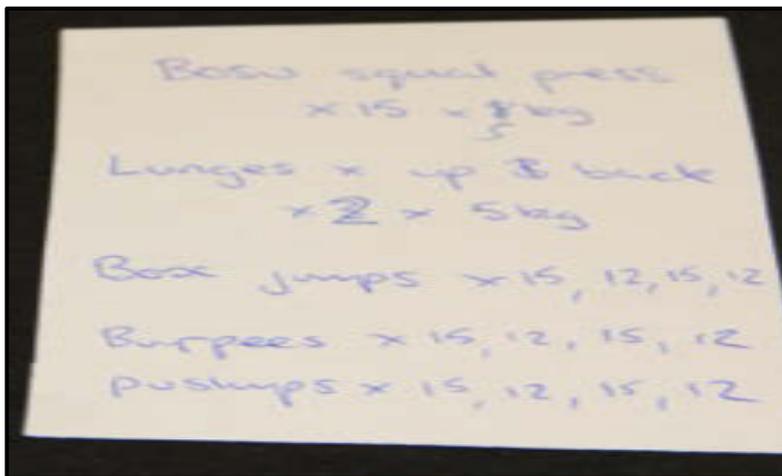
Matt appears to forget the ‘bodywork’ he has performed: it seems as if his work did not manifest on his body. But, using his exercise logbook enables him to recall aspects of his achievements. Even more importantly, I will suggest that his exercise logbook acts as a reflective tool for Matt. According to Markula (2003), who observes that ‘critical self-awareness’ is an essential concept of Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’, because only if one questions and reflects upon one’s ‘natural’ limitations can the individual change her/his condition. In other words, she argues that in order to be ‘freed’ from dominant discourses on the body, individuals need to apply critical self-reflection. So building upon Markula’s view on critical self-awareness, I argue that the exercise logbook’s value lies in its ability to assist him to be critical of his own ‘work’. In Matt’s case, reading, remembering and reflecting upon his ‘work’ urges him to question his performance in LABFIT. So what this

means is that the exercise logbook enables him is to evaluate and judge his own performances. As Cruikshank (1993) and Flowers and Swan (2012) argue, ‘technologies of the self’ are specialised forms of knowledge. This means that noting the specifics of his ‘bodywork’, helps Matt to learn about his progress in LABFIT and/or whether he has plateaued or perhaps even regressed. This means that the exercise logbook is not what Flowers and Swan (2012) call ‘generalised approach’ but rather, the exercise logbook enables Matt to become an ‘expert’ of his own performances in LABFIT. In turn helps him constitute a relation to himself whereby he is in charge of evaluating himself. In other terms, he becomes his own judge over his bodywork.

It was during my ‘walk-and-talk ethnography’ with Rachel that I realised that she regularly records the exercises she performs in LABFIT in a ‘small’ exercise logbook. Rachel is in her mid-twenties and typically visits LABFIT 3-4 times per week. She alternates between following her own exercise routine and asking the trainer to design a ‘WOD’. When she follows her own routine, she mixes cardio and strength exercises Unlike Matt, she usually writes in her exercise logbook after she returns home from LABFIT. Rachel, visits LABFIT usually three times per week.

During her exercise routine, she alternates between following her own - and asking the trainer to design a - 'WOD' for her. In the following account she describes how she keeps her exercise logbook:

**I always write the 'WODs' down on a little paper (see Image 8) and then write it in my book at home. When I look back on the workouts and remember I worked hard, I feel like when I do it again I'll work out hard again.**



**Image 8 Rachel's scrap paper**

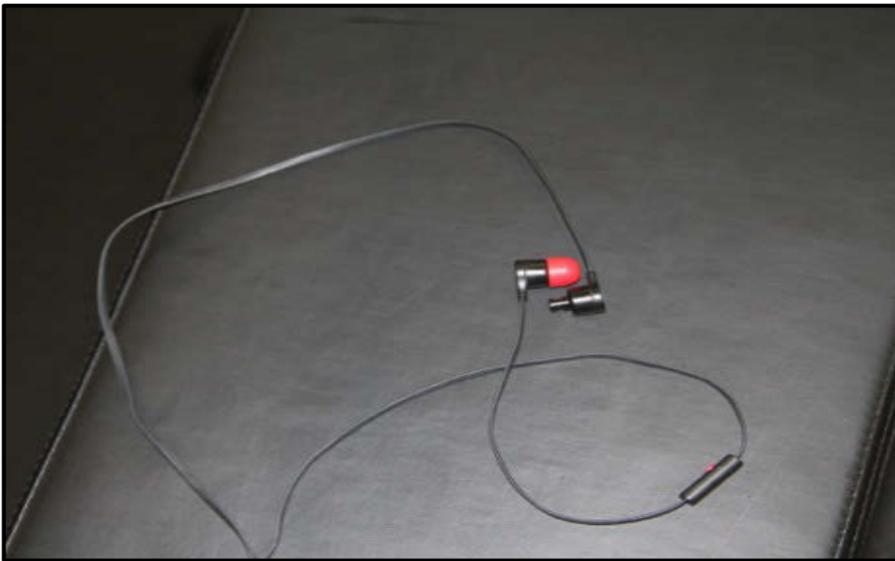
What comes across in her account is her memory of 'hard work'. This means for Rachel, the exercise logbook acts as a gym technology of the self, assisting her to remember a certain feeling that she associates with a sense of 'achievement'. It reminds her that her 'own' performance of 'own' hard work is important to her. And, similar to Matt, she is not able to remember all the 'bodywork' she has accomplished in LABFIT. Unlike Markula (2003), who argues that the individual needs to work with and through his/her body to

receive a sense of self-accomplishment, the exercise logbook on Rachel's memory not just her body. In other words, it triggers her memory, enabling her to remember the feeling of hard work. Rachel is able to re-live and re-feel a certain state of being that she had previously achieved.

Essentially, my data shows that using exercise logbooks are a gym 'technologies of the self' in LABFIT, which operate on people's memories, enabling them to recall their conduct on themselves when exercising. And, this in turn is meaningful because it helps them to remain motivated to exercise, able to identify progress in their work on the body/self; and to evaluate their progress against their own expertise of learning about the amounts and kind of 'bodywork' they are capable of performing in LABFIT as opposed to dominant discourses on the exercising body. The exercise logbook enables them to unlock past accomplishments that the body and mind are not able to remember. Thus, the exercise logbook is an effective technology in that it helps one to become more reflective, and to manage one's own progress of body and transformation for oneself.

#### **Section 4: Earphones – a sound for the self?**

During my fieldwork, I often noticed that people exercising in LABFIT had earphones plugged into their ears. There was mixture of people either using earphones or exercising without them, nonetheless, I wondered why they used them and how it affected their experience of LABFIT. Interestingly, I observed that most of the earphone users exercised exclusively on cardio machines, such as the treadmill. Thus, I was interested not only in understanding what kind of effect earphones had on an individual's experience of herself/himself in LABFIT (see Image 9).



**Image 9** Vera's earphones

One of the regular gym-goers, Vera, regularly uses earphones during her time on the treadmill. A regular attendee in her mid-forties, Vera visits LABFIT three times per week. She primarily uses the treadmill and typically runs for 45 minutes. Occasionally, after her run she performs a couple of strength exercises with free dumbbells. She stays for approximately 60 minutes. The main features of her visits to LABFIT are: (1) the amount of time she spends on the treadmill; and, (2) her usage of earphones. With regard to equipment, Vera only uses the treadmill during her visits to LABFIT. After leaving the change room, she typically runs for 60 minutes with her earphones plugged in. In the following excerpt from her ‘walk-and-talk ethnography’, Vera explains:

**I got the earphones in and I have no idea what the other people are doing. I can't see them because I am facing the wall when I am running on the treadmill and I am naturally short sighted so I can't see or hear anybody else. I am usually not aware of what's happening around me while I am running. Even if I don't listen to music when I have the earphones in - the signal is 'don't talk to me.**

Here, the key point for Vera is that earphones enable her to focus entirely on herself. She wants to be ‘cut off’ from everyone and everything that occurs in LABFIT. In a sense, earphones act as an ‘individualizing’ gym technology of the self. In other words, plugging in earphones assists her to signal to everyone that she does not want to be part of the ‘social’ during her time in LABFIT. In Section 5, I explore in more detail how running on the treadmill together with the earphones assist her to experience LABFIT as a time when she

can only concentrate on her moving body. This is in line with Smith Maguire's (2008a) notion of earphones as a technology that facilitates the individualisation processes that embedded in gyms. According to her, earphones encourage gym-goers to plug out of the 'social milieu' of gyms. In fact, they are an effective strategy that permits Vera to focus on herself instead of being distracted by external 'noises'. In similar vein, Chance (2009) suggests that 'technologies of the self' are strategies of individual domination, whereby she/he performs a certain kind of self-mastery and ascetic practice. This is very much evident in Vera's account because earphones enable her to transform her being in LABFIT into a productive time for herself. Furthermore, they allow her to feel 'autonomous' when 'working' in LABFIT. Rachel, whose usage of an exercise notebook I discussed earlier, typically uses earphones while she is on the treadmill. In her following account from her 'walk-and-talk-ethnography', she describes her usage and experience of earphones.

**I would walk over to the machine and be putting my earphones in and that's when I am kind of starting my workout. I quite enjoy my music and it definitely plays a role in motivating me and it is kind of getting me in the zone. I have time to myself to think while I am running. I am somewhere else. Just reflecting on why I am here and what I want and what I am after in my life. I definitely still am aware of what's going on around me. I am thinking about what other people are doing but I won't delve into it too much. So my thoughts are split between deep stuff and what's going on around me.**

What is evident in Rachel's account is the function of reflection. Rachel's use of earphones allows her to focus on her own thoughts. Markula (2003), in her discussion of Foucault's technologies of self, draws on his statement that 'thought is what allows one to step back' from dominant discourses (Foucault, 1984, p.388). Foucault further argues that ethical self-care is 'an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought' (Foucault, 1988b, p.5). Thus, what is clear in Rachel's description is that the earphones enable her to get into a 'self zone' of thought wherein she is able to metaphorically 'zoom' into her current state of being and be self-reflexive. Markula (2003) further suggests that only when people reflect upon themselves are they able to start crafting their own 'identities'. What is particularly interesting in Rachel's account is that earphones assist her to 'find' this zone that allows her to pose questions about herself, life, and other people around her. Thus, in line with Markula's argument, for Rachel earphones act as 'technologies of the self' because they help her enable her to experience time where she can engage in reflection about her life and herself and even more mundane things around her, such as other people exercising, and pondering upon why they may do so.

In the next section, in which I continue my account of Vera, I examine how the treadmill acts as a 'technology of the self'. I specifically focus on how she interacts with the treadmill and how using this particular form of gym equipment allows her focus upon her relation to herself. This means, while she is on the treadmill, she can focus upon her own moving body and thoughts.

## **Section 5: Gym equipment as ‘technologies of the self’ in LABFIT**

### ***Treadmill – body/mind hybrids***

In the literature on gyms, treadmills do not attract much attention. Descriptions of fitness gyms describe large ‘cardio theatres’ wherein individuals can choose between an array of treadmills, stationary bikes, cross trainers and rowing machines (see for example, Smith Maguire 2008a, Sassatelli, 2010). However, gym studies have generally under-researched how people use treadmills; that is, what are they using the treadmill for? Most importantly, what does it mean for people when they are running on the treadmill in LABFIT (see Image 10)?



**Image 10 Treadmills in LABFIT**

During my fieldwork, it often seemed as though people formed ‘relationships’ with the treadmills they used. In the following narrative, I provide Vera’s account of her experience with ‘the’ treadmill at LABFIT.

**...Just that feeling of at least being in control of some part of your life that you feel you can do some improving in and it’s just you and nobody else. Nobody can interfere with you: it is just you and the machine. I sound like a hamster, don’t I? I just care about the treadmill**

Clearly, what is being suggested here is that for Vera, ‘merging’ with the treadmill evokes a feeling of ‘self-control’. Her relationship with it enables her to sense that she can focus on improving herself by herself. What I mean by this is that Vera sees running on the treadmill as a means by which can she operate on ‘herself’ in order to attain a sense of ‘self-improvement’. In other words, for Vera, the treadmill is a ‘technology’ that enables her to improve her body’s running performance. Thus, in effect she perceives it as way of transforming/ improving herself. It is essential for Vera to be in ‘control’ of her own improvement. What is interesting here is that she does not consider the treadmill to be controlling her body. This is in line with Chance’s (2009) theory that gym equipment does not impede people’s ability to feel a sense of self-mastery when they exercise in the gym. Chance made clear in her argument that according to Foucault’s earlier work on the ‘theory of the body’, gym machines aimed to control bodies in order to make the latter appear docile. But, she also observed that Foucault’s (19888a) later work featuring ‘technologies

of the self' offered a new way of analysing exercising gyms in relation to bodies and the self. Chance (2009) further argues that exercising is a 'technology of domination', i.e., a 'statement of self-control' whereby the individual performs a practice upon his/herself. Therefore, when people use gym equipment to exercise, Chance (2009) argues, the equipment does not interfere with their experience of self-control. Here, my data builds upon Chance's (2009) argument in the sense that by using the 'hamster' analogy, Vera shows that the treadmill does in fact control her. If one imagines a running hamster in a spinning wheel, the former 'keeps on running' but never gets anywhere.

And for this reason, it follows that one could think that the treadmill 'traps' Vera into 'running' like a machine', i.e., controls her. But, surprisingly, and in contrast to the general consensus regarding the 'hamster' analogy, Vera views her perpetual 'mechanic'- like running as a means of being in control. This is particularly interesting because it shows how she sees the 'controlling' of the treadmill over her running as a way for her to sense 'self-control'. In other words, her description adds an essential contribution to Chance's argument by 'validating' the conclusion that gym machines do not negatively interfere with people's experience of self-control when exercising. Rather, gym machines' control over 'exercising' bodies may allow people to attain a state wherein they feel in control of both their bodies and their selves.

Another member of LABFIT who regularly uses the treadmill is Jenna. In her late twenties, Jenna usually visits LABFIT 3-4 times per week for about 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Jenna alternates between following her own exercise routine and approaching the trainer to ask for a 'WOD'. Jenna typically warms up on the treadmill for 5 minutes and sometimes remains on it to perform an 'interval' running workout. This means that she alternates running speeds based on a certain time interval. During her 'walk-and-talk ethnography' she offered a brief description of how she uses the treadmill.

**The treadmill is where I think about other things. I don't really focus on what I am actually doing. For the first 5 minutes of the warm up I am somewhere else. So while I warming up and speed is not too high, I have me time. Anything after 5 minutes I am really going to start pushing myself. I turn the speed up and in that time I need to concentrate on breathing and moving the legs and doing the best I can. But in the first five minutes the movement doesn't take priority because it is natural and easy: it allows me to go somewhere else... Thinking about the day ahead or the day I had.**

The treadmill acts as a facilitator for Jenna to attain a certain state of 'mind freedom'. Her perceived freedom to think about 'things' that she wants/needs to think about is derived from the synergy between the treadmill and her body. In other words, Jenna's running on the treadmill forms a hybrid between her body-mind and the treadmill. More precisely, during the first 5 minutes, this treadmill-body-mind hybrid experiences a strong 'synergy'

between treadmill and body that enables Jenna to shift her focus to her 'mind'. So the treadmill - as a gym technology - operates on Jenna's body which enables her to experience a state of 'mind freedom'. In other words, the treadmill actively operates on her body; but, in doing so, it also 'indirectly' operates on her thought processes by 'freeing' them up so that she can think about whatever she needs to for 5 minutes. I am not implying here that the treadmill as a 'technology of the self' enables Jenna to clear her mind of all thought. Rather, as the data shows, the treadmill allows her to attain a state whereby she can focus on her 'own' thoughts, which she interprets as 'me time'. Thus, these findings suggest that what people perform in gym is not only about 'bodywork'. But, it is also about how people use 'bodywork', such as for example running on a treadmill that enables them to exercise the mind.

According to Chance (2009), the function of the exercise machine is to 'work' the body with its 'natural movements' to improve the body's strength and physical characteristics. The main point that she is making here is that the gym machine 'helps' the gym-goer to experience a sense of 'self-mastery' over her/his body, providing the individual the willpower and physical ability to act upon her/his own body with assistance of the exercise machine. Here, two aspects are of particular importance: first, as I have previously suggested, the gym machine facilitates the individual's capacity to act upon her/his own body; second, the gym machine 'works' the body within its 'natural' movement, i.e., the machine does not direct the body to move in a way contrary to the former's 'design'.

Chance (2009) argues that the gym machine helps the body move in a way to which it is mechanically suited. What Jenna's excerpts demonstrate is that for the first 5 minutes, the treadmill's 'operation' on her body does not transform the latter's physical characteristics but rather helps Jenna to attain a state of 'mind freedom'. In short, for her, the treadmill acts as a 'technology of the self' by transforming her body-mind into a hybrid which enables her to focus on 'controlling' the time she spends on her own thoughts.

The next excerpt from Jenna's 'walk-and-talk' ethnography provides more detail about how the treadmill - as a gym 'technology of the self' - starts to act more on Jenna's body, enabling her to experience a different 'state of being'.

**S: Can you describe the shift from the 5 minutes of 'me' time to the beginning of your workout?**

**J: I definitely have to motivate myself more. I will say to myself 'come on you can do this': 'this is just the beginning get in the rhythm'; 'it's going to be hard but just keep going'. And especially when I do running intervals where I bump it up from level 10 to 12, I am sort of telling myself 'OK it is just 1 minute and then I go back to 10 minutes'. 'And then I have to do it again and we have to do these five times. So this is just the start'.**

**S: Sounds like in your head you are your own trainer.**

**J: Oh definitely. Sometimes I drift off again and I am not mentally here anymore. I am like ‘alright you are going too slowly now’. ‘We have to bump it up. Level 12 is too easy for you now’. You now have to do 12.5’. I want to be exhausted. I want to come off the treadmill feeling absolutely exhausted.**

**S: Why?**

**J: Well, that gives me the endorphins, the adrenaline rush. You know you’ve worked really hard and feel proud of yourself.**

Evident in this excerpt is how Jenna ‘uses’ the treadmill to help her intensify the ‘work’ on her body. Increasing the pace of the treadmill requires her body to move faster and essentially demand more work. Jenna experiences the ‘work’ she performs on her body through a feeling of absolute exhaustion. This means that the treadmill, as a gym ‘technology of the self,’ facilitates Jenna’s attaining of a certain bodily state that she values. As a technology, the treadmill helps her to ‘achieve’ this state by helping her to ‘challenge’ her body. The key point here is that the treadmill acts as a ‘facilitating’ - not a ‘dominating’ - technology. It is not the treadmill that ‘forces’ Jenna’s body to run faster; it is Jenna herself who ‘uses’ the treadmill to help her to attain what she wants to achieve, i.e., a state of absolute exhaustion. So, what the data shows concurs with Chance’s (2009) interpretation of Foucault (1988a, p. 23) when she terms ‘technologies of the self’ as technologies of individual domination. In other words, as Chance (2009) observes, technologies of individual domination enable the individual to become her/his own master,

in effect of herself/himself. This is further evidenced by Jenna who admits that she regards herself as her own ‘imaginary’ trainer.

Another interesting point is that Jenna seems to be able to ‘control’ the treadmill-body/mind hybrid that results from her running on the treadmill. As I have suggested earlier, when there is a synergy between the treadmill and the body (i.e., the treadmill is spinning at a pace the body finds ‘comfortable’ to maintain), Jenna experiences a state of ‘mind freedom’. However, the synergy shifts when the treadmill operates more intensively on her body. As a result, Jenna’s focus shifts to her body: she attains a certain state of bodily exhaustion. In her excerpt, Jenna shows that her state(s) of being help/s her to ‘control’ the ‘treadmill’ in the way that proves most ‘effective’ and ‘productive’ for her. In other words, upon realising that her focus has shifted to her thoughts, she knows that she needs to ‘adjust’ the treadmill to a higher pace if she wants to feel a state of bodily exhaustion. This extends Chance’s (2009) argument in that it shows how Jenna’s state of being assists her to regulate treadmill in a way that it enables her to attain what she seeks to achieve, i.e., bodily exhaustion.

### ***Rowing machines – a love/hate affair***

Similar to treadmills, there is a paucity of scholarly literature investigating why and how people use rowing machines in gyms. Based on my personal experience with fitnessgyms, there are usually fewer rowing machines than treadmills. Thus, as a general observation,

treadmills seem to be a more ‘popular’ choice as a ‘cardio’ machine. In LABFIT, there is only one rowing machine compared to five treadmills. During my fieldwork, I noted that people who used the rower tended to ‘work’ it with great ‘intensity’, force, and power. For example, people were thrusting their upper body forward in order to maximise their ability to pull the handlebar back into their ribcage when they were pushing off their heels. People were shooting the seat backwards their back leaning away from the rower, their arms and legs almost in full extension. Based on my field observation, I saw that it is easier for individuals to ‘control’ the usage of the treadmill as opposed to the rowing machine because it has multiple speed levels on the treadmill to choose from that adjust its pace electronically. In contrast, the rowing machine requires more ‘work’ from the individual’s body; without sufficient ‘pull’, the rowing wheel of the rowing machine will not spin. For these reasons, I was interested to understand how people use rowing machines (see Image 11).



**Image 11 The rowing machine in LABFIT**

I now return to Jenna, who often spends a couple of minutes on the ‘rowing machine’ before she finishes her time at LABFIT. During her ‘walk-and-talk ethnography’, I asked her if and how she uses the rowing machine during her time in LABFIT.

**Definitely. We have a love/hate relationship, I find it difficult (i.e., the rowing machine). It works my arms, shoulders, stomach, legs, back. I mean everything is hurting. If I think I haven’t done enough – I think let’s get on the rower and by the end I know I’ll feel great. So I use the rowing machine when I haven’t reached that point of complete exhaustion in the workout. For the first time yesterday, I did a 5 minute interval on it and after 3 minutes I thought I would die. But, in the end I felt so good.**

Evident here is that the rowing machine assists Jenna to operate on her body in order to attain a state of exhaustion which at the same time she experiences as a sense of elation. For her, it is imperative to achieve this bodily sensation because that’s why she visits LABFIT. In contrast to Magdalinski’s (2009) concern that bodies are submitted to the tyranny of gym machines, i.e., that bodies capitulate to the rigors of these machines, my data shows that because Jenna ‘submits her body to the rowing machine, she is able to experience a state that enables her to feel a sense of ‘satisfaction’ with the kind of work she performs on herself in LABFIT. This leads to my second point, which centers on why Jenna chooses the rowing machine to attain a state of exhaustion and elation.

Jenna hates and at the same time loves using the rowing machine. The rowing machine operates on Jenna's body in a way that 'hurts', she believes that she 'masters' herself by enduring the pain, knowing that it will 'convert' into a feeling of elation. In other words, if the gym technology fails to manipulate the working of her body in a way that evokes a feeling of 'self-mastery' (Chance, 2009), Jenna will not attain the state of being that she considers 'worthy' of her time in LABFIT. In other words, it is essential for her to attain this state of exhaustion because it enables her to 'feel' that she has accomplished her 'mission, her reason for going to the gym. In brief, her hatred for the rowing machine requires her to discipline herself to stay on it, to finish her 'work' which will enable her to feel a sense of self-mastery. Even more importantly, if the rowing machine failed to evoke in her a sense of hatred or challenge regarding her 'bodywork', it would not act as an effective technology of the self.

Besides the rowing machine, I noted that people were often hesitant when working with the barbell in LABIT. Similar to my previous observations in fitness gyms, I found that people saw these long, silver 'bars' as intimidating, resulting in their choice of other weight equipment such as free weights. The reason why people often resorted to selecting free weights for their strength exercises was because 'barbells' are more difficult to 'mobilise' due to their length (approximately 1.5 meters long). Hence people cannot easily 'walk' around with them in gyms. Furthermore, barbells, which typically weigh 20kg, are often too heavy to lift, particularly for some women. In LABFIT, there is one 20kg barbell,

which is positioned on a ‘rack’ in the center of other weight machines (which are situated along the wall, see Image 12). While working with a barbell is not as popular a choice as treadmills, women and men use this when performing squats.

***Barbell – a transformer of bodily feelings***



**Image 12 The barbell in LABFIT**

In my role as ‘trainer-ethnographer’ I observed that once I showed attendees how to use the barbell they started to ‘enjoy’ using it. I sensed that working with the barbell caused people to ‘feel’ a certain way about their bodies and selves. One member who caught my attention was Lisa. In her mid-twenties, Lisa usually visits LABFIT 3-4 times per week (mostly at night time). Lisa often follows her own exercise routine which includes both cardio and strength exercises. Other times, she may approach the trainer to design a ‘WOD’ for her and her colleague Rachel.

In the following excerpt from her 'walk-and-talk ethnography' she answers my question about why she likes using the barbell.

**I like the barbell because I get sore after using it. I guess that's why I like it. It makes me feel sore but it makes me feel good. I like the whole exercise how it works my body. I like how it works my stomach, legs and bum. I like exercises that do everything. I guess I like using that you get to workout with weights and it's really achieving if you get to a certain weight.**

The barbell helps Lisa to attain a state of soreness. This is essential for her because it evokes in her a feeling of transformation. Similar to Jenna, who loves/hates hurt because it transforms into a state of elation, Lisa values her body feeling sore because it elicits a sense of accomplishment. This is in line with Chance's (2009) suggestion that individuals are able to experience 'bodily sensations' through 'technologies of the self'. What my data emphasises are the different kinds of bodily sensations that certain gym technologies can assist an individual to attain.

I now return to Matt's excerpt, which I discussed earlier in relation to exercise logbooks. As a trainer-ethnographer, I observed that Matt was holding back when he first started to use the barbell in LABFIT: he was very conservative regarding how much weight he added to it. Furthermore, he hesitated to perform certain exercises with the barbell, i.e., took a long time to manoeuvre his body into the correct starting position. However, with time,

Matt showed more confidence in using the barbell. This was evidenced by the way he handled it, by the way he grabbed it much more quickly, and how he moved it adeptly into the correct starting position required to perform his exercises with the barbell. In the following excerpt from his 'walk-and-talk ethnography', I ask Matt why he enjoys using the barbell now.

**I think I like working with the barbell. I think a large part of it is because I never really had the confidence to use this piece of equipment when I was going to other gyms. I guess here (in LABFIT), I get more personalised assistance so I have been introduced to exercises with the barbell. I think it intimidates a lot of people. It's just one of those larger pieces of equipment you are going to get more attention on so I also feel you can't muck around with it or stuff it up. The barbell does make me feel stronger.**

My data here shows that the barbell assists Matt to feel that he has gained in strength. The barbell - as a gym 'technology of the self'- operates on his body in a way that transforms his perception of his own bodily strength. However, more interesting is the fact that his feeling of increased bodily strength also transforms into an enhanced sense of confidence in himself. Thus, similar to my earlier discussion, gym technologies assist individuals to attain different kinds of 'bodily sensations' (see Chance, 2009). However, what is unique in Matt's description is that the barbell not only helps him to attain a certain sense of bodily strength; but also transforms his perception of himself. That is, he feels more confident, which in turn is essential in that it encourages him to keep exercising, disciplining his body,

and, by extension, further increasing his bodily strength. Matt's narrative shows how important it is to him that gym technology be considered challenging; otherwise, he would not achieve a sense of increased confidence or 'self-mastery' (Chance, 2009). Certain gym 'technologies of the self' assist individuals to act not only on their bodies, but also on their memories and feelings, for it is in this way that they attain certain states of being.

## **Section 6: Conclusion**

This chapter has examined how specific gym 'technologies of the self' assist individuals in LABFIT to 'work' not only on their bodies, but also on their memories and feelings. More precisely, this chapter has focused on how exercise logbooks, earphones, treadmills, rowing machines and barbells assist individuals to act upon themselves in order to attain a certain state of being. Some other scholars of gym studies have drawn on Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self' but they have predominantly focused on analysing how exercise operates on people's bodies to transform their selves.

A key finding of my data is that exercise logbooks assist individuals to perform a mnemonic practice. I show that keeping an exercise logbook helps people to remember the specifics in LABFIT; it is a process of active self-examination which, Markula (2003) suggests, is an important feature in 'technologies of the self'. I demonstrate that exercise logbooks operate not only on the individual's body, but also on her/his memory. Thus, its importance as a 'technology of the self' lies in its ability to enable individuals to examine

their 'own' progress, even if it is only small and expressed in numbers as opposed to their bodies (bodily appearance). I suggest that remembering the specifics of an individual's body work is essential given that each aims to become an 'enlightened' expert of 'bodywork' on the self and by oneself. Occasionally, gym-goers may not see any visible evidence of progress, of the transformation of their bodies. Here, exercise logbooks are helpful because they enable evaluation of the 'bodywork' that the individual has performed on her/his body via specific records in the exercise logbook. As I have suggested earlier, my analysis shows that exercise logbooks enable an individual to remember specifics which will facilitate her/his identification of progress. As a result, the person becomes mnemonically motivated to continue to exercise. In addition, my data demonstrates that recording the specifics of a gym-goer's 'bodywork' on her/himself facilitates post-exercise engagement in critical self-reflection.

According to Markula (2003), the concept of critical awareness is another important component of Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self'. The importance of exercise logbooks is that they trigger the individual's memory. The work one does on one's own body cannot be easily remembered; thus, the value of an exercise logbook lies in the fact that it provides an opportunity for the exerciser to self-reflect upon performed work on the self. This particular form of record-keeping taps into the individual's memory of her/his conduct of the self on the self by allowing the person to recall the specifics of her/his attained state of being. I will suggest that exercise logbooks are proven gym 'technologies

of the self'. This is particularly important because recording one's activities in a logbook enhances one's mnemonic motivation and stimulates critical self-reflection, processes essential for further transformation of the self.

A further key finding of this work is that earphones act as individualistic gym 'technologies of the self'. My observation suggests that earphones assist an individual to cut herself/himself off from the social environment in LABFIT. In other words, earphones operate on an individual's conduct: they signal to others in LABFIT that the wearer is disinclined to engage in conversation. This, in turn, enables an attendee to focus on her/his 'work' on the self. My findings are in line with those of Smith Maguire (2008), who argues that earphones withdraw the individual from the social milieu and enable her/him to participate in a process of individualisation. In this way, earphones, as a form of gym 'technologies of the self', grant individuals control over their own conduct in LABFIT, enabling them to focus and concentrate on their personal 'bodywork'. In addition, I show that earphones act as reflective 'technologies of the self', which assist gym-goers to operate on their thoughts and to reflect upon their own being and conduct. Here I suggest that trainers' education can benefit from understanding in more detail how earphones symbolise more than an individual's expression of wishing to exercise his/her own music preference. I deem it imperative that they understand that earphones are an essential gym technology which assists individuals: (1) to direct their entire focus on their own 'bodywork' by the

self; and, (2) to perform self-reflection, a meaningful practice and condition for changing an individual's condition/ transformation of the self.

My analysis also shows how treadmills act as gym 'technologies of the self' for LABFIT attendees. I demonstrate that the control of a treadmill over an individual's body allows said individual to perceive external exertion of control. In other words, the treadmill's requirement to keep individuals' bodies running helps them to attain a state of being in control of their own conduct. Having their bodies controlled by the treadmill enables gym-goers to feel that they are in control of themselves. This corresponds with Chance's (2009) argument that 'technologies of the self' represent a 'statement of self-control'. Thus, in contrast to scholars who have argued that machines control bodies in order to make them docile, my analysis shows that the perpetual control of the treadmill over the individual's body assists her/him to attain a sense of control over the self.

Another key finding in relation to treadmills as gym 'technologies of the self' is the formation of treadmill-mind/body hybrids. My data demonstrates that treadmills can assist individuals not only to operate on their bodies, but also on their minds. This means that if gym-goers run at a pace at which their bodies are in synergy with the treadmill, they are able to attain a state of 'mind freedom' for a certain amount of time. In other words, the treadmill 'operates' on their bodies in such a way that enables them to concentrate on their personal thoughts. Therefore, by operating on the body, the treadmill also indirectly

operates on the individual's mind, assisting her/him to sense a certain freedom to focus on what she/he needs to think about. However, if the individual 'controls' the treadmill in such a way that it starts 'working' the body more intensively, the focus shifts allowing the individual to attain a state of being that is influenced by the way her/his body feels. In effect, the treadmill, as a gym technology, enables attendees to feel a state of bodily exhaustion. This is important because it allows gym-goers to 'feel' their bodies and the work that they have performed on themselves. It is, therefore, important for gym trainers' pedagogy to be: (1) more mindful that gym attendees perhaps choose a certain pace on the treadmill because it enables them to feel a certain state of being, even though the pace may not reflect what discourses on exercise prescription recommend; and, (2) more mindful of how to instruct and supervise individuals in gyms; i.e., trainers can encourage individuals awareness of - and to pay more attention to - the different 'states of being' that they experience while they are running on the treadmill, and to use these as 'guides' to control their own pace instead of trying to comply with discursive recommendations/advice.

Finally, my findings suggest that gym technologies such as the rowing machine and the barbell operate on individuals' bodies in such ways that enable them to feel different bodily sensations. For example, my data demonstrates that the barbell assists a person to feel her/his body soreness. This is an essential state of being for the gym-goer because it evokes a feeling of transformation of the self through the body. Similarly, the rowing machine operates on an individual's body in a pain-evoking way that converts into a sense of 'self-

mastery' accompanied with bodily states of exhaustion, then elation. Thus, it is essential in the case of both gym technologies that trainers assist attendees to learn to endure certain bodily sensations that they see as challenging or intimidating. In other words, my data shows that gym technologies need to represent a certain level of bodily challenge or intimidation to the individual which in turn requires the individual to exert discipline and domination over the self in order to feel certain bodily sensations. Trainers must devise ways of helping gym-goers to become more aware of how gym technologies can make them feel in order to assist them to make useful choices for their experiences of themselves when working-out in gyms.

The key findings of this chapter show that gym-going is not exclusively centred on 'bodywork'. Instead, gym 'technologies of the self' enable people to operate on their memories, minds, thoughts and feelings. In effect, gym 'technologies of the self' enable individuals to imagine that they take charge of their own conduct in LABFIT. In other words, their deployment of gym 'technologies of the self' enables individuals to work on their relations with themselves. It allows them to focus, for example, on the thoughts and feelings they experience through and about their bodies/selves. Employing Foucault's concept of the 'technologies of the self' helps one understand that the mundane gym-going practices that people perform in LABFIT, such as running on a treadmill or plugging in earphones are, in fact, essential gym technologies which assist individuals not only to 'operate' on their bodies, but also to 'dominate' their personal memories, minds and

feelings. What is particularly interesting here is that these gym ‘technologies of the self’ are less about assisting individuals to attain ‘ideal bodies’ and more about assisting them to perceive that they are working, improving and experiencing their selves through their own efforts. But, I want to stress that while gym ‘technologies of the self’ act on people’s memories, minds, and feelings, at the same time people’s bodies play a central role in gym-going. Thus, in the next chapter, I shift my focus to exploring in more detail how people ‘exercise’ their bodies in LABFIT, what types of ‘bodywork’ they perform, and what such exercise means to them.

## **Chapter 5: ‘Exercising’ bodies in LABFIT**

In this chapter, particular focus is upon the ‘reality’ of ‘exercising’ bodies in gyms and what types of ‘bodywork’ people perform in LABFIT. Thus far, the majority of gym studies have focused on investigating the meaning of people’s ‘bodywork’ in gyms. Studies have centralised ‘bodies’ and the reasons why people ‘work’ on them to attain a certain ‘body ideal’ through the medium of exercise. During my time as a trainer in LABFIT, I observed that people were focusing less on ‘working’ on their bodies. In other words, people were not attending LABFIT simply to pursue ‘bodywork’ to attain an ‘ideal’ body. Instead, I found that there was less emphasis on the ‘bodily result’ of exercising and more on the ways people were able to connect with and feel their bodies through ‘exercising’ in this gym. To this end, this chapter aims to investigate more closely the role and meaning of people’s ‘exercising’ bodies in LABFIT. I will start by reviewing how scholars conceptualise bodies in gyms. This will enable me to assess if my observations as a trainer were premature or if they contribute to the existing knowledge of ‘bodies’ and people’s ‘bodywork’ in gyms.

## **Section 1: ‘Bodywork’ in gyms and its meaning for the ‘self’**

‘The physical capital of the fit body “counts” in contemporary society’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p.28).

The above quote exemplifies Smith Maguire’s view of the body as a form of wealth generated and possessed by the individual and valued by modern society. According to Smith Maguire (2008a), the body’s function and form constitute physical capital for the individual; for her, the body’s function is ‘considered through the lens of health’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 40). Here she draws upon neo-liberal thought that suggests that ‘health and disease are framed as matters of individual will or failure’ (p. 40). I take her argument to mean that possessing a healthy body may be considered as an asset for the individual because it is highly valued in society. With reference to the body’s form, she specifically emphasises its outer appearance, arguing that in contemporary consumer culture and service economies, ‘physical appearances are important for occupational success and social status’ (p. 40). For example, she stresses that by working on their muscle tone people can improve their competitive advantage in the job and relationship markets. In other words, she suggests that a toned body will enhance one’s opportunity to receive a promotion or attract a romantic partner. In essence, Smith Maguire (2008b) argues that one of the reasons why a person exercises is to shape the body’s appearance and health in order to generate valuable capital for oneself. Drawing on Bourdieu (1986), she claims that the value of physical capital lies in its potential to be converted into other forms of capital.

Sociologist Diane Reay (2004) claims that according to Bourdieu, many forms of capital exist. According to Reay (2004, p. 57), social capital is made up of social networks which are generated through social processes. Her point here is that the circle of people with which one surrounds oneself may be considered a valuable asset. Moreover, she elaborates upon Bourdieu's (1986) notion of economic capital, which reflects the amount of wealth an individual has generated through his or her interaction with the economy. Lastly, she defines symbolic capital as the expression of an individual's personal qualities, e.g., authority and charisma. Reay (2004) emphasises that Bourdieu's other forms of capital because Bourdieu (1986) argues that one form of capital may be converted into another.

Here I return to Smith Maguire (2008a), who argues that a healthy body is not only beneficial for an individual's longevity, but because it may invite a certain social status. That is, a healthy body reflects a strong, independent, responsible and self-sufficient individual. But, a healthy form may only be converted into a social position if it is valued in society. As I have argued in Chapters 1 and 2, neo-liberal governments value a healthy body/citizen. Smith Maguire and Stanway (2008) argue that a toned, muscular, slim body stands a good chance of being rewarded with better employment opportunities in 'an image-driven economy' and will thus generate more economic capital. In addition, Smith Maguire (2008a, p. 41) suggests that one's physical capital confers status on the individual. Her point here is that by investing in one's physical body (its form and function), the individual is able to externally demonstrate that she/he is minimising health risk factors and

controlling the self; and, she/he is able to impress others by a certain look. In the process, the individual attains the status of a proper individual. In effect, Smith Maguire (2008a) conceptualises the body as an ‘expression of the self’. This, in turn, leads her to view the body as one’s ‘first and most important project’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p.41). For her, exercising is a form of investment in one’s personal ‘project’. Furthermore, she argues that the ‘status’ or assets of one’s project reflect one’s status in society. This means that not only is the body a status symbol for the individual: it is a means of expressing one’s sense of self. To conclude, in addition to conceptualising the body as a form of physical capital, Smith Maguire views it as a status marker for the individual.

Regarding her view of the body as a project of the self, Smith Maguire (2008a) suggests that class mediates the ways in which individuals invest in the project. In particular, she draws attention to the middle class who, she argues, drawing on Bourdieu (1984), ‘are characterised by a sense of unease or embarrassment about their social position, which manifests as an uneasiness towards the body’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 53). Her point is that in the main, it is members of the middle class who treat the ‘body-as-symbol’; or, using Bourdieu’s (1984, p. 213) term, ‘body-for-others’. For the middle class the body is not simply an instrument to perform work, for example. Rather, Smith Maguire (2008a) argues, the body is a sign through which status and social position may be communicated and reinforced. This is particularly important when considering the nature of contemporary society, which has seen a growth in the number of occupations for which image,

appearance and performance are fundamental; and, where increased emphasis on style and appearance in everyday life has emerged over time. As a result, the middle class (who generally accrue less economic and cultural capital than the dominant class) view the body as an investment to signal their worth and social position. In other words, she argues, they consider exercising an investment in their personal 'enterprise'.

In essence, Smith Maguire's view of the body as capital establishes a link to exercising which has been strongly associated with working on one's body (i.e., its form and function). In her opinion, one of the main reasons why people exercise is that it has the potential to increase one's physical capital. Exercising is a means for people to increase 'personal' assets by efforts on themselves for themselves (Smith Maguire, 2008b). In addition, she emphasises that the body 'as a project for the self' confers status on the individual (Smith Maguire & Stanway, 2008). By working on one's body (and this applies particularly to the middle class), people are able to express not only themselves, but also their social status. Her point is that individuals are encouraged to construct themselves and judge each other based on the messages communicated through their bodies. This also suggests that the self is not fixed. In Smith Maguire's (2008a) opinion, the self is 'malleable' (p. 61), her point being that transformation of the body expresses transformation of the self. The body is, therefore, considered to be a means of self-transformation.

Smith Maguire's concept of the body provides an understanding of how the body's health and appearance may function as a symbol and capital for the self. However, she glosses over what exercising (in the gym) means to people beyond the concerns of social status and acquisition of physical capital. In other words, she fails to adequately address the potential personal and intimate meaning of experiencing one's own body when exercising. Smith Maguire's offers an insightful, general 'result'/'benefit' analysis of what it means to people to perform 'bodywork' via gym-going is undoubtedly of value. Nonetheless, I find her approach problematic vis-à-vis helping me to understand in detail the role and meaning of people's 'exercising' bodies in LABFIT beyond 'symbolic' and 'class' purposes.

In contrast to Smith Maguire's unlively approach to the body, Sassatelli is interested in the body's 'natural' ability to be transformed through exercise. Her point here is that the body is not 'absolute', but rather 'malleable' and 'changeable' due to its 'natural' plasticity. In other words, plasticity determines the body's ability to alter its shape and contour. However, Sassatelli (2000) emphasises, there are limits to a body's plasticity. As a gym instructor in her study explained: 'If you're born with a large behind, the most the gym can do is ensure that you don't have cellulite as well' (Sassatelli, 2000, p. 403). Sassatelli, further arguing that one's exercise performances set the limits to the body's plasticity (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 177), suggests that the degree to which an individual can transform her/his body lies within the confines of the 'self-control' and 'responsibility' of the individual (Sassatelli, 2000). This means that when exercising, the body uses and acts upon its 'true capacities and

therefore brings about true transformation' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 183). Her argument here is that exercise assists the body to evoke its 'individual' 'natural' form. By this, I interpret her to mean the material properties an individual was born with. In essence, she proposes that exercising can only transform the body within its 'natural' characteristics, whereby the body utilises its inherent capacity for change. With reference to her notion of the body's natural plasticity, Sassatelli criticises the fitness industry for creating 'a utopia of total plasticity' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 179). After observing that particularly fitness magazines, posters, and other forms of fitness media promote 'an ideal of perfection', she emphasises that most fitness participants willingly respond to a 'culturally given ideal image of the body' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 178). But, she qualifies this on several occasions by saying that once inside the gym, people negotiate these ideal images and 'get real' with their bodies (p. 179). By 'getting real', she means exercising oneself, bringing out the 'naturalness' (in the body) and the 'authenticity' (of the self).

On the one hand, Sassatelli recognises that there is a certain body ideal embedded in the fitness industry, and that people are aware of it, on the other, she argues strongly that people negotiate body ideals through 'working' within their body's 'natural' limits of body plasticity. Importantly, she observes that while people remain attracted to body ideals, they are aware that exercising in order to achieve this 'body ideal' is an 'impossible' undertaking. In their attempts to justify this 'mission impossible' with their 'natural' 'frame', 'wide hips' and 'thick ankles', people seize upon exercising as way to achieve

better bodies. That is, they work with “what they’ve got”, their ‘own’ bodies and ‘energy’. By bringing out the potential of the ‘natural’ body, Sassatelli (2003) argues, the individual creates ‘authenticity’. The ‘natural’ body for her is characterized by one’s own innate, ‘true characteristics’. She argues that exercise could help to rediscover the natural body, which assists in creating an authentic self (Sassatelli, 2000). In other words, Sassatelli (2003) maintains that fit people are more ‘authentic’ than before because they have worked on their natural body potential and are more aware of how to develop it through exercise. For example, she claims that ‘authentic body improvements’ make people feel good about themselves; and, as one of her participants suggests, ‘improve [one’s] relations with others’ (Sassatelli, 2010 p.194).

Furthermore, Sassatelli suggests that working out at a gym enables individuals to acquire energy and strength and, consequently, confidence and trust in themselves (Sassatelli, 2010). She proposes that a fit, powerful and strong in particular acts as an instrument for the self. For example, as one of Sassatelli’s (1999b, p. 192) participants observed: ‘the energy produced in the gym is “good” because “it charges you up”, and “enhances your life and your environment”’. In contrast to Smith Maguire, Sassatelli conceptualises the body as beyond a symbol of class. She suggests that a fit body ‘illuminates an allegedly infinite horizon of potentiality, adumbrating the existence of a self that is not confined to social roles’ (Sassatelli, 1999b, p. 192). This means that for her, the body is less about being a symbol of social class and sign for others, and more about representing a particular source

of energy for the self. In her view, ‘the body is first and foremost something that can recharge itself with ever increasing energy’ (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 189). She explains how exercise cultivates the body, imbuing it with ‘positive energy’. In other words, she regards the body as a potentially ‘useful, malleable energy source to use in everyday life’ (Sassatelli, 2000, p. 406). In Sassatelli’s view, exercise is a means of enhancing the body’s ‘power and potential’ to function as a tool for the self.

In viewing the body as a source of energy, Sassatelli also recognises that the body may be susceptible to negative external influences which threaten to sap the body’s energy; for example, sedentary lifestyles associated with long working hours at a desk. In today’s society, most individuals work with their minds as opposed to their bodies. In many cases, she argues, the individual overuses the mind and underuses the body, resulting in an imbalance between the body-mind-self binary. Exercise, i.e., work on the body, may re-establish the balance between this binary pair. The negative energy produced through overusing the mind and ‘underusing’ the body in the workplace may be neutralised by focusing primarily on using the body in the gym. Sassatelli recognises that the experience of exercising may blur the line between body and mind. During periods of exercise, she argues, the individual is not ‘consciously’ focused on becoming distinct from the body by simply ‘governing’ it. This is in contrast to the notion of governmentality embedded in the

‘new’ public health which suggests that exercise is a strategy for individuals to care for their own health. More precisely, individuals are encouraged to exercise their bodies in order to become a healthy individual. But, Sassatelli (2010, p. 186) argues that exercise ‘erases the line of demarcation between the cognitive and affective’. This means that while exercising, focus on the outcome may be diminished and the actual sensual experience of exercising may shift to the foreground.

Sassatelli (2010, p. 195) argues that the notion of embodiment ‘as a dialectic of routine and rupture’ should not be underestimated. The point she makes here is that through routine and discovery of one’s body, gym-going becomes less of a rational choice and more a ‘creative learning process’. Thus, she maintains, fitness discourses may be limited in their ways to shape or influence the self. As she suggests, people do not feel fit or unfit because they read fitness magazines; rather, they feel fit or unfit because of the way they experience/ feel their bodies. Here, Sassatelli differs from Smith Maguire, who primarily emphasises the benefits that exercising yields for the individual. Sassatelli rejects a body that is completely ‘free’ to feel or experience whatever it desires. In fact, she argues, the body does not exist beyond the set of situated social practices that shape it in ‘countless’ but ‘precise’ ways. However, she acknowledges that experiences of one’s body do not occur in isolation but instead are shaped by the socio and spatial contexts that individuals occupy and conversely shape. In Chapter 6, I examine more closely how the notion of space relates to the ways people experience LABFIT.

Sassatelli (2010, p. 186) recognises that there are moments when the individual participates 'as a whole of body and mind'. Nonetheless, she maintains that the self is projected to be more than the body: the latter is primarily conceptualised as an object that needs to be managed and controlled. She argues that once the individual finishes her/his exercising, the body and mind-self are perceived to be different because exercising 'produces' a body that is more efficient, functional, and useful. As a result, the mind becomes stronger and more 'in control'. But, Sassatelli's view of the body is not clear-cut. While on the one hand she insists on a body-mind-self dualism, on the other she supports the notion of embodiment. In other words, she considers dualism and embodiment as co-existing. In her perception, exercising reproduces the notion of a separate mind and body concomitant with the involvement of both.

To sum up, Sassatelli's views regarding the body in gyms is helpful to understand people's negotiation of an 'ideal' body and their making the most of their bodies 'own' 'natural' characteristics. Different from Smith Maguire, Sassatelli conceptualises the body as one's source of energy as opposed to it representing one's class. While, Sassatelli recognises that individuals experience moments of 'embodiment' when exercising in the gym, she insists on a body-mind dualism that suggests one's 'bodywork' is a 'tool' for the self, by extension maintaining that an individual's body and mind/self remain 'separate' entities. In contrast, Nicholas Crossley, a social theorist of embodiment, conceptualises individuals as

‘embodied agents’. His notion of embodiment/embodied agents open ups idea about how the body and mind merge into a symbiotic relationship, particularly during exercising.

Importantly, in Crossley’s opinion, body and mind/self cannot be separated. This means that according to him, an individual possesses a body, but also *is* a body. In other words, the body is not only an individual’s object, but also a subject. More precisely, he states that ‘human beings are bodies’ because ‘there is no mind distinct from the body’ (Crossley, 2005, p. 38). With reference to exercising, and drawing on his extensive ethnographic work on a gym in the U.K., he suggests that the bodily ‘I’ acts upon the bodily ‘me’. In other words, during exercise, an individual not only acts upon her/his body (the possessed body), but also upon the embodied self (the body that one is).

More precisely, he states that motives for joining the gym are not exclusively upon the objective properties of the body, that is, beauty, health, and fitness (Crossley, 2005). He maintains that while these aspects are important, they are not ‘pre-emptive’. Instead, he argues, the ‘lived’ body appears to be more influential in people’s reasons for going to the gym; the ‘feel good factor’ of the workout, the opportunity to relax or let go, and the reactivation of the physical self. Thus, he argues, in order to explore intangible ‘experienced’ factors as reasons why people go to the gym, it is helpful to conceptualise the self as a ‘lived’ body which, for Crossley, is conceptualised through the notion of embodiment; that is, as I have explained earlier, his view of ‘merging’ the body with one’s

self. In other words, whatever the body experiences the self experiences. In short, there is no separate entity of mind and body.

Crossley (2004) further argues that exercising is not simply a form of behavioral patterns. Rather, it is an activity that embodies a 'practical understanding and meaning'. This means that performing an activity that will supposedly modify or shape the body requires the engagement of the embodied self (in other words, the embodied agent). For example, according to Crossley (2004), learning how to swim entails more than performing a set of fixed movements. It is about grasping a deeper understanding of the underlying principles involved such as buoyancy and water displacement. He contends that swimming embodies a particular purpose and - by extension - meaning (that is, staying afloat and moving in a desired direction). The point he stresses is that practices that aim to modify the body are 'forms of shared practical reason which complement and interact with collective representations' (Crossley, 2004, p. 38). In other words, he means practices that aim to shape the body act back upon the agent, or more precisely, upon the body-subject to modify her/him. Here, Crossley (2004) does not differentiate the body from the mind/self. In fact, he aims to show that body modification techniques such as exercising are embodied techniques, which involve a unified individual; that is, a self who is and has a body.

Similar to Smith Maguire, Crossley (2004) also draws on the notion of Bourdieu's habitus, suggesting that the habitus of exercising - or, more precisely, the habitus of a circuit class -

is, in fact, a social structure which not only shapes the activity of the embodied self, but is also shaped by it. It is, therefore, useful to briefly visit the notion of the habitus in relation to exercise. According to Crossley (2004, 2006a,b), the structure of a particular form of exercise shapes the embodied self; but, by reproducing the structure, the embodied being shapes the structure of the exercise. In other words, Crossley (2004) suggests a dynamic, a 'structuring' relationship between the habitus of a social practice (a circuit class) and the individual.

Taking this argument further, Crossley (2004, p. 45) conceptualises the habitus of exercising as 'a structured, structuring structure'. This means that in order for exercise to shape and be shaped by individuals, they must know, in an 'embodied' and 'practical' way, how to do it. What Crossley aims to show is that before exercise can shape individuals, they need to have developed a certain bodily know-how so that they can participate in these activities. For example, if individuals are unfamiliar with the exercise sequence of a circuit class, they interrupt the 'structure' of said class; that is, influence how others in the class experience it. And, at the same time, it affects their experiences of this class. Therefore, I reiterate that Crossley's (2004) reading of habitus emphasises how individuals are required to attain a certain practical understanding of their embodied being in order to shape their bodily 'I'. The fact that the habitus is also a structuring structure means that the habituses of both the individual and exercising (circuit classes) may change over time. For example, when individuals become more familiar with the habitus of the circuit class, they are able to

increase the intensity or weight of the exercises, which in turn shapes the overall ‘habitus’ of the exercise class.

An important contribution Crossley makes is to connect ‘sociality’ with exercising. Similar to other scholars, he suggests that shaping the body by means of exercising can be conceptualised as a form of ‘symbolic interaction’ localised within specific social networks (Crossley, 2004; Monaghan, 2001; Sassatelli, 1999a, b). By drawing on the notion of ‘sociality’, scholars acknowledge that people do not perform their exercises in isolation. This means that if exercising is considered as a type of ‘bodywork’, it is useful to recognise that other surrounding individuals may influence people’s ‘working’ on their bodies. In other words, Crossley (2004) stresses that because individuals exercise collectively in gyms, they need to regulate any mutual interference that inhibits their co-habitation of space. This requires people to interact with each other. Crossley (2006a) further suggests that ‘embodied individuals’ (that is, where affective and cognitive aspects of our being merge) do not exist in isolation: the visible and often invisible/unconscious interaction between ‘embodied agents’ in gyms builds and shapes identities (Crossley, 2006a). For example, he claims that in the case of an exercise group class, the bonds and networks between ‘embodied agents’ can shape the dynamics of the entire class.

The point that Crossley is making here is that the forming of a network of embodied selves shapes the context of exercising, ‘permitting and perhaps even requiring further deviation

from a mechanical repetition of “exercises” (Crossley, 2006b, p. 38). For example, he argues that individuals combine the doing of exercise with the doing of friendship and the doing of moral order (Crossley, 2006a). Significantly, he argues, exercising cannot be considered as purely instrumental for the body and the self. Rather, he insists, there may be a combination of reasons why individuals exercise. Somewhat cleverly, Crossley (2004) manages to weave together his notion of habitus and the notion of social network/sociality by arguing that the ‘network of differential relations’ between agents equally shapes the structure of exercising.

In short, Crossley observes that body and mind cannot be distinguished from each other. He does not view the body simply as a symbol of (Smith Maguire) or tool (Sassatelli) for the individual self. Rather, he maintains that individuals experience themselves through their bodies, acquiring a practical bodily know-how which, based on his notion of embodied selves/ agents, means knowing through one’s know-how of the self. This is why Crossley’s work suggests to study of bodies that feel, for example, pleasure and pain, and that some forms of exercising may have a social nature. He surmises that there may be a sense of self attached to ‘bodily doing’ as opposed to ‘bodily looking’. However, his account is limited in that it fails to explore in more detail how bodies do and experience. In this next section, I turn to the work of geographer Robyn Longhurst, who offers a fleshier version of embodiment in spatial contexts. Her concepts of how bodies’ fleshy materiality has epistemological implications and of how knowledge of bodies in spatial contexts is

produced are useful for this thesis because they offer an understanding of how knowledge may be produced through bodies in space.

Longhurst draws attention to two important points in regards to the notion of bodies and space: first, she argues that traditionally it was assumed that knowledge about space was 'out there'; in other words, ready to be collected from the mind. In turn, knowledge about space was believed by some to be derived from the mind, to be objective, disembodied, and simply ready to be collected. However, the view that knowledge derives from the mind is associated with masculinity (reason and rationality); and, in turn neglects 'body' in space which is traditionally associated with femininity (emotion and irrationality). Since the 1970s, human geographers have found this view to be problematic after recognising that bodies cannot be dismissed in the study of space (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Ley and Samuels, 1978). As a result, bodies have become acknowledged and included in the study and knowledge production of space. However, Longhurst (1997) finds this equally problematic because human geographers often conceptualised the body as completely autonomous, intact, incorporeal and transcendent. So while she stresses that studies of space had started to acknowledge the important role of bodies in space (as part of the production of space), these bodies had masculine features. However, she finds the way bodies have been conceptualised in space in the past unsatisfactory. She argues that knowledge may not be collected from the mind: knowledge arises out of an individual's experience (Longhurst, 2011). More precisely, she argues, knowledge is embodied; that is,

generated by individuals who are located within particular contexts. According to Longhurst, if knowledge is produced through an individual's experience, her view of the disembodied individual is problematic. Viewing the body as complete, static, incorporeal, intact, and in control contradicts her view of generating knowledge through embodiment.

Due to the above problems, Longhurst (2000) opted to study what she calls the 'fleshy' body in space. In other words, she expresses interest in a body that is 'real', i.e., a body that farts, sweats and is, therefore, sometimes uncontrollable and unpredictable, a body that interacts with space and time. By 'fleshy' she means the weighty material part of the body, 'the actual flesh and blood', 'its insides, organs, blood, muscles, veins, arteries' (Longhurst, 2000, p. 306). The reason why she draws attention to fleshy bodies is because traditionally, bodies in geography have tended to be theoretical and discursive. Longhurst's view of the body is productive for this thesis because she brings a 'theoretical' unlively view of the body (see for example, Smith Maguire) to life. Her concept may provide an understanding of how an exercising body is less about discipline and accomplishing a certain look, and more about experiencing the fleshy material of one's body. Longhurst effectively contributes to an understanding of how an individual is able to actively - and in a more 'fleshy' fashion - experience her/his body when exercising.

Similar to Crossley, Longhurst (2009) views a fleshy body as capable of developing an 'embodied knowing'. The point she seeks to make is that the fleshy body constitutes knowledge of the embodied self. By advancing this proposition, she differs, for example, from Sassatelli (2010) who insists on a body/mind dualism which suggests that only the mind can produce knowledge. However, by viewing embodiment as a 'fleshy' affair, Longhurst (2001, 2009) reiterates that the materiality of a body contributes to the production of knowledge. In her view, fleshy 'embodied' beings socially construct space together with the materialness of space. Longhurst draws attention to sensual experiences and body-space relations such as smells, tastes, gestures, reactions, clothing, glances, and touches which, she claims, influence and constitute the embodied knowing. Her argument here is that embodied selves store their experiences in their embodied selves and remember them through their embodied selves. Thus, the notion of a fleshy body that 'feels' pain, sweat, tears, exhaustion, and heat in the gym is not separate from the self.

Another important aspect of Longhurst's (2000, p. 36) work is her view that fleshy bodies consist of fluid boundaries. In her view, the body cannot be framed: its insides can merge with its outsides; an effect she defines as fluidity. This contrasts with the views of the traditional geographers of the 1970s and 1980s, who defined the theoretical as fixed and secure boundaries. Longhurst (2009) argues that a fleshy body does not live in isolation from its external environment; in essence, the body interacts with the space that surrounds it. More precisely, this means that the mind cannot be separated from the body, and that the

insides of the body cannot be separated from the outside. For example, sweat, which originates on the inside of the body, makes its way to the outside, where it becomes visible as sweat stains on one's clothes. Similarly, Longhurst (2000) writes that muscle contractions often produce unpredictable and uncontrollable movements, her point being that bodily insides merge with bodily outsides and space. This is important because the consequences of fluid boundaries are that bodies may not be viewed in isolation. Thus, it needs to be acknowledged that if bodies' boundaries are fluid, bodies shape and ultimately influence each other. It effectively clarifies that there are certain inner bodily processes that permeate the outside body; for example, sweat. In addition, it reifies that fleshy embodied beings are complex, messy, and unpredictable.

To come to the point, as key scholars of gym studies, Smith Maguire and Sassatelli offer a conceptual analysis of ideal bodies in relation to gym-going and exercising. While Smith Maguire employs a Bourdieuan view of the body suggesting that exercising helps a gym-goer to shape her/his 'body-for-others', Sassatelli emphasises bodies' plasticity. By this, Sassatelli means that exercising enables people to utilise their bodies' capacity to improve their performances, thus acting as a source of energy. As a by-product of working with her/his body's plasticity, the body becomes a symbol for the individual, indicating a 'functional', responsible, fit-looking, self. While Sassatelli argues that gym-going is a creative learning process, at the same time she recognises that there are moments when the individual participates 'as a whole of body and mind'. She further maintains that the self is

projected to be more than the body. This suggests that as part of gym-going, the body is primarily conceptualised as an object that needs to be managed and controlled. While both Smith Maguire and Sassatelli conducted limited empirical investigation into how people experience their bodies when they visit gyms, it may be that Crossley and Longhurst's notion of embodiment and fleshy bodies could prove more helpful for the purposes of this thesis. Their writings provide an interesting conceptual basis upon which to analyse how people actually experience and 'feel' their bodies in LABFIT. More precisely, I ask: (1) How do people experience their exercising 'bodies'? (2) How does exercising in LABFIT help people to develop bodily know-how and what does it mean to them? (3) How does 'sociality' affect gym-goers' experiences of their 'exercising' bodies?

## **Section 2: ‘Poster-perfect’ bodies**

During the setting-up phase of LABFIT, the CEO of the organisation recommended putting up some posters showing ‘images’ of stretching poses (see Image 13). The purpose of adding these posters to the ‘spatial’ characteristics of LABFIT was to resemble the ‘setting up’ of other fitness gyms. The CEO was of the opinion that these posters would inform those who were unfamiliar with a gym what they can ‘do’ in a gym space. Based on my own experience, posters that depict examples of how to ‘stretch’ are a common ‘feature’ of gyms. Typically, these posters are displayed either in a separate room, or in a specific ‘spatial’ area designated for people to stretch their bodies. However, from my observation during my time in fitness gyms, people rarely pay attention to these posters. People seemed to follow their ‘own’ exercises/ routines (i.e., different from the examples shown on these posters).

The posters were ‘installed’ on the backs of doors in close proximity to the stretching mats. At first glance, they did not appear to be an important ‘feature’ of LABFIT: (a) because they were not positioned in the centre of the gym where they would be visible to people running on the treadmill or using the weight machines, for example; and, (b) because these pictures ‘only’ depict certain static body positions that ‘imply’ where people ought to ‘feel’ the stretching of their bodies. Thus, trainers in LABFIT hesitate to direct people’s attention to these posters when they are asked for advice on how to stretch. Instead, they typically talk people into the stretching position, performing it simultaneously with them and/or

applying hands on correction; that is, trainers ask people for their permission to touch parts of their bodies in order to help them move their bodies into the correct stretching positions.



Image 13 Stretching posters in LABFIT

The bodies depicted on these posters ‘represent’ what Sassatelli (2000, 2010) terms ‘utopia of plasticity’. In her work, she argues that while bodies have a ‘natural’ plasticity that can be altered with exercise, the fitness industry has created an image that suggests to individuals that they can in fact attain a ‘body ideal’. She notes that fitness magazines, videos and posters display bodies and ‘body techniques’ aiming at persuading individuals that their bodies possess ‘infinite’ malleability. In similar vein, those that I allude to as ‘perfect poster bodies’ communicate to gym-goers that they can stretch and look the way these bodies do. The posters, which aim to foreground the ‘stretching’ exercises, instead convey the notion of what an ‘ideal’ stretching body looks like.

‘Perfect poster bodies’ appear to be young, slim, toned, and show no visible excess body fat on their bodies. The exercises are performed in straight lines, at ‘perfect’ angles, and in ‘perfect’ body positions. In addition, the ‘stretching’ poster bodies seem to be pain free, showing relaxed and happy facial expressions. These bodies do not depict the limitations and difficulties that attendees experience when trying to ‘negotiate’ their bodies’ ‘natural’ plasticity. For example, during my observation in LABFIT, I saw some people ‘desperately’ trying to coordinate their body parts in the right positions; that is, they were re-adjusting their bodies by moving their hands, repositioning their feet, pushing their hips further forward and tilting their heads at different angles until they froze and held their bodies still for a couple of seconds. At other times however, people continued to ‘move’ around, making me question if they even felt the stretch. This is because these ‘static’ stretches

asked the individuals to position their bodies correctly and to hold still for at least 30 seconds so that each could ‘feel’ the stretch in her/his body.

In contrast to my experience with other gyms, people in LABFIT seemed to be turning to these posters on a regular basis. During my fieldwork, I noticed that people did not seem to intentionally embed the ‘stretching’ exercises into their exercise regimes. Instead, they seemed to ‘stumble’ across them; that is, to stop in front of the posters in between their exercises or shortly before they were about to ‘disappear’ into the change room. The level of hesitation that people showed before they moved some of their body parts in order to ‘replicate’ the ‘stretches’ depicted on these posters was evident. People started to ‘experiment’ by moving their bodies into a position that remotely ‘resembled’ one on the poster. However, in my role of ethnographic observer, I noticed that some people either ‘gave up’ after several unsuccessful attempts to find the right position, or managed to ‘replicate’ the position depicted on the poster while not seeming to ‘feel’ a stretch. In the latter case, people’s foreheads were scrunched, their eyes slightly squeezed together, and their bodies ‘wobbly’ and ‘floppy’. This means that people’s bodies in LABFIT appeared less plastic and more ‘fleshy’, showing signs of movement and ‘imperfection’.

In brief, there appeared to be a stark contrast between the ‘perfect poster bodies’ and people in LABFIT attempting to stretch their bodies. Three key observations that I made during my fieldwork suggested: (1) that ‘poster bodies’, despite aiming to act as an example

showing people how to stretch, in fact represent an 'ideal' of a supple, mobile, 'fat free', young looking body; (2) that while people in LABFIT 'used' the posters, they appeared to struggle when negotiating these 'poster bodies' with their own stretching bodies. Unlike Sassatelli (1999b), who suggests that people negotiate these ideals in the gym, that is, 'make' the most of their own bodies, I argue that in the case of these stretching posters, people do not draw sufficient benefit from them. Despite depicting people in LABFIT how to stretch, the posters do not effectively convey the stretches. This brings me to my key observation, (3) that trainers do not seem to use these posters as a resource to assist their supervision or instruction of people. Instead, when people ask for help with stretching their bodies, trainers talk them through the positions step by step and/ or touch their body parts in order to get them into the 'correct' stretching position. This raises the question of whether or not these 'stretching' posters disguise the promotion of a perfectly supple, malleable, young and toned-looking body 'ideal'. In addition, my findings reveal that in order for people to experience a 'stretch' of their bodies it is important that they experience the 'feeling' of a stretch. Therefore, I argue that it is important to investigate how people experience /feel their 'stretching' bodies in a gym. The following section examines more closely how people in LABFIT experience their fleshy bodies when exercising.

### **Section 3: ‘Messy body liveliness’**

I start this section by offering three vignettes of people’s ‘bodies’ in LABFIT, my aim being to provide a glimpse of the ways in which people ‘move’ and ‘dress’ their bodies, and how people ‘socialise’ while ‘exercising’ in LABFIT. These three vignettes depict a typical scene that I observed one afternoon during my fieldwork when a ‘core’ group of four to six employees visited LABFIT. The organisation’s employees work in different departments. But, once realising that they frequented LABFIT on similar days and at similar times, they started to ‘exercise’ together. The first vignette details Marie’s body movements. Marie, who works in the accounts departments of the organisation visits LABFIT every Tuesday and Wednesday. Marie usually exercises with a group of 4-6 people who work in the skin laboratory department. Marie, who is usually the first to arrive at the gym, waiting for her fellow workers on the ‘stationary’ bike.

*It’s a Tuesday afternoon 3.00 p.m. in the ‘box like’ looking gym. In the middle of a room, Marie is ‘leisurely’ cruising on a stationary bike. Her seat is adjusted high and her slim, long, upright posture makes her look like ‘the princess and the pea’ on a bike. Her legs move effortlessly at a moderate pace; her knees look slightly wobbly, and there is little visible muscle tension in her legs. Marie has a ‘big’ smile on her face.*

This brief description suggests that Marie’s fleshy body seemed relaxed on the stationary bike. What is evident is the notion of Crossley’s (2004) ‘lived’ body. Marie does not seem to consciously think about how riding the bike will ‘transform’ her body or self (see Smith

Maguire, 2008a). Rather, what is depicted here is that Marie appears to be in the ‘moment’. She does not seem to focus on the way her body moves or to be inquiring about the ‘ideal’ way of ‘using’ the stationary bike to achieve a ‘healthy’, ‘fit’ ‘body’. Thus, in a way this is in line with Crossley’s (2004) suggestion, i.e., that it is the ‘lived’ body or rather the way people ‘experience’ their ‘exercising bodies’ that ‘makes’ them ‘feel good’ or ‘happy’. Of course, this is also in contrast with Sassatelli’s (2000, 2010) argument that views an exercising body as a source of energy for the body. What the vignette conveys is that for Marie it is less about a function that the ‘exercising’ body fulfills and more about ‘simply’ feeling her body move (even if only at moderate pace).

This next vignette follows on from the ‘scene’ I depicted earlier. This vignette, however, emphasises in more detail the ways people dress and ‘look’ in LABFIT. It thus elucidates a more ‘real’ example of what kinds of bodies visit LABFIT and how they compare and contrast to the ‘gym’ bodies described in the literature. I start by ‘outlining’ Marie’s ‘outer appearance’ and then continue to provide a detailed sketch of colleagues who typically ‘exercise’ with her, for example Christina and Fernandez. Both work in skin laboratory and are in their mid-forties and mid-thirties, respectively. Christina and Fernandez usually visit LABFIT on Tuesdays and Wednesday and exercises with a group of 4-6 people. Despite not being the emphasis of this vignette, I would like to start drawing attention to the ways people interact in LABFIT, a topic I discuss in more detail in Section 4:

*Marie's brunette curly, chin length hair shows some sweaty hair strands sticking to the sides of her cheeks and neck. Her face is shiny, a dewy complexion, lit up by a red, matt lipstick which has worn off a little and is slightly out of line. She wears a white cotton t-shirt that is loose and long, covering half of her thighs as she moves her legs on the bike. She is wearing black cotton ¾ leggings. Her off-white sneakers look sturdy and heavy on her feet. Christina and Fernandez who have arrived at LABFIT to join Marie for a 'WOD' and are warming up on the treadmill. Christina has brown, mid-long hair, put up in a loose ponytail. She wears a grey, fashion t-shirt with a clock print on it, with silver studs forming the clock's hands. Her leggings look like proper gym gear, three quarter lycra tights with a pink stripe on each side running down from her hip to her knee. Her black sneakers, which look modern, are made out of a light-looking, flexible material. Fernandez is short, with little muscle definition. He wears black glasses, has a five o' clock shadow, and short, trimmed hair. He wears a black breathable top and black, nylon, knee-length shorts. His upper back is hunched and his shoulders rounded forward. His black top is stretched around his 'melon shaped' stomach. Both he and Christina have big smiles on their faces. They giggle with Marie on the bike before turning to start their treadmills, continuing to chat and laugh. As the treadmill belts slowly starts spinning, they start speculating about who other of their colleagues will come to the gym within the next 15minutes to join them in their workout.*

What is evident here is that these bodies in LABFIT depict a certain level of 'imperfect' 'exercising' bodies. The ways people dress and their overall appearance in LABFIT are in stark contrast to the 'perfect poster' bodies. For example, compared to the poster bodies in LABFIT, these bodies are neither 'perfectly' shaped nor groomed. Rather, people wear smudgy lipstick and have bodies with 'melon' like stomachs. In other words, people's

bodily contours are not as 'stream lined'/ perfectly shaped as depicted in the stretching posters or in scholars of gym studies' appraisals. Longhurst's notion of 'weighty materiality' helps to illuminate the fleshiness and the 'messy' liveliness of bodies in LABFIT. This suggests that in order to understand what people experience 'with' or 'through' their bodies in this space, it is important to recognise that people bodies are, in fact, 'alive'. This means that more often than not, these bodies are atypical to the 'body ideal' depicted by posters. Longhurst (2001) argues that the messy weighty materiality of people's bodies, including their clothing and their biological bodies (flesh and muscles), shape people's sensual experiences in spaces.

In Chapter 6, I already discussed in more detail peoples' relationships to the space of LABFIT. However in this section, I would like to illuminate that the messy liveliness of people's bodies forms an essential part of the way they experience their 'exercising' in LABFIT. As briefly suggested earlier, this vignette also 'subtly' exemplifies how 'socialising' can be included in the ways people experience LABFIT., the particular ways in which Marie, Christina and Fernandez chat with each other is part of their 'messy body liveliness': that is, they do not engage in 'proper' conversations with each other; rather, they giggle, laugh and joke with each other while 'exercising' or in the process of starting their exercises. this concurs with Crossley's (2004) argument that people's lived experiences in gyms may not be as 'rationally' calculated and focused on 'bodywork' as proposed by some authors in the gym going literature. Instead, as he suggests, people do

not exercise in isolation: they exercise while ‘doing’ friendships. Before discussing his notion of ‘sociality’ in more detail in relation to LABFIT, I discuss the ‘evidence’ and meaning of people’s experiences with their ‘fleshy’ bodies in LABFIT.

### *Fleshy body feeling*

First I turn to Paul because during my field conversations with him, he often described vividly how performing certain exercises make him feel. Paul, is in his mid-thirties, and works in the finance department. He visits LABIFT on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights. Paul usually follows his own exercise routine, which mainly includes strength exercises. He executes his exercises - for example, bicep curls- with great body movement control, focusing on his lower arms flexing and extending.

His answer to my question about his favourite body part is an excerpt from my ‘walk-and-talk ethnography’ with him.

**I like the shape of the chest, how the pecs and delts tie in and when you are wearing a t-shirt or clothes it just feels good. Especially when my chest is pumped, I just like the feeling when the muscles are full of blood and just that...I wouldn’t say bloated but buff feeling.**

Important in his answer is that Paul feels ‘inner’ bodily processes on the outside. In other words, the ‘weighty materiality’ of this t-shirts enables him to connect more closely with the ‘insides’ of his ‘fleshy’ body. Here again, Longhurst’s (2001) notion of sensuous

experiences is helpful to draw upon because it assists my understanding of how people are able to 'experience' their 'fleshy' bodies; that is, the way Paul's blown up muscles 'fill' his t-shirt evokes in him a feeling of 'bodily' satisfaction and/or achievement. Longhurst's (2001) notion of embodied selves suggests that whatever the body experiences, is also experienced by the self. This in effect means that Paul's feeling of a 'buffed' chest does not only connect him more closely to his 'fleshy' body, but transfers to his perception and/or feeling about himself, i.e., the ability to 'feel' his muscles grow or blow up also instills in him a sense of 'power' and 'strength'. Thus, it is important for trainers to understand how people not only 'feel' the 'fleshiness' of their bodies through, for example, swollen buffs or sore muscles but how this fleshy feeling or experience is meaningful because according to Longhurst, one's (fleshy) body is not separate from one's self. More precisely, whatever the body experiences/feels is experienced or felt by the self.

In the following section I draw to sweat as a specific 'fleshy' body experience. In the literature on gym studies, there is little focus bodies experiencing sweat, in part because sweat has been conceptualised as an 'embarrassing' body fluid (Longhurst, 2001; Grosz, 1994; Waitt, 2014) which, when visible on the 'outside' - for example through 'dripping' or stains on clothes - causes embarrassment. However, during my fieldwork, I noticed that people dealt with sweat in a different way from that I was used to in other fitness gyms. While in the fitness gyms gyms, people seemed 'obsessed' about working their bodies. They were typically well 'groomed' and took great care in minimising the visibility of their

sweat by carrying towels at all times and/or wearing specific, breathable gym attire designed to absorb sweat.

In contrast, in LABFIT, I often observed that people embrace their sweat. This means, they did not seem to care for wiping their sweaty faces while they were exercising and often did not even bring a towel to be able to wipe any sweat of their face or other body parts (e.g., arms). So in general, I sensed that for people in LABFIT, sweat was not ‘something’ that they were embarrassed about or wanted to hide from other people in the gym. Instead, during my field conversations, people often described how they ‘like’ feeling sweaty. Of course, this does not mean that everyone who visited LABFIT showed sweat on their bodies. As I describe in Chapter 1 Section 2, sometime people only visited LABFIT to stretch or for a slow pace 15 minutes ride on the stationary bike. Thus, while these bodies were ‘exercising’ they did not experience ‘sweaty’ bodies. In the following section, I explore in more detail how some people experience their ‘sweaty’ bodies and what it means to them.

### *Sweaty bodies*

I first turn to Rachel's view on sweat first because during my field work, I observed that Rachel was one of the members who typically exercised at high intensities, which often results in sweat visibly dripping down the edges of her face, and the appearance of small patches of sweat in the middle of her back. In her mid-twenties, Rachel works in the histology department of the organisation, visiting LABFIT 3-4 times per week. She alternates between following her own exercise routine and asking the trainer to design a 'WOD' (i.e., workout of the day) for her. During her 'walk-and-talk' ethnography, she offered her view on sweat.

**I feel like the more I sweat the better it is for my body. It's like an indicator [of] how hard I have worked.**

Important here is the notion of sweat as an 'embodied' symbol of one's 'body/selfwork'. In other words, sweat signals to Rachel that the work she/her body performs is sufficient to elicit a state of transformation. This is because sweat symbolises the inner working of the 'fleshy' body (Longhurst, 2001). But, it also proves that the embodied self has acted sufficiently upon the body. Instead of regarding sweat as a sign of leakage or as a body that is out of control, sweat may prove a significant tool allowing the individual to enjoy a sensuous experience while working on the embodied self. In addition, sweat acts as an 'embodied symbol' signifying that one's body is 'healthy'. In other words, sweat acts as a symbol that indicates to Rachel that her body/self is healthy. In contrast, notions of 'new'

public health suggest that a 'fit' looking body expresses the health and thus value of an individual. So interesting here is that Rachel's interprets her sweaty body as a sign of her personal health. This suggests that experiencing one's fleshy sweaty body may be important for an individual in order to perceive her/his body/self 'healthy'.

Another gym-goer who regularly showed signs of sweat on her face was Jenna. In her late twenties, Jenna works in the toxicology department. She is a regular attendee at LABFIT usually visiting LABFIT 3-4 times per week for 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Similar to Rachel, Jenna exercises at high intensity, resulting in her body producing 'sweat' which is often evident in the way that her sweat-wet hair is stuck to her cheeks and neck while she was 'exercising' in LABFIT. In this excerpt from her 'walking-and-talking ethnography', I ask her about how she 'feels' sweat. Her account is interesting as it further illuminates the role and meaning of sweat in relation to 'exercising' bodies in LABFIT.

**Silke: How do you feel about sweat?**

**Jenna: It's good. I know I've worked hard and function properly (when I sweat). The other day I [thought I] wasn't sweating; but, then when I looked at my t-shirt, it was sweaty and I felt better about that. First I felt ripped off because I thought I am not as tired as I should be or as I have been. But, then when I saw the sweat I thought I have done alright.**

For Jenna sweat may be expressed in different forms and intensities. Jenna said that initially she did not 'feel' sweaty. But, since sweat acts as an 'embodied' symbol reflecting

the quality of her performed body/self work, the lack of feeling sweaty undermined her perception of her achievement. However, 'seeing' sweat stains on her t-shirts acted as a 'material' sign that replaced the 'fleshy' embodied feeling of sweat. Drawing on Longhurst's (2001) notion of fluid boundaries elucidates how Jenna and Rachel experience the 'hard workings' of their inner bodies on the outside through a 'fleshy' feeling of sweat running down the edges of their faces or down their backs. My field notes suggest that an experiencing a 'sweaty' body is often 'used' as an embodied symbol that 'evidences' their body/self work. My findings extend Longhurst (2001) view in the sense that I show that sweat can be experienced in many forms. While people may not 'feel' the sweatiness of their 'fleshy' bodies, it may be apparent as 'material' signs on their t-shirts/clothing. But, besides experiencing a 'fleshy' version of their bodies through bodily feelings and sweat, I observed as a trainer-ethnographer that people improve the ways their bodies perform exercises. In the following section, I examine the ways in which people improve their bodily know-how by 'exercising' in LABFIT.

#### **Section 4: 'Knowing-how'... to 'exercise'?**

Prominent scholars of gyms studies (see Smith Maguire, Sassatelli, Markula) have discussed exercise in relation to how it can help to 'work' an individual's body. The 'bodywork' that individuals perform in gyms has been contextualised in relation to a certain 'body ideal'. Smith Maguire, for example, writes about body ideal of/for the middle class, whereas Markula writes about discursive body ideals, a subject I discussed in

Chapter 4. What remains under-researched in the literature is how people ascribe meaning to their gym-going, not by ‘transforming’ their body appearance through ‘bodywork’ but through developing ‘bodily know-how’.

During my fieldwork I noted how individuals improved their ‘body movements’; that is, their ability to perform certain movements with more coordination, fluidity, confidence, and body control. For example, I noted that people who were ‘new’ to LABFIT found it difficult to lower their hips into a ‘squat’. Clearly they did not know how to ‘move’ their bodies into a ‘proper’ squat with ‘full range of motion’; in other words, when their hips lowered to become parallel to their knees. People were hesitant, moved slowly, unsure of how to lower their hips and buttocks into a squat position. I often saw a disconnection between people’s ability to control and move their bodies in the way intended. Thus, despite my demonstration of how to perform a ‘proper squat, and despite their understanding of my verbal instructions of how to move their bodies into a squat, they were still unable to perform a ‘proper’ squat.

Similarly, when I asked people to perform a series of lunges, i.e., to put one foot forward while the knee on the other side sinks down and touches the ground, then raise and bring the back foot into line with the front foot, irrespective of age and body shape/weight, some experienced great difficulty maintaining their balance during the ‘lunge’. They were often unable to lower their knees to the ground. However, over time, often during their visits or

after several visits to LABFIT, I noted that some among them developed a better ‘feeling’ for the exercising movements they were performing. That is, they (and their bodies) started to ‘know’ how far to lower their hips in order to position them below parallel to their knees and demonstrated greater stability (that is, were less wobbly) when performing their lunges. During my fieldwork, two people who caught my attention due to the visible improvement in the way they performed their exercise movements were Matt and Neil. I introduced Matt in the previous Chapter wherein I alluded to his use of an exercise logbook. Matt was initially quite shy in LABFIT and tended only to use the treadmill. As time progressed, he started to seek more assistance from the trainer, keen to try out different types of exercises. In the beginning, I noticed that Matt did not seem to trust his body to be capable of performing certain exercises. Working with him as a ‘trainer-ethnographer’, I observed a significant change in the way he approached the exercises I prescribed for him and the way his body executed them. The following vignette offers a more detailed description of Matt’s development of ‘knowing’ how to ‘exercise’ his body in LABFIT.

*In the beginning, Matt looked quite uncomfortable and insecure in the gym. His body was disconnected from the cues he received from me (i.e., from the trainer-ethnographer). For example, I would tell him to shift his weight onto his feet when he was squatting down but when he tried to do it, his body tilted forward, his weight shifted towards the front, and his heels lifted up. So, while he was in a squatting position, his heels were off the floor. In this position, he struggled to keep his chest upright because gravity pulled him towards the floor. He used to squat on his toes with his knees falling inwards. Now he is aware of transferring the weight onto his*

*heels, shifting his body weight backwards and driving his knees out when he squats up. He will correct himself on a squat-by-squat basis and it seems as if he is more in tune with his body.*

What the data shows here is the ‘practical’ bodily ‘knowing’ that Matt acquired through his gym-going experience in LABFIT. In other words, the vignette offers a brief glimpse of the bodily learning process that Matt experienced during his time at LABFIT. As Crossley (2004) suggests, exercising is not simply a form of behavioural patterns; rather, it requires the individual to practically understand how to perform certain exercises. While my observations concur with those of Crossley (2004), I argue that more attention needs to be drawn to how individuals acquire practical knowledge and what it means to them. As evident in Matt’s vignette, while he initially lacked bodily know-how, he finally demonstrated his acquisition of it when he was able to adjust his body into correct bodily alignment and to execute the exercise correctly. For Matt, this ‘process’ involved acquiring knowledge of how to correct himself/his body positioning and movements. Sassatelli’s (2009) thesis has proven useful here: she suggests that often gym-going becomes less of a rational choice and more of a ‘creative’ learning process. Here I do not mean ‘creative’ in an ‘art-oriented’ ‘painting pictures’ kind of way.

In effect, I am suggesting that Matt embarked upon a learning process through and with his ‘body’. I deem it important vis-à-vis the education of trainers that they should understand that bodily know-how - how to perform exercises - is not inherent in every person who

visits a gym. For this reason, it is imperative that trainers assist individuals in their ‘bodily learning process’, guide them ‘step-by-step’ through verbal or perhaps physical cues (that is, ‘touching’ body parts that need adjustment), teach them to ‘feel’ their body ‘learning’, and how to get to ‘know’ their bodies when performing exercises. The key is to not only recognise that people require ‘practical’ knowledge to ‘correctly’ perform certain movements, but also that it involves a learning process to which people can ascribe meaning because they can ‘feel’ more connected to the movements that their bodies are performing. I suggest that this learning process can transport people’s ‘bodywork’ in LABFIT beyond a means of creating an ideal body that expresses their sense of self and class. Next, I provide another ‘glimpse’ of how Matt’s improved ‘body-know’ affected the way he performed his ‘WODs’ (workouts of the day) in LABFIT.

*Not noticeably expressed by his body was his ‘learnt’ attitude towards the ‘WODS’ I ‘prescribed’ him. In the beginning, Matt complained a lot about how difficult the ‘WODS’ were and doubted himself -whether or not he could finish the workout. It was normal for him not to finish a workout and to give up. ‘I am dying’, ‘I don’t think I can breathe’, ‘I think have never sweated that much in my entire life’, were often words he used to express his feelings about his ‘WOD’. Now he no longer complains. He accepts any ‘WOD’ I ‘prescribe’ him and completes it confidently. He is self-sufficient, moves fluidly through the exercises, invests more effort, runs faster, and lifts heavier weights. He also looks more ‘together’, that is ‘in sync’ with his body, and this is expressed in the way he moves, his feeling when his body is misaligned, i.e., when his heels are coming off or when his back is rounding when it is supposed to flat. I still give him ‘cues’ that ‘guide’ him to check/correct his body*

*positions and movements while he is exercising; but, compared to before, he now transfers these cues immediately into 'bodily conversions', expressed in changes of his body position which demonstrate his body's 'know-how' to 'exercise' in LABFIT.*

This description reveals how the bodily know-how Matt acquired transformed the way he performed his 'WODs' in LABFIT. In other words, his 'bodily know-how' affected his 'exercise' experience in LABFIT. Sassatelli (2010, p. 186) suggests that there are moments when people experience exercising 'as a whole of body and mind'. In a sense, this is evident in Matt's account because for him, being more 'in-tune' with his body enables him to perform his 'WODs' more as an 'embodied' experience whereby he exercises as a 'unit' as opposed to only focusing on his body or his mind, thinking about how to execute a certain exercise. In other words, it is the 'bodily knowing' that facilitates his exercise performance. Again, this is an important factor for trainers to be aware of because it will encourage them to develop practical strategies designed to promote the connection of attendees' ability to 'feel' and 'know' their bodies with how they experience their gym-going. Furthermore, the acquisition of embodied know-how presupposes that the boundaries of the body are flexible and changeable (Longhurst, 2009; Sassatelli, 2010). It also presupposes that the fleshy, messy parts of the body are able to learn and 'know'. It is precisely this 'practical and embodied understanding of human agency' that is required to understand how people use gyms, and how knowing and learning through their bodies underpins people's forming of meaningful attachments to gyms (Crossley, 1996, p. 41).

It is the 'feel' that people develop which originates through and in their bodies (Crossley, 2004, p. 46). The feeling of a specific exercise and how to move in this space becomes ascribed with meaning for the individual. In spite of visible bodily transformation of shape, learning through, with, and of her/his body is offered to the individual in the gym. Investigation of embodied experience requires attention to be directed towards things that occur with and in one's body. This includes feelings associated with bodily movement and the body touching space(s) outside (Horton & Kraftl, 2006; Windram-Geddes, 2012). Initially, Matt was new to feeling out of breath, sweating, and to experiencing bodily, fleshy, real sensations in and through his body. He had never been exposed to these feelings before. LABFIT, and his experiences in LABFIT, enabled him to feel the fleshy, exhaustive, sweaty aspects of his body. His learning occurred in an embodied fashion; in other words, he not only learnt through his body, but also about his body. This is particularly important because what precedes embodied knowing is the embodying of learning. Thus, instead of emphasising how bodies acquire knowledge, I argue that embodied learning is a process that is important for the way that the individual experiences his or her body in the gym.

## **Section 5: Socialising for ‘exercising bodies’**

As I briefly pointed out in the vignette in Section 3, there appeared to be a notion of ‘sociality’ when people exercised in LABFIT. For example, Marie, Christina, and Fernandez were pursuing different forms of exercises (e.g., riding on the stationary bike) while laughing, chatting, and debating (i.e., ‘socialising’) with one another. It was apparent that the pursuit of exercise was not a priority; rather it was the socialising that seems to take prominence, i.e., the exercising of the by-product. The following vignette aims to showcase more concretely how socialising is expressed and if all bodies were socialising in LABFIT. It depicts a ‘typical’ scene that I participated in on several occasions during my fieldwork as a ‘trainer-ethnographer’.

The vignette describes the ‘same’ group of people I introduced earlier: Marie, who works in accounts department who exercises together with Christina and Fernandez who work in the skin laboratory department, along with John and Ben who typically exercise ‘alone’ but at the same time as this group. John, who is in his early twenties, works as a blood sample courier for the organisation. He typically visits LABFIT on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the afternoon and exercises for approximately one hour. Ben is in his early thirties and also works as a blood sample courier. He visits LABFIT every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday for approximately 45 minutes.

*I (the trainer-ethnographer) find myself multi-tasking, splitting my focus between supervising the ‘skin-lab group’ and instructing John. I ask John to perform 50*

*pushups and he immediately drops down onto his knees starting to perform the exercise. He grunts and breathes heavily. He is right in the centre of the gym, next to where the people of the 'skin-lab group' are warming up. Despite the number of pushups he performs, and his 'noises', John does not draw much attention to himself. Everyone appears to be doing their 'thing'. Another other guy, Ben, 'swaggers' around, moving from one machine to the other, following his 'own' routine. It feels as if everyone exercises next to each other, without being ignorant or interrupting each other.*

The co-existence of bodies comes through in this data. Although there was no direct interaction between all of the people exercising in the gym, it did not seem that people were 'isolated'. In fact, it felt as though there was what Crossley (2004) terms 'an invisible/unconscious interaction' between the people who helped to facilitate everyone's pursuit of exercise in the gym. In line with Crossley's (2004) notion that people exercise 'collectively' in gyms, I suggest that 'collectively' may not always mean that people either do the same thing in gyms or work as a group. Instead, people do not isolate themselves: they keep walking and 'exercising' around and next to each other. In other words, the people's bodies co-exist in the gym, and this co-existence is managed by unconscious and often invisible interaction that helps people to manage the space collectively. This, in turn, ensures that while everyone feels somehow connected to LABFIT, they pursue their own 'agendas'.

Crossley (2004) refers to specific ‘social networks’ that exist in gyms, the ‘skin-lab’ group being one example of such ‘networks’. Within their group, there appears to be a level of sociality whereby ‘socialising’ becomes a part of their ‘exercising’. While I resist claiming that people exercise to socialise, I suggest that members of this group socialise for the purpose of exercising. In other words, social interactions such as chatting, laughing, and making fun of each other assist the group to keep exercising. The follow-on from the previous vignette further depicts the ‘social’ interactions in LABFIT, particularly within the ‘skin-lab’ group.

*I then walk into the centre of LABFIT telling the ‘skin-lab’ group to stop warming up. I gather everyone around me and explain their ‘WOD’. Everyone listens attentively and, upon my signal, starts working on their allocated exercises. Christina moves confidently, powerfully executing the movements in a controlled and steady manner. Others, like Fernandez, move tentatively and often look around to copy their colleagues. After a couple of minutes, chatter starts to emerge amongst the group. They jokingly and humorously state how difficult the exercises are, how much they are hurting. But, they also share words of encouragement with each other. For some of them, it is hard to keep up with the exercises and to stay focused. For example, Fernandez often stops during the movements, especially when I am not looking. But concomitant with their ‘socialising’, everyone seems to be exercising hard and sweat is starting to appear on their faces and arms, especially on their hair. As time passes, bodies in the ‘skin group’ show more signs of fatigue; but, they are also getting more active and louder, resembling a ‘little’ zoo of ‘exercising’ ‘sweaty’ bodies. There is a lot of chatter and laughter but also moaning about the duration and intensity of the ‘WOD’. Once the time is up – the*

*amount I had prescribed for the 'duration' of their 'WOD' - I hear a big sigh of relief. After a couple of minutes of refilling their water bottles, everyone from the skin-lab group sits on the mats, in front of the mirror, chatting, laughing and stretching their bodies. Still breathing hard, their faces look sweaty, their bodies look tired, all tension is gone, their posture collapsed - relaxing with subtle smiles on their faces. It feels as if the zoo 'bodies' have gone to sleep.*

At the centre of this vignette are 'socially exercising' bodies. The gym-goers' socialising of their bodies assists them to keep 'exercising'. In other words, it is the ordinary social tactics that people deploy in this group that constitute a 'specific social network' which shapes their exercising in LABFIT. Crossley (2006b) argues that it is through these networks that people 'deviate' from the mechanical repetition of 'exercise'. Socialising while exercising provides a distraction from one's 'bodywork', which in turn allows people to ascribe meaning to exercising beyond 'working' on their bodies. In similar vein, the sociality of 'exercising bodies' may also assist the others' 'bodily learning process'. For example, whereas Christina demonstrated powerful, capable body movement, Fernandez was easily distracted and 'struggled' to perform the exercises with correct form. However, I suggest that the socialising of 'exercising bodies' also has implications for how bodies can 'learn' from each other. In other words, socialising may enable people with little 'bodily know-how' to 'learn' from bodies with 'developed' bodily know-how. This will contribute to trainers' education in the sense that it will encourage them to group people with various degrees of bodily know-how together in order to set up a 'bodily learning' process. Thus,

despite the fact that socialising is frequently conceptualised as a ‘distraction’ from an individual’s ‘bodywork’, it may in fact be an effective strategy to help people ascribe meaning to their time in LABFIT other than in pursuit of a ‘bodily’ ideal.

Furthermore, the socialising of ‘exercising bodies’ contrasts with the bodies depicted on the ‘stretching’ posters. Stretching, on the posters, is depicted as a solitary activity free from the influence of other people’s bodies. It draws the attention to one’s own body, its plasticity and appearance. Hence, when people use these posters as a guide to learning how to stretch or ‘exercise’, they find that they depict an unrealistic reality of what actually occurs in the gym. As the vignettes in this chapter show, people’s bodies are fleshly, sweaty, messy, and co-exist in LABFIT. This means that bodies visibly - and sometime invisibly - interact and learn from each other. Thus, when attempting to understand what it means to people who go to LABFIT, it is essential to recognise that socialising ‘exercising bodies’ become connected (albeit often only unconsciously) by sharing space in LABFIT.

## **Section 6: Conclusion**

In this chapter I drew on my interviews and field notes to focus on people’s ‘exercising bodies’ in LABFIT. In my previous experience with fitness gyms in the past, I found that people were predominantly focused on working in ‘isolation’ on their bodies’ appearances. During my fieldwork as a trainer-ethnographer at LABFIT, I was able to investigate in more detail how people’s bodies moved, dressed, socialised and ‘learned’ in LABFIT. First,

depictions of ‘poster perfect bodies’ misrepresent the reality of how people (can) stretch their bodies and what they look like when stretching. Most of the extensive ethnographies on gym studies (see Smith Maguire, Sassatelli, and Markula) have discussed the role of fitness magazines or videos in relation to people’s motivations and reasons for exercising. Smith Maguire has conceptualised fitness magazines as effective technologies designed to influence an individual’s discipline to continue to exercise. Markula, in her earlier work, investigated how the ‘discursive’ body ideals portrayed by the media affect people’s reasons for participating in aerobics. However, the literature has under-researched how these ‘poster bodies’ compare to an individual’s experience of her/his body in the gym. In addition, the research has neglected to investigate how gym-goers make use of the posters and how trainers draw on these posters pedagogically. My analysis of my fieldwork shows that while these ‘stretching’ posters aim to depict how to stretch, they simultaneously suggest a certain ‘utopia of plasticity’ whereby it is conveyed to individuals that everyone ‘can’ and ‘should’ look like ‘poster’ bodies when they are stretching.

However, there is a strong disconnect between these poster perfect bodies and the ‘fleshy’ ‘exercising’ bodies who experience LABFIT in messy lively ways. In other words, my data shows that bodies’ weighty, fleshy materiality is, in fact, an influential factor in how people experience their ‘exercising’ in LABFIT. The reality is that their bodies are not perfectly shaped, their bodies are not perfectly toned, and their exercises are not performed with ‘perfect’ control and alignment. Familiarity with Crossley’s (2004) notion of embodiment

and Longhurst's (2000) notion of a body's weighty and fleshy materiality is thus essential to understanding people's experiences with their bodies. As Crossley (2004) points out, one's self is not separate from one's body, meaning that if an individual attempts to replicate a stretching pose that the 'perfect poster body' shows, she/he may feel inadequate (a) about not being able to feel the stretch; and, (b) about not resembling the person depicted in the poster. A key finding of my data is that people experience lively, fleshly sweaty bodies in LABIT and that the experience is messy rather than perfect. As well, my data reveals that people are able to experience the fleshiness of their bodies. This is an important finding because it explains that while visible changes to one's bodily appearance may often be absent, people are able to *feel* change 'inside' their bodies. This indicates that the mind and body cannot be viewed as separate entities, especially in relation to an exercising body. Rather, as my data demonstrates, people are connected to their fleshy bodies and this connection is particularly meaningful because it conveys to the individual that her/his body is transforming.

Another key finding that concurs with Longhurst's (2000) notion of bodily boundaries is the role of sweat. In contrast to the existing literature (Grosz, 2001; Waitt, 2013; Longhurst, 2001) my data reifies the fact that sweat is an essential embodied symbol that is utilised as an indicator by the individual to monitor and evaluate her/his 'body/self work'. By analysing sweat through the notion of 'new' public health, it can be conceptualised as an indicator that an individual's body is healthy and working properly, which in turn confers

value on the individual. In other words, ‘displaying’ sweat assists the individual to ‘show off’ that she/he has been exercising at sufficient intensity to maintain a healthy, fit body (Sassatelli, 2010; Fusco, 2006). Building upon Longhurst’s notion that sweat is an essential part of people’s fleshy embodied experience, my data shows that sweat is expressed in various forms. People may not always experience sweat running down their backs; it may be more subtly evident on their shirts, for example. In other words, it is important to raise trainers’ awareness that people can experience different forms of fleshiness and that it may not necessarily always be a ‘correct’ indicator of someone’s intensity and duration of individual ‘bodywork’.

A further key finding appertains to Crossley’s (2004) and Longhurst’s (2001) notion of ‘embodied knowing’. Gym studies have predominantly emphasised the meaning of exercising from the viewpoint that the body is (among other things) a ‘tool for the self’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a), a source of energy for the individual (Sassatelli, 2010). There has been little focus on the meaning of ‘embodied learning’. While Crossley (2004) argues that individuals need to acquire practical know-how before exercising, he has under-researched the processes connected to acquiring this bodily know-how. My data shows that people in LABFIT are often ‘disconnected’ from their physical bodies. They have little bodily ‘feeling’ that enables them to perform certain exercises with correct form and correct ‘bodily alignment’. As a trainer, I saw people struggling through their ‘WODS’, not ‘knowing’ how to do certain exercises properly. Thus, my data is helpful because it

indicates that people do, in fact, develop bodily know-how; thus, it is important for the trainer to assist with strategies that enable ‘embodied’ learning. This means acknowledging the notion of ‘fleshy messy liveliness’ of bodies in LABFIT because it is imperative that trainers help people to ‘feel’ the correct position or movement. Apropos of this argument, it is, therefore, questionable if (and how) pedagogically effective ‘stretching’ posters realistically assist ‘bodies’ to learn. In the last chapter of this thesis, I offer specific strategies to enhance trainer’s understanding of ‘exercising’ bodies, and provide recommendations vis-à-vis how to deal with the messy, fleshy, sweaty lively reality of ‘bodies’ in gyms. My data supports the reality that bodies co-exist in LABFIT: they do not exercise in isolation. In essence, there is a certain level of sociality between bodies that helps people to both negotiate and use the gym’s space. Drawing on Crossley’s (2004) notion of ‘sociality’, my analysis confirms that social networks can be formed in LABFIT, i.e., that ‘socialising ‘exercising bodies’ constitute these networks. The thesis shows that bodies do more than simply ‘exercise’ or socialise: they socialise for the purpose of exercising. Not only do socialising bodies encourage each other to keep exercising, but they can also facilitate embodied learning by transferring information from one to the other.

To sum up, exploration of the role of ‘exercising’ bodies in LABFIT suggests that ‘bodywork’ is not necessarily performed in a structured, neat, isolated fashion. This means that gym-going bodies do not exercise in isolation; rather the ‘bodywork’ that bodies perform is influenced to varying degrees by other bodies. Sometimes bodies socialize while

at other times they work around each other. Nonetheless, what is interesting in this chapter is that gym-going in LABFIT constitutes collective, messy 'happy' bodies. The following chapter investigates in more depth how 'exercising' bodies act and interact within the 'space' of LABFIT.

## Chapter 6: LABFIT ‘Space’

In Chapter 4, i.e., the first data chapter of this thesis, I examined how people deploy gym ‘technologies of the self’ to help them to operate on their own bodies, memories, minds, thoughts and feelings, and, by extension, to attain a certain state of being and create a certain relation to their selves. In Chapter 5, the second data chapter, I explore more closely representations of bodies on posters and compare them to the ‘reality’ of ‘exercising’ bodies in gyms. Furthermore, I look at different aspects of embodiment and what types of ‘bodywork’ people perform in LABFIT. In this last data chapter, focus is upon the ‘space’ of LABFIT. The thesis is centred on understanding what it means to people to visit this organisational gym, it is therefore essential to investigate in more detail how people produce and ‘perceive’ this space.

When I first started as a trainer at LABFIT, I sensed that its space differed from the spaces I had earlier experienced in fitness gyms. As I observed in Chapter 1, Section 1, from my experience, spaces of fitness gyms were always similarly structured. In general, one found a spacious large gym floor with an infusion of cardio and strength machines such as treadmills and leg presses; separate rooms for groups classes, e.g., step aerobics; and, separate rooms or ‘areas’ for free weights. Invariably one could hear loud music thumping in the background, and saw several TVs positioned in the large gym floor area screening an array of programs such as music, sports or entertainment. However, when I first entered the

LABFIT space, it seemed different. Of course it resembled a fitness gym, a fact visible in the similarity in the gym equipment. But, there were a number of obvious spatial differences. First, LABFIT was located in the basement of a large organisation complex. Second, it was secured: only employees of the organisation were able to enter LABFIT using their employee-swiping cards. Subsequently, this meant that only employees of the organisation were able to use this gym. Third, LABFIT consisted of one rectangular 98m<sup>2</sup> sized room only which resembled a small box (see Image 14).



**Image 14** View upon entering LABFIT

Besides these ‘structural’ differences, during my fieldwork I noted that people tended to socialise more than attendees of fitness gyms I had observed in the past. As I suggested in Chapter 1, Section 1, in fitness gyms, people appeared more ‘private’: there was usually less social interaction between members of fitness gyms. I noted that everyone focused primarily on their own ‘bodywork’ and only engaged in secret ‘body gazing’ as a form of silent and ‘opaque’ interaction. While people were performing their exercises, ostensibly only concentrating on their own moving bodies, at the same time they occasionally looked at other’s bodies and their performances. But, despite this secret ‘body gazing’, people appeared to exercise in private despite being surrounded by other people. Thus, I observed little socializing compared to that which I had observed in fitness gyms in the past.

In contrast, in LABFIT, people opt not to perform their ‘bodywork’ in isolation: nor is their ‘bodywork’ primarily centred on transforming their bodies into ‘ideal’ shapes. As I maintained in the previous chapter, people in LABFIT often socialise to exercise; and, as a result, one finds a collective messiness of bodies. Take, for example, employees who work in different departments and only know each other from visiting LABFIT. Often they engage in ‘casual’ conversation, or ask how their fellow ‘workmates’ training or work is progressing. Some perform their ‘WODs’ (i.e., workout of the day) together. I also observed that some people not only focused on working on their bodies, but seemed to be engrossed in certain types of gym equipment. Some contemplated their ‘exercising bodies’ in the mirror: others simply chatted, either to the trainer or to other members. Despite

gaining a more detailed insight into the ways people experience their ‘exercising’ bodies’ in the gym, in this chapter I was interested to explore how people’s individual understandings of ‘space’ in LABFIT contributed to the meaning they ascribed to their gym-going. However, before I draw on my ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies/field observations/ conversations as a ‘trainer-ethnographer’ to elicit a more in-depth understanding of how people use the space of LABFIT, I will first revisit the work of key scholars of gym studies and their conceptualisations of gym spaces.

### **Section 1: Conceptualisations of fitness gyms**

Gym spaces are an essential component of people’s gym-going. As Table 6 shows, these spaces can vary, for example in relation to the particular structure and services offered. This thesis compares and contrasts LABFIT with fitness gyms, which are known for their common spatial characteristics (such as space division for group classes, weights and cardio machines). Some scholars of existing gym studies concentrate on various elements to distinguish gym spaces, such as gyms’ clientele, services offered, décor, lighting, and the overall size of the gym (Smith Maguire, 2008a) whereas other scholars focus more on the production of gym spaces (Andrews, Sudwell & Sparkes, 2005; Vertinsky, 2004; McCormack, 1999). The latter claim that gym spaces are constituted by a dynamic interplay between, for example, spatial characteristics, embodied agents and the specific gym-going practices that these embodied agents perform

**Table 6 Landscape of modern gyms**

Features/Types	Fitness gyms	LABFIT (i.e., organisational gym of investigation)	Gyms/ Studios focused on one type of exercise (e.g., boxing, yoga, crossfit)	Health clubs, wellness/ centres, fitness centres, hotel gyms
<b>Sex</b>	Unisex (female only fitness gyms exist but are in the minority)	Unisex	Unisex (certain types of exercise traditionally have a greater appeal for single gender, for example boxing for males)	Unisex
<b>Membership</b>	To be paid on a regular basis; for example, fortnightly or monthly. One day memberships are possible but rare (membership fees typically vary depending on the length of the contract, size and services offered)	Free of charge; user must be an employee of the organisation and complete a medical history and physical activity questionnaire, and measurement of blood pressure	To be paid on a regular basis, for example, fortnightly or monthly: single or multiple day member passes are common	To be paid on a regular basis; for example, fortnightly or monthly: single or multiple day member passes are common (or for free if used by hotel visitors)
<b>Focus</b>	'bodywork': fitness/fit 'looking' bodies, body shaping, body transformation	A space available for employees to use	Skills work: improvement of functionality and appearance of the body	'bodywork', well-being, fitness, relaxation
<b>Target members</b>	General population	Employees of the organisation	Individuals who are interested in a particular element that the type of exercise offers e.g., individuals who are interested in stretching choose yoga or pilates	Typically individuals from a higher socio-economic status (Except for the YMCA or fitness centres that are run by universities)
<b>Structure &amp; Services</b>	Large gym floor with multiple strength machines often divided into machines targeting specific body parts. For example: back area, leg area, arm area; cardio theatres, free weights; and, multiple rooms for group classes such as yoga, zumba, spinning	One large room with a variety of strength and cardio machines and an area with aerobic mats for stretching or other floor work, such as abdominal exercises, and some free weights	Typically one room wherein classes of the specific type of exercise are conducted including the equipment needed. For example, aerobic mats or other props.	A gym floor including multiple strength and cardio machines, sometimes a room for group classes such as spinning, pilates or body pump. A swimming pool, sometimes tennis, badminton, and squash courts. Sometimes, massage and/or physiotherapy services are offered
<b>Trainers</b>	Gyms typically recruit multiple trainers who are available for members to hire at extra cost for one-on-one training at the gym	A trainer is available during open hours. Supervises, monitors correct techniques when attendee is exercising; assists with exercise programming & constructing	A trainer conducts the class	Trainers are available to supervise; and limited numbers of trainers are available to hire at extra cost for one-on-one training
<b>Opening hours</b>	Typically 7 days a week 5.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. (opening hours vary slightly depending on location and size)	Monday-Friday 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m.; 3.00 p.m. to 7.30p.m.	Limited opening hours: classes run usually for 1 or 1.5 hours in the morning and at night	Typically 7 days a week 5.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m. (opening hours vary slightly depending on location and size)

I first return to Roberta Sassatelli, who studies fitness gym spaces in Italy and Britain. In my study, LABFIT is an organisational gym which has different but also similar characteristics to Sassatelli's fitness gyms. A significant difference between fitness gyms and LABFIT is that the former '[are] typically open to everyone who has the cultural competence and the economic capital to act as a consumer' (Sassatelli, 1999a, p. 229). Simply put, fitness gyms attract individuals who are interested in - and able to pursue - the type of "bodywork" that these gyms offer, and who are able to afford the fees charged for membership. LABFIT offers a range of weight machines and cardio machines, is only open to the employees of the organization, and significantly is free of charge.

The fitness gyms that Sassatelli studies are spatially divided into two main types of 'bodywork': machine training (cardio or weight lifting equipment) and 'gymnastic' exercise (e.g., aerobics, step-aerobics, yoga, stretching), activities which are conducted in group classes. Her research reveals that the gyms consist of multiple rooms and areas separating members' preferences vis-à-vis 'bodywork' and their respective interactions in the gym. In contrast, LABFIT comprises one big rectangular room: there are no separate rooms in which to conduct gymnastic group classes. This means that while people 'perform' different kinds of 'bodywork' in LABFIT, they are doing so in the same 'physical' space. For example, while some people are running on treadmills, others are performing 'walking' lunges up and down the length of LABFIT behind the treadmills; or, some people stretch on mats while those next to them perform squats. This means that within LABFIT, people performing different kinds of 'bodywork' at the same time. In other words, it is more

difficult to structure LABFIT space according to different kinds of ‘bodyworks’. This in turn creates a certain mixture of atmosphere in LABFIT. While some people lift heavy weights, others are stretching or running and it seems to appear all at the same time in one ‘physical’ space’ Instead of providing ‘obvious’ ‘physical’ space divisions’, LABFIT provides a small stretching area, different types of machine work, with weight lifting equipment and cardio machines ‘sharing’ the space (see Image 15).



**Image 15 Space distribution in LABFIT**

A core theme in Sassatelli's work is that spaces in gyms are 'locally organised' (1999b, p. 2). In particular, she understands local organisation through the 'spatiality and the interaction rules operating during training' (Sassatelli, 2010, 34). For her, these are the fundamental building blocks that constitute gym spaces. Sassatelli uses the term 'spatiality' to denote the different space divisions and respective 'materialistic' characteristics of the gym. She argues that 'every gym offers different and distinct spaces of body exercise' (Sassatelli, 2010, p.7). Distinct spaces are 'space divisions' which commonly divide machine and aerobic exercise training. In these space divisions, 'the time of the exercise becomes a concentrated time' wherein individuals focus on a specific task which is condensed in its 'own exclusiveness'. Within space divisions, training becomes a central focal point and external matters such as work or family matters are distilled.

A gym's spatiality also refers to its distinct material characteristics, which facilitate individuals' transition to - and experience of - a world that is separate from their 'everyday lived reality'. For example, through the use of space, light and decoration, every gym organises its own distinctive ways, differentiating itself from the 'everyday world' to the 'exercise world' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 229). As well as emphasising gyms' spatiality, Sassatelli argues that gym spaces are organised by interaction rules. This means that gym spaces are shaped by the rules that dominate individuals' actions and their interaction with others in the gym. These 'tacit and ceremonial' regulations are 'implicit scripts for participants to show through body demeanor, glances and speech, their mutual respect or relative position' (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 43). In other words, interaction rules determine how

individuals conduct themselves in the gym, their demeanor, and their behaviour towards other members. Inscribed on the interaction patterns of people, these rules often occur in embodied forms such as ‘postures, feelings and mood’ (Sassatelli, 2010, p.44). According to Sassatelli (1999b), these rules are important because they form the ‘social environment’ of gyms. That is, they influence how social relationships are structured and managed in the gym (between oneself, with other people, and/or the gym instructor). In essence, Sassatelli (2010) suggests that gym spaces are not only constituted by equipment or bodies; but gym spaces are also social spaces. Here, a key finding in Chapter 5 was in similar vein to Sassatelli’s arguments, in that it suggests that gym-going to LABFIT is partly about socialising for the purpose of ‘exercising bodies’ and that LABFIT is constituted by a fleshy sociality.

Spatiality cannot be effectively isolated from interaction rules, mainly because space divisions and their respective material characteristics instigate and shape interaction rules. As discussed earlier, machine training and gymnastic exercise are typically spatially divided: both space divisions are organised by different sets of expressive behaviour. By ‘expressive behaviour’, Sassatelli (1999b) means interaction rules that are comprised of both verbal and bodily signals aimed at other participants. For example, in the case of gymnastic exercise classes, time is collectivised due to the simultaneous reproduction of movement. Consequently, the space of a gymnastic class is ‘all invested by exercise’ (1999b, p.7), according to which participants follow and imitate the instructor’s movements.

In contrast, machine training individualises time and space: it is produced through mutual 'inattention' (1999b, p. 12). This means that unlike in a classroom, the continuation of the exercise lies within the individual to 'isolate from others and focus on a personal sequence' (p.7). Thus, the 'collectivisation' and 'individualisation' of time enable gym-goers to observe a certain exercise rhythm that is 'officially prescribed' in the gym's space, which maintains coherent interactions within space divisions in gyms. In other words, the interplay between spatiality and expressive behaviour produces a 'well-structured environment' (1999a, p. 156) that helps members to negotiate their way through the gym and its respective space divisions, knowing how to act and interact.

A key interaction rule that shapes the local organisation of gyms are 'rules of glance management'. By this Sassatelli (2010, p. 237) means rules that determine 'how glances are passed and exchanged, as well as how they are handled when resorting to verbal justification'. In the event of a non-prescribed glance, both males and females may verbally defend themselves with a trivial, often ironic comment which may help to render their glances 'neutral and innocuous' (Sassatelli, 1999a, p.12). Using a mirror to observe the bodies/movements of others is typically avoided, being regarded as inappropriate behavior in the gym. Such restrictions ensure a 'measure of discretion and sober informality' for gym-goers. Sassatelli adds that during gymnastic exercise and machine training, eye contact is typically avoided, ensuring that participants may experience a level of security and ease in the gym. This is in line with my observation in fitness gyms, where I realised that people were trying to keep it secret that they are looking at other people's bodies and

performances. It was more about gazing at their bodies as opposed to making eye contact and potentially start a conversation. Sassatelli further explains that the rules of glance management filter body specifications, lessening any likelihood of individuals being 'sexualised' or 'racialised'. She suggests that this leaves the individual free from judgment by others in the gym. Similarly, Sassatelli argues that the avoidance of eye contact partially removes desires - for a 'better body' or for the body of another - in gym spaces.

Sassatelli contends that locally organised interaction rules assist gym-goers to filter 'body ideals'. In the current literature, gyms are predominantly thought of as spaces wherein people 'work' towards a specific body ideal (Markula, 2011, Smith Maguire, 2008a, Frew & McGillivray, 2005). In contrast, in a very important move, Sassatelli argues that body ideals play only a small role in people's engagement with the gym space. Invariably regular members 'are able to get involved in physical activity, to feel at ease, to find ways of enjoying what they are doing well beyond the objectives which have brought them into the gym' (Sassatelli, 2010, p.15). Members tend to enjoy their time at the gym because they follow shared interaction patterns. But, at the same time, Sassatelli argues that time at the gym cannot be described as a time free from all regulation.

Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi (1982), Sassatelli (2010) suggests that people experience a kind of involvement in the gym which is similar to play but with inscribed interaction rules. This means that the gym is neither a free play nor completely unstructured zone wherein everyone can make her/his own rules. Rather, it is an organised environment which is built

around shared interaction rules. For this reason, the more people adhere, conform to and internalise these rules, the more they will feel secure enjoying a measure of discretion and sober informality in the gym. This in turn, Sassatelli argues, enables them to concentrate on themselves in an attempt to improve their respective exercise performances.

With reference to the interaction rules, Sassatelli views gyms as protected spaces (Klein, 1993; Wacquant, 1995; Monaghan, 1999). By this she sees gyms as separate worlds wherein individuals ‘take a break’ and are ‘cut off from normal life’. Rules such as glance management, along with other tacit and ceremonial rules that apply during training, allow the individual to exercise in an ‘environment’ that filters any ‘external noise’ emanating from the ‘outside’ world. She argues that when exercising at the gym filters all distractions, including one’s attention to one’s own appearance, ‘gym-going’ has the characteristics of a ‘world-building activity which generates its own world of meanings’ (Sassatelli, 1999a, p. 7). In other words, it enables people to produce their own world in gyms, separate from their everyday lives.

Sassatelli (1999a, 2010) argues that individuals are able to let go of their external roles and immerse themselves in the ‘gym world’ without external attachments. She explains that interaction rules help individuals to remove themselves from their external roles and to experience a break from their everyday life. For example, her ethnographies reveal that gym-goers employ rules of ‘role-distance’ or ‘deference’ whereby they are able to let go of their identities or professional roles in the change room and immerse themselves in the gym

world. Sassatelli further contends that in many ways gym spaces are ‘artificial environments’. By ‘artificial’ she suggests that these spaces are not based on spontaneity: its functionality is to organise and regulate the individual’s experience in the gym. This means that their particular spatial arrangements make time spent in the gym ‘purposeful’ and ‘useful’. According to Sassatelli (2010, p.43), ‘their interiors are often quite carefully planned, equipment is to be used in certain ways, and spaces are organised quite obviously to facilitate specific courses of action’. In other words, fitness gyms provide ‘environmental’ resources including equipment, space, different training modalities and trainers in order to succeed as ‘specialised’ institutions.

Personal trainers represent another constituting factor of fitness gyms spaces. Smith Maguire (2001, 2008a) argues that personal trainers help to produce the gym’s personality through their demeanor and interaction with members. In her ethnographic work on the fitness field in the U.S., Smith Maguire (2008a, p. 149) found that personal trainers ‘served as instructors, motivators and status symbols for their clients’. Their services are typically not included in the membership. This means that if members seek the help of a personal trainer, additional fees are charged. This is different from LABFIT where a qualified trainer is always present and available to all attendees during the opening hours. The trainer - LABFIT gym-goer relationship is different from the ‘fee-based, paid service relationship’ in fitness gyms because in LABFIT, the trainer is available for every LABFIT gym-goer to ‘use’ or seek assistance from. Consequently, the trainer in LABFIT often performs a combination of supervising gym-goers, providing one-on-one assistance, or designing

workouts for people who wish to work out with a colleague. However, similar to trainers in fitness gyms, the trainer at LABFIT fulfills ‘many of the same roles as other therapeutic experts – listening, counseling, and advising, providing support’ (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p.174).

According to Smith Maguire (2008a, p.150), personal trainers often establish ‘quasi-relationships in which fitness instruction [became] blurred with gossip, cheerleading, and coaching as the trainer continues to motivate the client to pursue his or her fitness goals’. Without intervening, trainers indirectly manage the participants’ conduct in order to facilitate their motivation and maintenance in the gym. So rather than compelling people to exercise, personal trainers use their ‘governmental mode of authority’ to influence, inspire, instruct and mobilise gym members to exercise (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 170). In the process, trainers employ ‘energetic performances’ lending members their attitude towards exercise (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p.173). Here Smith Maguire suggests that personal trainers embody a motivating and exhilarating attitude towards exercising. Their energetic performances are expressed through their smiley faces; erect postures, and energizing gaits. So through their provision of motivation and instruction, personal trainers help members to feel a sense of ‘belonging’, by extension reifying their roles in the production and maintenance of gyms. Thus, Smith Maguire’s maintains that interaction between trainers and members produces gyms as motivational spaces. Trainers’ emotional investment in their roles of motivators underpins the formation of their ‘affective relationships’ with clients in gym spaces.

According to Smith Maguire, a gym's 'personality' is also constructed through its clientele, who 'furnish' the gym with its 'social atmosphere'. Here Smith Maguire infers that a gym's 'social atmosphere' is not created by isolated individuals, but rather through members' demeanor and their interaction with each other. She further suggests that social interaction with others may also act as a support mechanism to help members continue to exercise. So despite the 'individualistic nature of gym exercises', Smith Maguire argues, the gym, with its social atmosphere, may create opportunities for social networking and interaction. Lastly, Smith Maguire maintains that a certain social atmosphere can act as a facilitator to sustain attendees' gym visits. In outline, she argues that a gym's personality is fundamentally produced by an assemblage of its members, décor, the demeanor of its trainers, and lastly by the manager and organisation of the gym. In other words, an empty club has no personality at all.

## **Section 2: Gyms and the 'production' of their spatiality**

In contrast to Smith Maguire and Sassatelli, geographers profile the body, embodiment and body movements as key producers of space (Andrews et al. 2005; van Ingen, 2003; Lefebvre, 1991). For example, Andrews et al. (2005) study a small privately-owned gym from the perspective of fitness geography. Their observational study captures the interrelationships between space, body and the ways the body exercises. In their attempt to conceptualise the production of the gym they suggest that the gym 'is much more than a physical setting or container and has roles and meaning far beyond its physical existence and function' (Andrews et al., 2005, p.888). In other words, space is produced and bodies

play an important role in its production. They argue that members do not only physically interact with the gym equipment when they visit the gym, but also interact with (or at least are impacted upon and negotiate) the ‘personalities in-situ’ and their behaviour patterns. Additionally, Andrews et al., (2005) argue that the social interaction of and between members is influenced by specific codes of conduct, rituals and attitudes.

They observe that the gym turns from a ‘fitness’ gym into a ‘bodybuilding’ gym during weekday evenings. This means that the character of the gym changes because individuals who perform fitness exercises, such as running on the treadmill, visit the gym during the day; whereas in the evening, the gym is visit by individuals who primarily perform bodybuilding exercises, such as heavy weight lifting. This is an important point as it emphasises that gym space can change over time. At different times, the gym attracts different types of people, bodies and demeanors; and, by employing different interaction rules, rituals, attitudes and exercises, the gym transforms into a different space. Andrews et al. (2005) conceptualise the gym as ‘micro-geographies’, that is, divisions of space according to the body and type of customer. They argue that while ‘these divisions are partly a result of physical layout and planned designed features, they are also produced by [the] social order’ (Andrews et al., 2005, p. 886). Thus, by inscribing different social interactions on different spatial areas gym spaces are characterised by different spatial divisions and their respective interaction rules. Andrews et al. (2005) also suggest that, gyms’ material characteristics cannot be separate from their social characteristics. In essence, they maintain that both (i.e., material and social characteristics) interact in a

dynamic interplay and produce space. In contrast, a geographer who focuses primarily on the material characteristics of gym spaces and how these influence people's 'bodywork' and behaviours in gyms, is Patricia Vertinsky.

Vertinsky investigates the relationship between gyms' architectural design and its influences on the movements and experiences that occur 'inside' a gym. She focuses on gyms that are representative of the traditional architectural design of gyms, a model significantly influenced by French modernist Le Corbusier (1925). According to Vertinsky (2001), Le Corbusier's viewpoint is that a gym's architecture ought to reflect what it means to be masculine; to embody force, competence, to occupy space and to have a physical presence in the world. In other words, the architectural space of gyms 'echoed a particular version of masculinity' (Vertinsky, 2004 p. 12). Gyms had to complement the 'Newtonian view of the body as a machine, being a machine for training the body' (Vertinsky, 2004, p. 83). For example, focus on building the gym like a 'giant machine', 'a house of cement', 'iron and glass,' 'without curves,' focusing on 'light and space', 'right-angled' corners and 'bold geometric patterns' represented all that was male (Vertinsky, 2004, p.64). This gender-dominated approach in turn led to men dominating gym spaces because the architectural space resonated with their masculine characteristics. As a result, they felt empowered, safe, and consequently shaped the social interaction rules.

Thus, Vertinsky is making an important point about gender and how gyms are constitutive of the power relations created by their architecture. Power relations construct rules

resulting in certain members feeling more or less empowered and, by extension, comfortable in these spaces. The different power relationships embedded in gyms are a product of their distinct spatial arrangements. In effect, the 'architectural space' of a gym, its planning, design, and construction create these power struggles and thus influence its social relations and interactions. Bale and Vertinsky (2004), arguing that the physical environment cannot be isolated from the social interaction produced in the space, regards the architectural space as the 'bedrock' of social relationships. Vertinsky (2004, p. 26) state that 'form shaped space and in turn, space gave shape to social relations'. This suggests that architectural space entails behaviour qualities that produce and influence social interaction in the gym. For example, the architecture of modern sports training was host to the masculine culture in which the spatial rules of sport had been defined and developed. Drawing on Eichberg (1993), Vertinsky (2001) argues that this has led to a distinctively male version of sport as a planned and regulated activity which, in turn, transfers into men's behaviour in gyms. In fact, men frequently have a sports agenda (the urge to be competitive with others) embedded in their personalities; to be in it to win, and, in effect, to claim space for themselves.

Vertinsky (2004, p. 67) argues that gyms 'deliberately express stereotyped gender roles in [their] spatial arrangements'. For her, 'architectural space is [neither] neutral nor transparent' (p. 77). Instead, it has contributed to constructions of gendered identities. Arguing that since their beginnings, gyms have always been involved in the construction of sexed bodies, she adds that there is a 'dramatic difference in space and facilities for

women's and men's affairs, causing power differences in social relationships' (Bale & Vertinsky, 2004, p. 39). For example, she claims that a gym's architecture has the 'power' to influence the ways a woman experiences and feels the space. Because gyms were traditionally built by and for men, women in gyms feel often 'out of place'. In contrast to Andrews et al., (2005) who suggest that gyms are often conceived as spaces wherein people (particularly men) feel 'homely', Vertinsky argues that this often results in feelings of 'homelessness' for women. However, Victoria Boynton, a linguistics scholar suggests that space can also be 'sacred' and 'protected' for people.

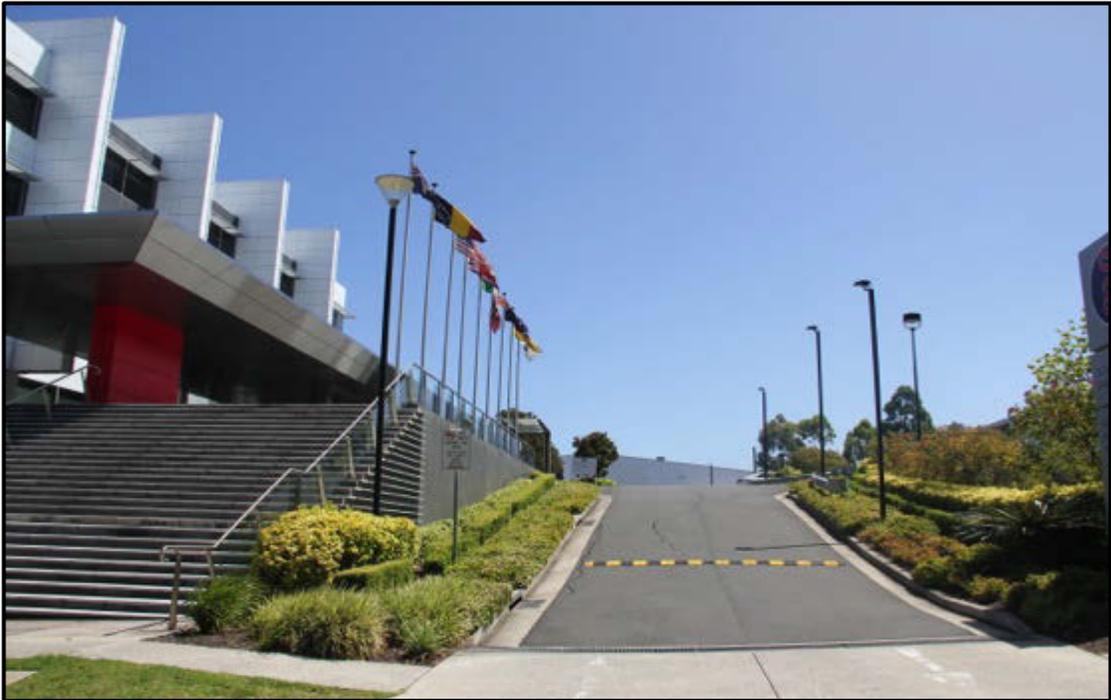
Boynton (2010) conceptualises the yoga studio as a sacred, protected space. Within these spaces, people are encouraged to relax and release any commitment to external roles derived from everyday social expectations. Boynton contends that women in 'busy worlds' experience 'busy minds', which often ignore the body. She argues that the expectations of women in relation to their social and work lives increase and that they need practices, spaces, and communities to detach from their 'everyday' minds. According to Boynton (2010, p. 117), the yoga studio acts as 'a container' where participants can experience a 'mindless' body, a space where 'thoughts fall away'. Because I am interested in understanding how people perceive LABFIT space, and how their perception of space contributes to their meaning of gym-going, I am particularly interested in Boynton's explanation of how the yoga studio becomes a protected space for people.

Here, Boynton argues that the little details that make up the interior of yoga studios facilitate the 'construction' of a sacred, protected space for women. For example, she hints at the incense, bronze Buddhas, and prayer rugs that customarily furnish yoga studios, a form of décor strikingly different from Vertinsky's (2004, p. 118) description of the traditional architectural design of gyms. In the yoga studio, women create their 'own narrow spaces' using mats and blankets. She suggests that their self-created spaces become 'grounding containers' which enable individuals to be more in the present as opposed to thinking about past or future events (Boynton, 2010, p. 118). A critical Boynton's writing is that the individual creates her/his own 'space capsule', which is separate and private as well as connected to all of the other spaces in the yoga studio. The effect of her writing is that individuals constitute their 'own' space by having a separate mat and blankets which helps them indicate and feel that it is their protected, private space. It is in their 'space capsule' that Boynton suggests individuals are facilitated to draw attention to their bodies as opposed minds. However, an important point in here writing is that she stresses that their 'space capsules' are still part of the 'collective' space of the yoga studio. In other words, I do not interpret her to mean that people create spaces in yoga studios which are completely sheltered and isolated. In fact, similar to Sassatelli, Boynton's writing implied that time in the yoga studio is somewhat collectivised because people are performing the same type of exercise (i.e., yoga). However, where Boynton's argument differs is that she argues within the collective people also create their own 'space' capsule, where they can focus on their own bodies, without being completely isolated from other people around them.

This raises questions about how does LABFIT space compares to the conceptualisation of space and gyms in the literature discussed above. How do people constitute and perceive space in LABFIT and what does this space mean to them? Do people create different spaces for themselves during their time in LABFIT? And, if so, how they create them? Lastly, do specific body types can change the ‘space character’ in LABFIT? Before I attempt to answer these questions in Section 4, I first offer a detailed description of the exterior and interior spatial characteristics of LABFIT based on the assumption that it is one’s first time visit to this gym. In doing so, I aim to bring LABFIT more ‘alive’ in this thesis. My description of LABFIT space draws on my experiences as a trainer-ethnographer and my interactions with ‘new’ members of LABFIT.

### **Section 3: ‘Imagine it is your first time visiting LABFIT’**

Driving up the little hill past the gigantic entrance of the company, which resembles a 5 star hotel tower, one has little idea of what is hiding around the corner on the side of the building (see Image 16).

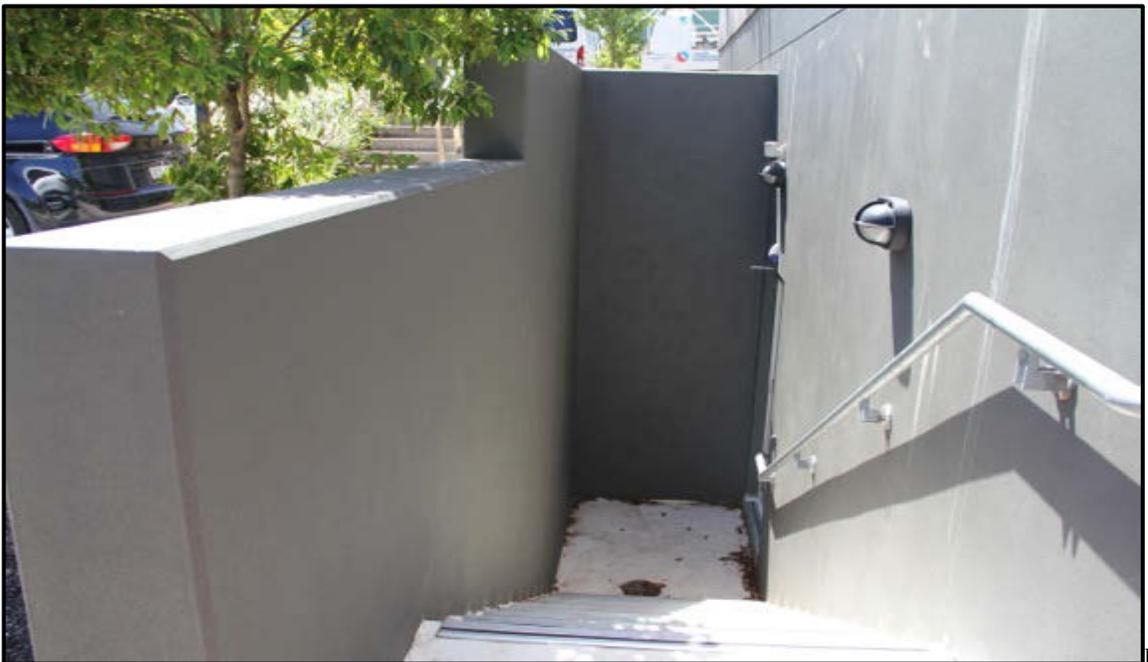


**Image 16 Drive way up to the organisation complex building**

Walking past the side of the company building, a sidewall emerges, which builds the foundation of a slippery, often covered-with-leaves, ‘twelve step down’ staircase. However, unless employees of the organisation have been to LABFIT before, employees walk past the wall without even noticing that it leads to a staircase (see Image 17). There are no signs that hint to the entrance of LABFIT, which is located in the basement of this enormous, prestigious company complex of a gym. There is no intriguing, welcoming entrance that entices one to walk down those stairs in (see Image 18). However, if one decides to descend the rather gloomy staircase, a glass door appears at the bottom, offering a relief of bright light.



**Image 17 Sidewalk that 'surrounds' the staircase to LABFIT**



**Image 18 Staircase to LABFIT**

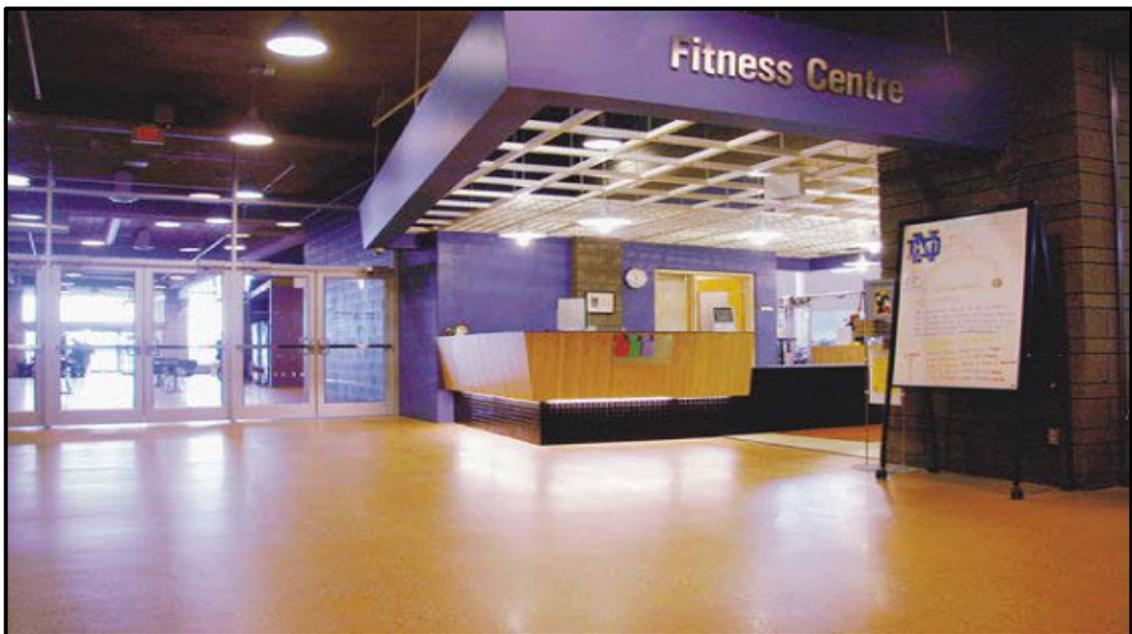
Once standing in front of the glass door, the prospective attendee sees a glimpse of what is inside this space. That is, one sees a small (98m<sup>2</sup>) yet spacious organized room housing ‘typical’ gym equipment such as treadmills, cross trainers, a rower and weight machines. There are two horizontally posted A4 paper signs; the top one communicates the operating hours of this room, while the bottom one cautions people not to enter until the trainer is present (see Image 19).



**Image 19 Signs on entrance door of LABFIT**

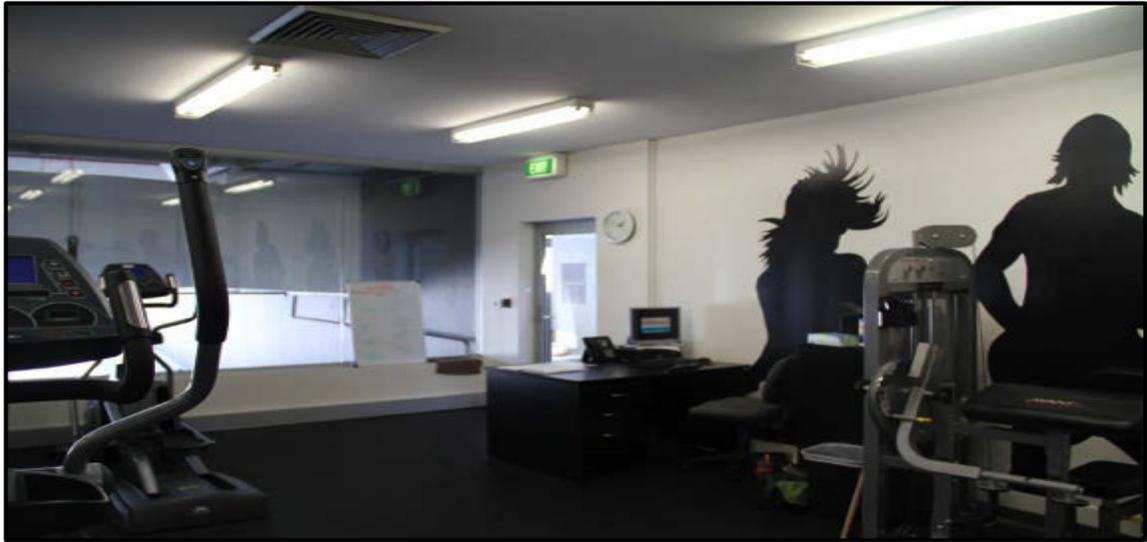
The instant obstacle that confronts employees after ‘daring to come down the gloomy staircase is the opening-act of the door because the door to this bright and different-looking

space does not open easily. A personal company swipe card is required to gain access. It often happens that employees are so excited to have finally found the gym that their fellow co-workers have talked about, that they try to force open the door open and become disappointed when they realise it will not open without first inserting their swipe card. Once they manage to press their card against the little receiver next to the glass door, and are patient enough to wait for the green light and beep sound, they are able to step inside this bright space. This ‘entry process’ is significantly different from entering the fitness gyms that I have described in Chapter 1, Sections 1 and 3. In fitness gyms, anyone who is interested or owns a membership can ‘freely’ access these spaces by walking into the ‘open’ reception area of the gym (see Image 20).



**Image 20** Open entrance of a fitness gym

As a trainer I noticed an instant feeling of relief is palpable: the employee has finally ‘made it’ into this new and different ‘little world’ inside their organisation. The faces of the new space entrants are childlike, happy and excited; the newcomers have overcome their fear of the unknown, of location, experience, and of the people inside. However, they are still a little unsure about how to behave in this space and what to do. In contrast, employees who regularly visit LABFIT show a sense of social and bodily confidence in entering this space. They know what to expect; that is, they ‘know’ how LABFIT is furnished, organised and they ‘know’ what they ‘do in this space; for example, they must get changed, approach the trainer, ask for a ‘WOD’ and start exercising whereas employees ‘new’ to LABFIT space need to orientate themselves first because they need to become familiar with interaction rules in LABFIT and establish their own rituals .Once they make it through the door, they often glance towards the trainers’ desk, which is located next to the entrance (see Image 21). Sometimes, the gym trainer sits at the desk (for example, when people at LABFIT are preoccupied with pursuing their ‘own’ exercise regimes); other times, the trainer walks around the gym, supervising, correcting or assisting gym-goers’ exercise techniques. When ‘new’ members enter LABFIT, the gym trainer welcomes them and explains how to use LABFIT; e.g., how to sign in and out of the logbook, and where to get changed.



**Image 21 View of the trainers' desk in LABFIT**

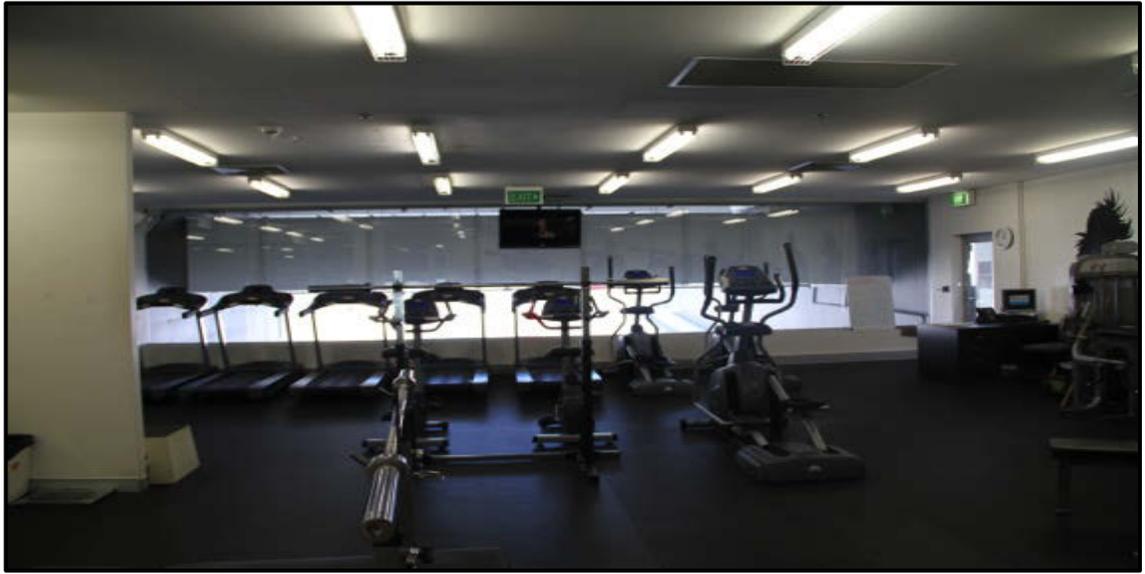
Often, 'new' members do not know where to look first. They are too busy trying to absorb as much as possible of the space, which seems so different from their daily surroundings in the company. There is a row of five treadmills on the left hand side facing the front windows. In the far right hand corner is a rower. Adjacent to the rower is a stretching area with gymnastic mats and weightlifting machines against the left side-wall, and a bench press in the middle of the left hand side of the room in front of the weightlifting machines (see Images 22-24). Between the treadmills and other cardio machines, one can see a little aisle signaling where the change rooms, water fountain and lockers are located.



Image 22 Back wall of LABFIT



Image 23 View from the back of LABFIT



**Image 24** View of cardio equipment in LABFIT

Before I offer four ethnographic descriptions of Nadine, Vera, Paul, and Sean and the ways they ‘use’ LABFIT space, I briefly introduce them:

**Nadine** is in her early thirties and works as the executive assistant to the laboratory manager in the organisation. She does not like the idea of going to gyms and being in pain. Nadine only makes ‘guest’ appearances at LABFIT when special occasions are on her agenda; for example, a holiday. During her occasional gym visits, she usually approaches the trainer to guide her through an ‘exercise routine’.

**Vera**, is in her mid-forties, works in the finance department. As a regular attendee, she visits LABFIT three times per week. Vera predominantly uses the treadmill and typically runs for 45 minutes. Occasionally, after her run she performs a couple of strength exercises with free dumbbells. She stays for approximately 60 minutes.

**Paul**, in his mid-thirties, works in the finance department. He visits LABIFT on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights. Sometimes he and Neil lift weights together. Paul usually follows his own exercise routine, which mainly includes strength exercises. However, he often engages in conversation with the trainer to inquire about their lives, training, and any advice on specific exercises or supplements. For example, one time Paul asked the trainer her opinion of fish oil tablets.

**Sean**, in his early thirties, works in the biochemistry department. A previous state rowing champion, body builder, and mixed martial arts athlete, Sean is finding his way back into training after an injury-induced break. He visits LABFIT irregularly (mostly at night). Some weeks he visits LABFIT everyday, others he does not use it at all. Sean typically exercises intensely for around 30-45minutes. Occasionally, he approaches the trainer to inquire about some specific exercise training questions. For example, one time he asked how to ‘work’ his neck muscles. Other times, Sean pursues his own exercise routine.

The reason why I selected these four participants for my ethnographic description of LABFIT space is due to their specificities of ‘using’ LABFIT space in particular ways that resonated with aspects of how key scholars conceptualise gym spaces. In the following section, I am interested in exploring how four ethnographic space descriptions contribute understanding to how LABFIT ‘space’ compares and contrast to the literature on gym space? And more specifically, how do people constitute and ‘perceive’ space in LABFIT, and what does this space mean to them? I also ask if people create different spaces for

themselves during their time in LABFIT? And, if so, how they create them? Lastly, do specific body types can change the 'space character' in LABFIT? I first offer the ethnographic space description of Nadine which depicts how one who claims to generally dislikes gym spaces, turns her visit in LABFIT into productive and somewhat enjoyable time.

#### **Section 4: LABFIT and energy spaces**

*As the clock ticks 5.05 p.m., Nadine, a 30 year-old, vibrant, smiley and fashionable Asian woman walks through the door. With a big smile on her face, she turns to face the trainer sitting at a desk and cheekily smiles at her. Nicole, the trainer, congratulates her for making it down to the gym after a 6 month break. Nadine, who claims that she hates the gym, only seems to appear when there is a special occasion coming up. Her last period of 'gym going' lasted six weeks in the lead up to her 'big thirtieth' birthday trip to the U.S. This time round, she is heading to Bali for a mini vacation. She jokingly tells Nicole that she is heading off next week 'so this session will have to do'. Before she leaves the trainer's desk, she chats with Nicole for another five minutes or so.*

*Nadine changes into black tights and a rather loose-fitting t-shirt. She has put her hair up into a ponytail, and she resembles a little schoolgirl who hates physical education class but knows she has to attend anyway. Despite Nadine's self-confessed hatred for the gym, she tries to be enthusiastic about her upcoming workout. Nicole sends her for a warm up on the rower. Nadine has been told to row 500m. While she is rowing, she appears to concentrate and tries to make an effort more than initially anticipated from her. After reaching 500m, Nadine establishes eye contact with Nicole and slowly walks back over to the trainer's desk. Her walk resembles a stroll paired with evident hesitation to slow down her feet. Rolling her*

*hands into the end of her t-shirt, she approaches the trainer. Nicole writes down her 'WOD' on a piece of paper. Nadine's demeanor gives out mixed messages: While on the one hand she is complaining about the pain she anticipates the workout will elicit, on the other, she is smiling, laughing and having a good time with Nicole, constantly joking about how much she hates working out. Despite the discomfort she claims to experience during the workout, Nadine loves being sore and hurting the next day. 'I want to be sore, at least I know I did something', I would be disappointed if I wasn't sore tomorrow'.*

*After Nicole explains the workout routine to her, Nadine self-sufficiently starts to perform the exercises with intention, concentration and focus. After ten minutes or so, Nadine starts to look tired and bored; but, Nicole's encouragement keeps her going. It seems as if her motivation and care for Nadine transfers energy to Nadine's body, helps her to complete the workout. In other words, buoyed by the investment of Nicole's energy, Nadine appears to remain focused on her performance. After she finishes her routine, Nicole high fives Nadine and asks with a big smile on her face 'How did you go?' Nadine, giving an exhausted smile, replies: 'It was tough'. Nicole, looking surprised that Nadine is keen for more work, suggests finishing with some sit-ups. Nicole sits alongside Nadine, encouraging her to keep going with her sit ups. With a big sigh, but resisting complaining, Nadine finishes off her sit-ups and stays seated. Answering Nicole's question about how she liked the session, Nadine seems satisfied with her effort but 'extremely glad it's over'. Nadine warns her that she might hurt tomorrow. But, Nicole reassures her, saying that she doesn't mind the pain of soreness afterwards. 'In fact, I would be pissed off if I wasn't sore, that's good pain - at least you know it was worth it'. In response to the question of whether she will come back more regularly, Nadine is very clear on this point. 'No. Don't get me wrong, I had fun with you today, but no, I don't need the gym. All in all, it's no fun for me'.*

*After ten minutes or so, Nadine slowly gets up and reaffirms to Nicole that she is finished now. 'I am tired, time to eat'. Still wearing her gym clothes, but with her big bag in her hand, she walks back over to the trainer's desk, thanks Nicole, takes a final look around, says goodbye to anyone she knows in the gym, smiles, swipes her card, pushes the door open, and, without turning back one more time, leaves the space that she had fun in today, but generally hates.*

Nadine's focus is on the co-production of an energy space that involves Nicole, the trainer in LABFIT. Nadine dreads going to LABFIT; indeed, she dreads attending gyms in general. For her, gyms are spaces that cause her pain and require her to work in 'isolation'. However, what is evident in her narrative is that during her visits, she transforms LABFIT - a space of initial dread and 'hatred' - into a temporary space of excitement. Nadine does not resent being in LABFIT. Rather, she turns LABFIT from a 'dead' space into a 'productive' space for her, evidenced in the degree to which she concentrates and focuses on her 'prescribed' 'WOD' once she commences her exercise. It seems as if Nadine 'forces' open a 'new' productive space for herself in order to 'make the most of' her time in LABFIT. Nicole's 'energetic performances' are critical to her co-production of an energy space (Smith Maguire, 2008a). What is important to note in Nadine's ethnographic description is the role that the trainer plays. Smith Maguire (2008) argues that trainers' energetic performances turn gyms into motivational spaces; in effect, they 'lend' their energy and attitudes towards exercise to their clients. However, what Smith Maguire under-researches is how gym-goers and trainers co-produce 'energy spaces' and the degree to which trainers' energetic performances are an essential part of this production.

Take, for example, Nicole's reaction to Nadine's performance when the latter starts to struggle. In her role of trainer, she 'projects' an energy into Nadine that enables the latter to continue to exercise. On another occasion when Nicole high fives Nadine, again exchanging 'energy' via the clapping of their hands, she rewards Nadine with symbolic 'praise'. Also, Nicole's support is evident when she sits next to Nadine, assisting her by mere virtue of her presence and interest to complete her sit-up. A trainer can, in fact, produce multiple energetic performances that help to constitute the energy space between gym-goer and trainer. What I am suggesting here is that Nicole is able to transfer her energy onto Nadine. In saying this, I do not infer that Nicole has no energy left; rather, I mean that Nicole's demeanor towards Nadine assists the latter to feel a sense of motivation and enjoyment when exercising in LABFIT.

The energy space that Nadine and Nicole co-create changes the character of LABFIT space for Nadine. Here, I draw on Andrews et al., who argue that a space's character is produced by the interaction between bodies, people and demeanours. They argue that because there are different people at different times with different bodies and demeanours in gyms, the characters of gyms spaces differ. Rather than arguing that the entire space character of LABFIT changes, I suggest that the constitution of an energy space bolstered by Nicole's energy in effect alters the way Nadine 'uses' - and her temporary perceptions of - the LABFIT space. Instead of feeling 'lost' in space and not knowing what to do, Nadine is able to turn her time in the gym into productive 'bodywork'. And, while the energy space between herself and Nicole enables her to 'fit' in, other gym-goers are able to observe the

‘emotional’ connection between Nadine and her trainer. But, while other gym-goers observe how Nicole’s energetic performances boost and support Nadine’s work-outs, some among them who may also feel ‘lost’ in the gym, may feel ‘left out’ or isolated due to the energy that Nicole expends on Nadine. Conversely, it may be that other gym-goers are happy to ‘feel’ isolated or ‘ignored’ because it enables them to focus on their own individual energies needed to perform their exercises. It is, however, interesting to note that energy spaces can be temporarily constituted in gyms by the expenditure of individual energy. Often, it may be that trainers impart exhilarating or emotional energies to which gym-goers connect. It is this ‘connection’ that facilitates the production of energy spaces in which individuals feel positive about and confident in the energy ‘transferred’ onto them. In turn, it helps them to ‘enjoy’ and feel ‘productive’ in the gym. However, while energy spaces are especially important for individuals involved in their construction, one needs to be mindful that these energy spaces can change the atmosphere in a gym. For example, if Nicole invests too much individual energy into her energetic performances for Nadine, other members may feel that they are not ‘welcome’ in LABFIT, or that this space is solely about the energy space between Nicole and Nadine.

In the following section, I provide an ethnographic space description of Vera. Vera, who seems unaffected by the energy space between Nicole and Nadine, blends into LABFIT seemingly ‘minding’ her ‘own’ space.

## **Section 5: LABFIT – in space and yet out of space?**

*It's 6.20 a.m. Two ladies in their mid-fifties are walking at a slow pace on the treadmill. The door clicks open and Vera, a very slender-looking lady in her early forties with short hair walks in. She may as well be an elite athlete. Dressed in Adidas attire from head to toe, she epitomises a fit, athletic-looking person. Vera does not seem to have any time to spare: she only briefly glances over at the treadmills before signing into the logbook. She appears to be friendly, yet she is quiet and reserved. She looks like she is on a mission. She walks straight over to the hallway, her work attire packed in a suit bag hanging over her shoulder. She puts her bag down, then briefly disappears in the direction of the bathroom and returns with her headphones in her hand. Plugging them into her ears, she purposefully walks towards the treadmill on her far left without hesitation and looks around the gym. From this particular treadmill, one can see cars entering the car park, whereas people driving into the car park cannot see who is using the treadmill. Vera and the treadmill seem so familiar and private together. She appears to know the correct 'code' to operate this machine. She runs as if no one else is in the room, staring out the window, maybe looking at her own reflection, maybe looking through it. Her head does not tilt left or right. Her stride is forceful, powerful and full of determination. There is no visible sign of fatigue on her body. A strong, upright position and controlled breathing dominate her running. The sound of her spinning treadmill creates the background music of the gym.*

*The door opens and another member walks in. Vera does not react. In her world, nothing has happened, nothing has changed. The member looks over to the trainer, asking how long Vera has been on the treadmill. The trainer replies thirty minutes. Seemingly impressed, the member walks across to the toilet block to get dressed. Without any precursors, Vera jumps off the side of the treadmill, steps down, and walks over to the water fountain. With her headphones still in place, and her eyes*

*fixed firmly on the water cup in her hand, she slowly walks back to the treadmill. No heavy breathing, no sweat dripping from her body. Exhibiting control, she steps back on the side of the treadmill, which is still running. Placing the foam cup in the holder on the treadmill, Vera moves back onto the belt of the treadmill. Her feet move firmly, her look is focused and determined; there seems to be only her, the treadmill, and this space. Sixty minutes on the dot have passed and Vera slowly reduces the pace of the treadmill, stepping slowly down. Taking the cup with her, Vera, seemingly untouched by her achievement, again walks over to the water fountain, fills up her foam cup, and disappears into the toilet block with her suit and handbag. Emerging a few minutes later, with her short wet hair, and dressed in a thin, red woolen cardigan, white blouse and black dress pants, and carrying her handbag, she walks to the trainer's desk with a smile on her face. While still seemingly disinterested in her surroundings, Vera thanks the trainer, and says 'have a good day'. Looking relieved, happy and satisfied, she swipes her card, pushes the door open, and disappears into the dark.*

My ethnographic description of the way Vera 'uses' LABFIT shows that she aims to blend into LABFIT space; she visits LABFIT to 'feel' that she is left alone as opposed to socialising with other people. Vera appears to construct her own 'perceived' space which incorporates the treadmill. Here I am building on Boynton (2010), who argues that people's yoga mats and blankets assist them to create their own - what she alludes to as - 'space capsules'. Boynton (2009) suggests that specific material things help people to constitute their own individual spaces in order to enable them to 'find' and feel their bodies in the present moment. However, Boynton stresses that while individuals construct their own 'space capsules', they are still connected to the 'collective' space of the yoga studio. She further maintains that due to the collectivization of the space, i.e., the collective practice of

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yoga with other participants intensifies an individual's spiritual practice of experiencing the body. In contrast, Vera's constructs her 'own' perceived 'space capsule' to protect her from anyone and anything around her. In other words, for her it is more about experiencing a sense of space that 'isolates' her from both work and home and less about experiencing a 'mindless' body. Critical to her usage of LABFIT space is the fact that she employs the treadmill as a 'space capsule' maker. The treadmill enables her to 'mark' her physical 'territory' and, by doing so, she constitutes a 'perceived' space for herself within LABFIT.

Besides using the treadmill as a 'perceived' 'space capsule' maker, Vera deploys two specific interaction rules that assist her to constitute her 'space capsule' in LABFIT. First, by plugging in her earphones, Vera 'tacitly' communicates to others in LABFIT to leave her alone and to refrain from speaking to her. In other words, the earphones signal that she is unavailable for any kind of social interaction. Second, her demeanour specifically expresses that she wants to use LABFIT in a 'private' fashion. Her combination of directing her gaze straight ahead, not tilting her head left or right to see what other people are doing, and keeping her eyes fixed on the display of the treadmill assist her to construct and maintain her 'perceived' 'space capsule' wherein only she herself matters.

Vera's usage of LABFIT space is in contrast to the socialising 'exercising bodies' I discussed in Chapter 5. What I am suggesting is that collectivization and individualization are not exclusive in LABFIT mainly because this organisational gym only consists of one rectangular 98m<sup>2</sup> sized exercise area. This requires people to perform different types of

‘bodywork’ next to each other at the same time. According to Sassatelli (1999b), different types of ‘bodywork’ are typically spatially divided and each space division is organised by different interaction rules that are comprised of both verbal and bodily signals aimed at other participants. As a result, she argues, individualisation and collectivisation of time prescribe a certain exercise rhythm which influences the social organisation of space. Here, my data builds on Sassatelli’s argument in the sense that Vera’s ‘self-constructed’ ‘perceived’ ‘space capsule’ is part of the social space of LABFIT. In fact, Vera is in and yet out of LABFIT space.

In the next section, I show how Paul creates multiple spaces for himself through different kinds of interactions he performs in LABFIT. In contrast, to constituting an intimate, private ‘space capsule’ like Vera, Paul seems to move through a variety of different spaces.

## **Section 6: LABFIT and ‘space dipping’**

*It is 6.00 p.m. The door clicks open and Paul, a man in his mid-thirties, walks in with a big smile on his face. He is already dressed in his gym gear, wearing washed-out black track pants and a loose fitting brown t-shirt with a crocodile print on it. His first glance goes to the bench press. He walks over to the trainer’s desk and starts a friendly conversation. Nicole and Paul talk about their day, what they have been up to, and how their training is going. Paul does not seem to be in any hurry. He seems happy just to be there. After ten minutes or so, Paul walks calmly but purposefully over to the bench press. He lies down and warms up, using just the bar. After ten repetitions, he places the bar back on the rack, sits up, and looks at himself in the mirror. His eyes do not wander; he looks straight at himself, leaving me wondering what it is he is looking at or thinking of. Eventually, he slowly gets up and puts some weight plates on the bar. His movements are controlled, calm, and he carries a certain peaceful energy with him. He lies back down and performs more lifts. In the meantime, Neil, Paul’s co-worker, walks in. After he returns the bar to the rack, Paul sits up again and sees Neil approaching. He seems excited, smiling and reassuring Neil that he has just started.*

*After putting his bag down on the bench in the hallway, Neil joins Paul at the bench press. They now take turns and encourage each other. Neither loses sight of the mirror while they are sitting up, resting, and eventually putting more weight plates on the bar. But, they are still engaged with each another, chatting about their workouts, their progress, and debating what weight plates to put on next. So, there is a shifting between looking in the mirror, chatting, and focusing on the exercise. After they each reach their maximum performance on the bench press, Paul leaves Neil on the press and wanders over to the free weights. On the way, he stops by the trainer’s desk and starts another casual conversation with Nicole. He asks what she recommends for aching limbs. This leads them into a conversation about*

*supplements and sore muscles. As the conversation draws to its natural end, Paul walks calmly over to the free weights. Standing in front of the set of mirrors, Paul does some bicep curls with his eyes fixed firmly on his upper body. In between sets, he casually sits down on a bench opposite the mirror. With a foam cup in his hand, he sips some water, still looking in the mirror at his body. His eyes do not wander; they are totally fixed on his body, specifically on his upper arms. After five sets of bicep curls, Paul switches to a different exercise with free weights, behaving similarly as before. He lifts, takes a break, has a wander, talks to a few people, sits down, has a sip of water, and stares at himself in the mirror. After he returns his free weights, Neil and Paul have a quick chat about work, the following day at work, and how their training went. Paul then heads over to the trainer's desk, stops again to have a final chat with Nicole, talks about his workout, pulls his swipe card out of his track pants' pocket, and smilingly pushes open the door. Walking through the door, he leaves exactly as he arrived: smiling, calm, and content.*

In contrast to Vera's 'perceived' 'space capsule', Paul dips in and out of spaces. Paul creates multiple spaces in which he performs 'body work'; 'social work' and 'self work'. These spaces do not overlap; Paul employs a certain space rhythm whereby he blends socialising with the trainer and socialising with other gym-goers with working on his body. In other words, Paul shows that not only does he use LABFIT space in multiple ways, but, in the process, he 'constructs' different spaces for himself. Paul's usage of interaction rules assists him to create these various spaces for himself. For example, concentrating on himself via his reflection in the mirror establishes a space between his 'exercising body' and his 'exercising self'. In other words, observing his body perform certain exercises in the mirror helps Paul to connect to his body/self. Thus, the mirror is an important medium

through which Paul constructs a ‘perceived’ space for his exercising body/self. Unlike Vera’s ‘space capsule’, Paul’s constructed space neither protects nor isolates him from the collective in the sense that Vera perceives it. Nor is it Paul’s aim to experience isolation. Instead, he seeks to enjoy - to experience - ‘the whole gym’, to experience multiple spaces in which he experiences his body, him ‘self’ and the ‘social’, e.g., chatting with the trainer and other gym-goers.

Paul’s casual conversation with Nicole is another example that demonstrates how he constitutes a ‘social’ space with the trainer. During his walk-and-talk ethnography, Paul observed that he ‘likes talking to the gym trainers’. ‘I enjoy the whole package of going to the gym’. Thus, for Paul, gym-going is about experiencing LABFIT’s different kinds of ‘facets’, i.e., the socialising, the ‘bodywork’, and learning about nutrition from the gym trainer. Paul effectively dips in and out of space in order to experience gym-going as a ‘wholesome’ experience as opposed to LABFIT being a space wherein space dipping is not facilitated through the social and physical space. By this, I mean that the fact that LABFIT occupies only one physical space simplifies ‘spatial dipping’. The spatial confinement of LABFIT enables Paul to ‘construct’ and dip between spaces quite fluidly and effortlessly. For example, once Paul has finished a set of exercises, he can easily find the gym trainer to socialise with him, in contrast to a spacious fitness gym wherein trainers are seldom available unless one hires one for a one-on-one personal training session.

Sassatelli writes about the 'exercise rhythm' that is 'officially' prescribed in the gym space. By this she means that individuals know how to act and interact in a gym's space division. For example, in the case of gymnastic exercise classes, time is collectivised due to the simultaneous reproduction of movement. Consequently, the space of a gymnastic class is 'all invested by exercise' (Sassatelli, 1999b, p.7) according to which participants follow and imitate the instructor's movements. Individuals using weight machines find that time and space is individualized, evident in the fact that they follow their own personal sequence of exercises. In essence, people who participate in group classes know that they are expected to copy the moves and rhythm of the gym instructor, whereas individuals following individual programs know that they are in charge of their own body movements in the gym. For these reasons, Paul 'designs' his own exercise rhythm wherein he both creates - and dips in and out of - his interactional constructed spaces.

So far I have shown that Nadine co-constructs an energy space together with the trainer, Vera constructs her own 'perceived' 'space capsule', and Paul dips in and out of spaces. Now I offer a glimpse of how Sean 'transforms' LABFIT's character into a space wherein his bodily domination is palpable.

## **Section 7: LABFIT and space domination**

*It is 4.45p.m. The door opens and a six feet tall, muscularly built, cap wearing thirty-year old guy walks through the door straight to the trainer's desk. No smile on his face, head down, eyes focused on the sign-in book. Sean says quietly: 'Hi, how you going' to the trainer sitting at the desk. His persona radiates an indescribable confidence, an assurance of himself and his body. He is wearing a hoodie and mixed martial arts shorts that resemble board shorts with a split on each side of the leg. At first glance he does not seem to fit into the space. While he does not look lost, he does not emit the friendly, laid back non-extreme vibe that usually permeates LABFIT. After a quick look around the gym, he heads to the hallway to put his bag down. He does not seem to be looking out for people; rather, he seems to be getting a sense of the gym, questioning which equipment is free, where are the people, looking like he is mapping out his training. His stride and demeanour are powerful and purposeful. His body and muscle mass is palpable in the space. Other members in the gym do not look directly at him; but, there is a feeling in the air that no one wants to get in his way. After putting his bag down, Sean walks straight to the squat rack, picks up the empty bar, rests it on his back and starts squatting. He keeps his head down and creates this invisible silence and space around him. Meanwhile, other members carry on with their training. As he adds on weight plates, he inhales deeply before he squats and exhales loudly as he gets back up into an erect standing position. He does not communicate with any of the other members. He looks like he has an agenda in his head and is entirely focused on executing it. He does not take breaks, he does not look around. He seems focused and in his 'zone'.*

*When he finishes squatting, he approaches a guy near the bench press, asking if he has finished using a particular piece of equipment. The other member unhesitatingly assures him that he is done and that Sean can use it. The other*

*member leaves the bench press area and heads over to the corner on the other side. Sean adds weight plates to the bar and starts bench pressing. In between sets, he walks decisively to the pull up tower performing dips. He repeats this routine five times, without taking any rest in between, without looking in the mirror or talking to other members. Afterwards, he goes back to the pull up tower and starts doing chin-ups. As he pulls himself up he breathes out heavily. Everyone hears him but no-one looks at him. He then walks over to the rower and starts pulling as though rowing in the Olympics. The top end of the rower keeps lifting up, and the gym is permeated by the noise coming from the wildly and powerfully spinning rowing machine. Other members try not to stop their training. But, some subtly glance over in the direction of the rower, trying to glimpse this seemingly obsessed, forcefully driven, powerful guy on the rowing machine. After three minutes, Sean stops and slowly places the handlebar back in the starting position. Barely able to move, he remains seated, waiting for his breathing to slow down. His facial expression is unchanged and untouched by his rowing performance.*

*Maintaining his 'face of steel', he slowly gets up and walks over to the hallway grabbing his bag and disappearing into the toilet block. Twenty minutes later, he comes out without his cap, his short shaven hair visible, wearing a polo t-shirt, jeans and sneakers. This focused, tunnel-visioned, cap-wearing 'gym animal' has transformed into a strong and powerful-looking man who exudes a calm albeit scary, hostile yet friendly demeanour. He slowly walks to the trainer's desk, head still down; and, with his backpack slung over one shoulder, he signs out, thanks the trainer, and leaves the gym with a certain calm that just experienced a storm of invasion.*

Sean produces a masculinist geography that temporarily changes the 'space' character of LABFIT. His description differs from the 'spaces' I discussed so far in this chapter because his production of space emanates strongly from his particular body type, his use of his body, and his body movements. Andrews et al. (2005) emphasise how the presence of different 'body types' changes the space of the gym. In other words, Andrews et al. argue that bodies are distinctive by virtue of their particular look. They further argue that 'big' 'muscular' bodies change not only the character, but also the atmosphere of a gym. Upon entering the gym, Sean's shape, power, force, and the size of his body typifies the stereotypical male discussed in other gym studies (Vertinsky, 2004, Klein, 1993; Wacquant, 1995; Monaghan, 1999). He is the embodiment of what it means to be masculine, 'to embody force, competence, to occupy space, and to have a physical presence in the world' (Connel, 1983, p. 49).

Social theorist David Morgan opines that masculine bodies are typically connected to notions of 'embodied masculine power' (Morgan, 1993). For example, Sean's heavy breathing, his erect posture, his intense and rapidly-paced exercises, together with the heavy weights he lifts make his presence very visible and audible. While I experienced masculinist demeanours in fitness gyms in the past, i.e., where men were grunting, dropping heavy weights and 'parading' around the gym 'showing off' their square shoulders, protruding chests and oversized bicep muscles, in LABFIT most men used LABFIT differently from Sean. While they performed exercises similar to those favoured by women, some used predominantly cardio machines whereas others exercised with free

width or weight machines. These men exercised in LABFIT alongside women and other men, and often engaged in 'friendly conversation' about their work or their training.

In contrast to Vera, who seeks isolation, Sean ensures with his masculinist demeanour that he 'stands out', is noticed in LABFIT. In the words of Vertinsky (2004a, p. 63): 'A man steps straight ahead because he has an aim'. Sean knows exactly where he is going. He moves through the gym purposefully and powerfully as he strides resolutely forward. His masculinist demeanour is also a form of energetic performance which becomes visible through, for example, rowing so powerfully that the front 'leg' of the rowing machine lifts up. Sean, commenting about himself, said: 'I like to kill myself in here'. This violent and hyperbolic metaphor reinforces his investment in being seen as strong, intense and physical. It infers that he wants to annihilate a weak version of himself. As Vertinsky (2004, p. 73) maintains, gyms were originally designed to complement the 'Newtonian idea of the body as a machine'. The gym has been conceptualised as a machine for training one's personal machine, i.e., the body. This resonates with Sean's view of the gym. For him it is a space where he 'trains his body', creating and exuding an energetic space of dominance and power through his body. Therefore, in part, his body embodies a machine which desires to develop an intense killing energy. He sees the gym as a space in which he is able to develop this intense killing energy. In his 'walk-and-talk' ethnography, he told me that to him the body matters more than the mind. He said: 'I know it may sound stupid, but I don't care about my degree, I care about my body being able to do intense work, that's what we are designed to do'. Thus, for Sean the body is a machine that he imagines equips him for

life. He desires to develop this intense powerful energy because that is what he believes will help him to create the strongest and most resilient version of himself and his body.

Sean's focus is on his body's energetic performance, which facilitates his ability to 'give off' space (Goffman, 1959). When his body - together with his masculinist demeanour - enters LABFIT, Sean's presence is palpable. When he is moving in LABFIT, he non-verbally communicates to people around him to 'make' space for his body performances and to look at his body performances. Sean influences the space of LABFIT and indirectly controls other people's usage of the gym by dominating the space. In this way, he ensures that others act in accordance with his own vision of how he wants to use LABFIT that they should 'work' and literally 'walk' around him. In contrast to Nicole, who co-produces an energy space with Nadine through her energetic performance, Sean 'demands' space and recognition for his body and body movements. Vertinsky (2004, p. 83) notes that 'men raised on competitive sport learn to desire, learn to make connections according to the imperative to take space away from others and jealously guard it for themselves'.

In other words, Vertinsky (2004a) suggests that men ‘strive’ to occupy space. In Sean’s case, however, he not only ‘takes up space’, but he erects a temporary masculinist micro-geography in LABFIT, in contrast to the quiet and blended-in ‘space capsule’ in which Vera protects and isolates herself from everything and everyone, Sean dominates and transforms LABFIT space for the duration of his visit. This means that this micro-geography is not of ‘material’ nature; rather, it is produced by Sean ‘giving off’ space through his bodily physique, his masculinist demeanour, and specific masculinist body performances such as bench press, and lifting heavy weights at high speed. As suggested by Andrews et al., micro-geographies change the character of a gym. In the case of Sean, it means that people typically stay out of his way.

During my field observations, I often noticed that people finished with their exercises on the bench press as soon as Sean entered LABFIT. They knew that he used the bench press on a regular basis and it appeared that they did not want to be confronted by him. On other occasions, Sean would approach gym-goers who were using a certain strength machine and ask them if he could use the machine while they were resting in between sets. Most of them would say that they were ‘finished anyway’ and move to another exercise. The trainers usually leave him alone unless he approaches them and asks for their assistance. I noted trainers instructing people while Sean was transforming LABFIT into a masculinist invaded space: they were prescribing exercises that included machines which Sean typically did not use. The other people continued to perform their exercises, but the atmosphere became intense, saturated with a masculinist ‘essence’ of power and

domination. However, upon Sean's exit, LABFIT regained its calm and people continued to perform their exercises more 'freely' and with less constriction and tension.

## **Section 8: Conclusion**

In this chapter, the focus was upon LABFIT as a particular kind of gym space. My data, which is based on ethnographic descriptions of four people and their use of the space in the gym, shows four key findings: first, my findings suggested that individuals can create their own 'perceived' 'space capsules' within the collective space of the gym. This means that these space capsules are not in isolation from the social environment in the gym. Rather, it is about how people perceive their time in the gym. My data analysis also showed how Vera uses the treadmill as a 'space capsule' maker; in other words, selecting the treadmill assists her to mark her physical spatial territory. In addition, she deploys earphones, and a specific body demeanour that signals to other people in LABFIT that she is socially unavailable. Vera's 'perceived' 'space capsule' allows her to experience LABFIT as a protected and 'isolated' time, while still being part of the existing sociality that is constituted by socialising 'exercising bodies'. What is interesting here is the co-existence of a variety of different perceived 'spaces', wherein people - while part of the local organisation of LABFIT (Sassatelli, 1999a) - 'play' within the physical, social, and cultural structures of a gym by blending into the space but still constituting their own perceptions and usage of this gym.

Second, my ethnographic description of spaces shows that people constitute temporary spaces to illustrate how they interact with themselves, with other people in LABFIT, and with the trainer. For example, my data shows that gym-goers constitute a space between their ‘exercising bodies’ and their selves. By looking in the mirror and observing their ‘exercising bodies’ performing exercises, individuals connect with themselves. In short, seeing their bodies ‘work’ helps individuals to comprehend a space in which they can focus on closely ‘observing’ their bodily/self- transformation. Another example is the interactional space constituted between the gym-goer and the gym-goer/trainer. The formation of space through social interaction, laughter, and casual conversation produces a perceived ‘social’ space between two people in which the focus is less on the self and the exercising body and more upon being ‘social’. My findings suggest that the same person can constitute different interactional spaces which facilitate ‘space dipping’ in a gym. I propose that it is not sufficient to simply depict a gym’s (what Sassatelli terms) ‘local’ ‘social environment’; rather, it is important to understand how people can dip in and out of space and how each intersectional space constitutes a meaningful part of an individual’s gym experience. In essence, the notion of ‘interactional’ spaces and ‘space dipping’ can help trainers to understand that people may choose their own space rhythm intentionally when they move through gyms. That is, each space they co-produce with trainers, themselves or with other gym-goers may shape the ways in which they wish to experience the gym.

Third, my findings suggest that energetic performances construct energy spaces. My findings build upon Smith Maguire's work (2008a) on the multiple energetic performances performed by trainers and members. My data demonstrates that trainers can offer various forms of 'energetic' support that will help the individual to pursue her/his 'WOD'. For example, there are times when the trainer simply 'keeps an eye' on the gym-goer, while at others he/she sits next to the attendee and acts like a 'cheerleader'. Trainers can utilise multiple energetic performances to 'channel' their attitudes and bodies towards exercise to the gym-goers. In addition, it is worth emphasising that not only trainers but other gym-goers can use their energies to either construct 'energy spaces' for themselves, or to co-construct with others in order to help them enjoy their time in LABFIT. This means that energetic performances are not a 'one way street' exclusive to trainer-gym-goers: energies or energetic performances are a useful form of 'interaction' that enables gym-goers to make the most of their time in LABFIT. With reference to Andrews et al.'s (2005) argument, my data demonstrates that the constitution of energy space changes the character of LABFIT. In essence, the energy space 'between' the gym-goer and trainer influences the sense of space in LABFIT. Lastly, my data offers an extension to Sassatelli's interaction rules. In her work, Sassatelli (1999b, 2010) draws particular attention to expressive behaviour; that is, to verbal or bodily signals as a specific interaction rule. However, her work does not examine how interaction can be gender specific and/or deployed to create a particular space in gyms. Men (and perhaps women) can deploy interaction rules to constitute masculinist micro-geographies, specific types of behaviour that emanate from people's bodies For

example, a male's heavy breathing, grunting, stern face, and rapidly-paced, intense exercising signals 'masculine' domination through his body in space.

The findings presented in this chapter showed how gyms are neither constituted by one space nor permeated by a universal spatial 'feeling'. Instead, the overall gym personality is the end result of a variety of spaces that people - individuals and groups - create through specific interactions and energetic performances. This finding will be of value to any future investigation of what gym-going means to people and why they choose to utilise LABFIT as opposed to other fitness gyms. In other words, understanding how LABFIT space(s) are produced not only adds to the knowledge of what people experience in LABFIT, but also to what kinds of space(s) LABFIT constitutes.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Before I commenced this study of LABFIT, my knowledge of gyms was limited to fitness gyms. Since I was 16 years of age, I have dedicated most of my personal time and professional development to gyms, exercising and bodies. Being genuinely interested in how people can transform/improve their fitness and bodies through different types of exercise, I was attracted to fitness gyms. As I suggested in Chapter 1, Section 3, fitness gyms, a particular type of gym, are characterised by their common features, a central feature of which is their promotion of 'fitness'. So unlike, for example, traditional working-class gyms that focus primarily on muscle growth, fitness gyms offer a variety of activities that will allow individuals to enhance their 'fitness', a term that scholars tend to define differently. Some sports scientists view fitness as a set of physical abilities which promote the body's wellbeing and qualities (Smith Maguire, 2008a), others associate fitness with the notion of a 'fit' looking body (Frew & McGillivray, 2005). Most scholars agree, however, that fitness gyms are considered to be the main sites wherein 'fit' (looking) bodies are produced (Sassatelli, 2010; Smith Maguire, 2008a).

Prior to this study, i.e., during my time as a gym-user and trainer in fitness gyms, I observed that while people became heavily engrossed in working on their bodies, they did not always socialise in fitness gyms. In other words, I noted limited 'chatting' or laughing between members. People generally kept to themselves and focused on their 'body work', their intent being to attempt to shape their physiques through exercising. My observations

in fitness gyms revealed that people tried to shape their bodies with each repetition of an exercise, or each stride on the treadmill. Furthermore, I noted that people engaged in 'body gazing', trying to 'secretly' look at other people's bodies and the kinds of 'bodywork' they were performing. Thus in general, fitness gyms' atmosphere was created by pulsating, working bodies.

During my time as a gym trainer in LABFIT, I was surprised to find the atmosphere 'relaxing' and 'low key', engendered by the ways in which people contemplated 'working' on - and 'improving' - their bodies. As I suggested in Chapter 1, Section 2, people tended to use LABFIT in 'collaboration'. In general, people did not appear to use this gym in isolation, although, each gym-goer pursued her/his own exercise routine,. Often, they would smile or nod at each other, walking constantly from one section of LABFIT to another, depending upon what type of equipment they had selected for use. People would also make 'casual' comments to other people in the gym; for example: 'Jeez, you're working hard today' or 'I haven't seen you in a while', despite not 'knowing' the person outside of visits to LABFIT. There is evidence of a certain level of commonality amongst people, despite the fact that most of them follow their own routines. Contrary to my earlier experience of fitness gyms, there appeared to be mutual acceptance and respect when using LABFIT. Attendees appeared less isolated and less personal 'body focused'. People used the facilities in LABFIT in different ways; e.g., some dropped in during lunchtime wearing their work clothes, keen for a 15 minute easy bike ride. Others visited LABFIT to stretch prior to starting work. Some who visited LABFIT spent more time watching TV or talking

to the trainers than actually exercising. Others seemed to be in their ‘own worlds’; while their bodies physically appeared in LABFIT, their minds seemed to be elsewhere. Finally, there were those who seemed to be focused on their workouts but appeared to concentrate less on bodily change, e.g., increasing the size of their bicep muscles or reducing their waist circumference. Focus for them was more upon how their workouts made them feel. For example, I felt that people predominantly shared with other members or the trainer how they felt after or during their workouts, and the degree to which their exercise-related techniques had (or had not) improved.

Thus, I sensed that people using LABFIT were generally more ‘low key’ vis-à-vis how they worked on and improved their bodies. People seemed to sweat less; and, they appeared less serious regarding -or focused on - the ‘intensity’ of their workouts. For example, I observed people ‘playing’ with their phones, staring at the TV, or engaged in casual conversation with fellow gym-goers or the trainer in LABFIT. Based upon these observations, I did not sense any exaggerated focus either on working on - or improving - one’s body. Rather, I sensed that LABFIT exuded a more relaxed gym atmosphere. Thus, because my impressions as a gym trainer in LABFIT differed from those I harbored during my earlier 15 years of experience as a fitness gym-user and trainer, I was keen to understand in more detail what it meant to people to visit LABFIT. In my initial attempt to understand the meaning that people ascribe to their gym-going at LABFIT, I reviewed the literature addressing ‘new’ public health. But, subsequent to perusal, I concluded that analysing people’s gym-going practices in LABFIT through the lens of this particular

concept was too simplistic. At the core of ‘new’ public health is the proposition that people are personally expected to take care of their own bodies (Lupton, 1995). In general, I sensed that people ascribed more meaning to their gym-going practices than simply complying with external prescriptions for health and bodies. Thus, my attempts to conceptualise gym-going practices in LABFIT as a form of ‘new’ public health revealed that individuals share the same meaning of gym going, i.e., to be healthy. Drawing on notions of ‘new’ public health ‘suppresses’ the diverse meaning of people’s gym-going practices. During the lengthy periods of time in which I worked in and inhabited gyms, I noted that people’s visits to LABFIT, and the ways in which they used this gym, were markedly varied, and that people associated more than responsibility, discipline, and the achieving of health goals to their gym-going in LABFIT.

Similarly, my review of ‘gym studies’ reveals that scholars in the main have under-researched what people are actually doing in gyms; that is, how they are using this space and what it means to them. For example, Markula’s (2004, 2006) studies focus on examining how exercising (in the gym) can ‘free’ individuals from dominant discursive bodies, however, her findings are limited in that they fail to provide an understanding of what people actually do in gyms and the fact that their physical gym experience means more to them than simply complying with discourses on the body. Likewise, despite offering a detailed socio-cultural analysis of the fitness field, Smith Maguire’s (2008a) work glosses over individuals’ personal and more intimate relations with feeling or experiencing their bodies when working out in the gym. In other words, her analysis is

limited to understanding people's reasons for gym-going through the lens of their 'social class' and associated concepts such as individualization and consumption. Sassatelli (2010), in turn, regards gym participation as a mixture of habit, self-challenge, emotional release, light sociability and, broadly speaking, as a culturally approved way of coping with one's own shortcomings. For her, gyms are transformative environments; they change individuals as much as - and indeed more than - they change bodies. Furthermore, Sassatelli (1999a, b, 2010) hints that gym-going may affect the individual beyond working her/his body. She suggests that gym-going can influence people's ways of thinking about their bodies, and what they associate with gym-going. For example, she argues, once people go to the gym, it is less about transforming or shaping their bodies to a certain ideal, but rather an opportunity to experience a kind of involvement which is described by words similar to those typically associated with play (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982). She maintains that gym-going enables individuals to experience sensations of body 'control' as well as 'power', 'strength', 'agility', 'harmony', 'expressivity' (Sassatelli, 1999b). Furthermore, her research reveals that gyms are neither static nor universal. Rather, they are locally organized by the ways in which individuals engage with the physical environments of gyms and with the people around them. This, in turn, means that people's experiences in gyms are shaped by their interactions with the physical environment and with other people attending the gym.

Even though Sassatelli's work is probably the closest to this thesis conceptually, she under-researches how people use gyms differently, i.e., how they use different items of gym equipment and how they experience their bodies/selves in different ways; and, how the

ways in which they use gyms assist them to create their own meaning of their gym-going practices and gym space. Thus, in order to understand in more detail what it means to people to visit LABFIT, I conducted this ethnographically - informed study in which I pose the following questions:

- (a) How do people use LABFIT?
- (b) What do people's use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going?
- (c) How do people's gym-going practices in LABFIT differ from/fit in with the literature on gyms?
- (d) How can gym trainers' pedagogical strategies benefit from the study's findings?

In Chapters 4 to 6, which are informed by data collected during my fieldwork and my 'walk-and talk' ethnographies, I offer answers to these questions. In the following section, I reiterate the key findings of each chapter. I then provide an analysis of how these findings relate to each other. This further enables me answer the research questions (see above) before I conclude the thesis with a reflective account of the design, undertaking and findings of this study.

## **Section 1: Summary of key findings**

### *Chapter 4*

In the first data chapter of this thesis, I started to look at three specific gym ‘technologies of the self’ which appeared to play an essential role in the ways in which people use LABFIT. During my fieldwork, I noted that people seemed to use exercise logbooks, ear phones and gym equipment, not in an arbitrary fashion but rather, I sensed, using these gym ‘technologies’ helped people to discipline, manage, and control themselves. Despite key scholars writings about these ‘technologies’ as being part of gyms’ interiors, and as equipment that people sometimes use in gyms (i.e., earphones and exercise logbooks), they have under-researched how these technologies act, in fact, as “‘technologies of the self’”. Thus, in my first data chapter, I was interested to further explore why and how people use these gym ‘technologies of the self’, and what using them means to their relationship with themselves in LABFIT.

Key scholars, particularly those who have drawn upon Foucault’s concept of ‘technologies of the self’ in their studies, have predominantly examined how ‘technologies of the self’ ‘work’ on people’s bodies. Chance (2009) and Smith Maguire (2008), for example, examine how ‘technologies of the self’ help individuals to discipline and take care of their bodies in order to reassure themselves they are self-managing and in control of their selves’. In contrast, Markula (2004, 2006) argues that exercise can act as a ‘technologies of the self’ by operating on people’s bodies and helping them to ‘free’ themselves from the dominant discourses espousing bodily ideals. Magdalinski’s (2009) work, on the other hand, is

centered on concerns that the ‘profusion of machinery’ in gyms renders people’s bodies vulnerable to capitulation to the ‘tyranny’ of exercise equipment.

One of my key findings in this chapter was that gym ‘technologies of the self’ not only assist people to operate on their bodies, but also to operate on their memories, thoughts and feelings. What appears to be important is that people remember specifics about their ‘bodyworks’. My data analysis shows that keeping an exercise logbook is a ‘technologies of the self’ that works mnemonically, enabling individuals to evaluate their progress in ‘transforming’ themselves. Markula (2003) refers to the difficulty one encounters when interpreting exercise logbooks as ‘technologies of the self’ given that they encourage individuals to monitor their ‘bodywork’ against dominant discourses on bodies and exercise prescription. She argues to the effect that people keep exercise logbooks to ‘police’ themselves, to monitor whether or not they meet the requirements of ‘official’ standards or prescriptions pertinent to how to exercise to achieve a certain bodily ideal. However, my findings show that as a mnemonic ‘technology of the self’, the exercise logbook disciplines individuals to engage in critical reflection on their own conduct on the self, which, Markula (2004) argues, is a critical feature of ‘technologies of the self’. Thus, the evidence suggests that exercise logbooks do not directly help individuals to discipline/master their bodies in order to feel a sense of ‘self-transformation’; rather, exercise logbooks discipline the mind, stimulating ‘mnemonic motivation’. What I mean by ‘mnemonic motivation’ is that instead of pictures acting as motivation (Smith Maguire, 2001), individuals’ motivation to continue to exercise can be triggered by their memories of the hard ‘bodywork’ they have performed.

Another key finding has been that earphones can act as a reflective ‘technology of the self’, allowing their users to focus on their thoughts and current state of being. Here, once more my findings are somewhat in line with those of Markula (2004), who argues that critical self-awareness is an important feature of ‘technologies of the self’. However, Markula (2004) further suggests that gym-goers should question the dominant discourses pertaining to the body, i.e., be critical of their purpose of exercising. I argue that earphones can still act as ‘reflective’ gym ‘technologies of the self’, even though the individual may not consciously consider his/ her participation in gym-going a form of being ‘freed’ from dominant discourses. Rather, earphones are meaningful on an intimate, individual level. They allow the person to concentrate on her/his thought; that is, to reflect upon their own current state of being.

Lastly, I argue that gym equipment such as treadmills, barbells and rowing machines can act as ‘technologies of the self’. My most important finding is that using gym equipment elicits bodily sensations that help individuals: (1) to feel their selves perform; and, (2) to feel a sense of ‘self-mastery’. In other words, a key finding of this study is that gym technologies operate on people’s feelings about their bodies and selves. This does not mean that the rowing machine, for example, does not ‘work’ on a person’s body; but, it is essential that the individual knows how gym technologies make her/himself ‘feel’ about the work performed on the self. Therefore, it is important to recognise that in contrast to Magdalinski’s (2009) concern that individuals’ bodies are dominated by gym machines, I suggest that they in fact help people to feel sensations through their bodies which they

associate with their own selves. This means that gym machines are ‘facilitating’ gym ‘technologies of the self’ that assist individuals to attain a certain state of being which enables them to feel a sense of accomplishment or progress about their ‘work’ on the self by the self. It is critical that individuals should ‘feel’ this state because it enables them to realise that their time in LABFIT is about themselves by, for example, concentrating on their thoughts, ‘bodywork’/ body, and transformation of the self. An essential finding regarding gym technologies is that the treadmill forms a hybrid with people’s bodies and minds that assists them to experience either a sense of ‘mind liberation’ or ‘hard work’ on the self by the self. Here I build on McCormack’s (1999) work, which leaves open to discussion whether the individual or the treadmill has control over the ‘other’ when they form a hybrid.

My findings show that the treadmill enables the individual to control it in a way that she/he perceives the treadmill can either act in a ‘mind’ liberating or in a body-challenging/disciplining way. In other words, the individual can set the treadmill at a pace at which her/his body feels at ease, allowing the individual to concentrate on her/his thoughts. In other words, the individual perceives the treadmill to control the body; but, this control is not perceived as oppressive or restrictive. Instead, it enables the individual to spend time with her/his own thoughts. In a way, the control of the treadmill over the body is more about the machine being in sync with the body; forming a treadmill/body hybrid which facilitates the individual to ‘listen’ to her/his own thoughts. However, the individual can also set the treadmill at a pace at which the treadmill operates more on her/his body as

opposed to 'liberating' the mind. This means that the individual focuses on the treadmill's operation of her/his body. This in, turn, helps to achieve a sense of self-mastery over the self through the body. To put it briefly, the point I seek to make is that using certain forms of gym equipment, plugging in earphones, and keeping exercise logbooks may be conceptualised as Foucault's 'technologies of the self'. Using these technologies helps people to 'operate' not only on their bodies, but also on their memories, thoughts, minds and feelings.

## *Chapter 5*

The focus in this chapter was upon the roles of people's 'exercising' bodies in LABFIT. After I found that gym technologies act upon individuals' feeling of their bodies, I was interested to examine in more detail how people 'use', come to 'know' and 'feel' their 'exercising' bodies in LABFIT, and what these experiences mean to them. Here, Crossley (2004) and Longhurst's (2001) writings on embodiment provide the theoretical foundation for the analysis of my data. A key finding in this chapter was that bodies in LABFIT exercise in a 'messy', but 'lively' and fleshy way in contrast to the perfect poster bodies displayed at the gym. In other words, what my findings suggest is that discursive 'body ideals' may not be the dominant factor that fuels people's reasons for gym-going as Smith Maguire (2008a) or Markula (2003, 2004) suggest. Instead, more attention needs to be paid to how people experience their 'exercising bodies'. Here I argue that people can experience various levels of 'fleshiness' of their bodies. Take, for example, sweat, which is an essential embodied symbol that helps people feel their bodies. My findings suggest that sweat is an effective indicator that helps individuals to 'feel' that they have worked hard in LABFIT. A further interesting point is that my findings show that sweat can come in different forms, and, for this reason, individuals may not always experience the same kind of fleshiness with and through their bodies.

Similarly, Crossley's (2004) and Longhurst's (2001) embodied fleshy view of individuals suggests that the latter can learn through and with the body. What this means is that the fleshiness of their bodies enables individuals to 'feel' how they execute an exercise; i.e.,

whether or not it feels ‘awkward’ or perhaps more fluid. In other words, my findings show that individuals can develop a certain ‘feeling’ for their ‘exercising bodies’. I argue that the notion of embodied learning and knowing is essential for individuals in LABFIT. My findings also show that they ascribe meaning to the process of bodily learning and knowing, which demonstrates that individuals may associate more with gym-going than aim to work on their bodies in order to shape them into a certain ‘ideal’.

Lastly, my findings in this chapter showed that ‘exercising’ bodies in LABFIT do not use this space in isolation. In contrast to ‘poster bodies’, people’s bodies interact and connect on various levels. But, despite sociality being by-product of people’s intentional socializing with one another, not everyone participates in it. The reality in LABFIT is that while levels of sociality may vary between people, the invisible and unconscious interactions that occur between individuals undoubtedly influence how LABFIT space is utilised. To this end, in my last data chapter, I examine more closely how space in LABFIT is characterised by what people ‘do’ in the gym.

## *Chapter 6*

This chapter facilitated further understanding of what it means to people to visit LABFIT and how they create their ‘own’ space (s) in it. I have drawn in particular upon Sassatelli’s (2010) notion of interaction rules which forms the foundation of the analysis of my fieldwork and ‘walk-and-talk’ ethnographies. According to Sassatelli (2010), interaction rules are part of the ‘local organisation’ of a gym. She acknowledges that gyms are not

static, universal spaces, but are influenced by material characteristics and by the ways in which people interact. However, her work under-theorises the production of space(s) through interaction rules. Here is where my findings extend on Sassatelli's work by showing that various interaction rules play an essential part in how people constitute their own 'perceived' and temporary spaces.

A key finding of this chapter was that individuals create interactional spaces in LABFIT. These are perceived spaces, rather than spaces with physical boundaries. These perceived spaces are distinguished by the particular types of interaction rules that people employ. For example, when individuals socialise with other gym members, they constitute a 'social' space between those involved, whereas individuals who focus on their 'exercising bodies' by staring into a mirror create an interactional space between their 'selves' and their mirror reflection. This, in turn, means that the same individual can create different perceived spaces for herself/himself by performing various interactions. In other words, I argue that individuals can constitute various spaces for themselves in LABFIT, which assist them to experience a variety of different 'space' sensations. Another key finding is that trainers perform multiple energetic tasks which assist in creating energy spaces between gym-goers. Here my findings build upon Smith Maguire's work (2008a) which suggests that trainers' energetic performances are predominantly aimed at enhancing gym-goers' motivation to keep exercising. My findings build upon this assumption in the sense that energetic performances constitute energy spaces that temporarily convert the character of LABFIT

from a space of hatred, envy and ‘pain’ into a space that enables individuals to render the time they spend in this space productive and ‘for themselves’.

Lastly, I discuss the specific types of interaction rules that individuals perform, e.g., isolating rules and masculinist demeanours. Isolating interaction rules assist individuals to signal to other gym-goers to leave them ‘alone’. Isolating rules can, for example, be amplified by using gym technologies such as earphones that enable the individual to focus on her/his exercising and/or thought. Similarly, masculinist rules are traditionally associated with male features that communicate a notion of power, domination and strength. Both types of interaction rules help individuals to temporarily constitute space for themselves. What I argued in this chapter was that masculinist demeanour rules constitute masculinist micro-geographies that temporarily change the character of ‘LABFIT’ space. In other words, LABFIT’s ‘relaxing’, ‘low key’ atmosphere can be invaded by the type and number of masculinist demeanour rules.

Furthermore, my data shows that the treadmill, as a gym technology, can also act as a material ‘space capsule’ maker, enabling individuals to ‘spatially’ create imaginary shelters that will shield them from other gym-goers in LABFIT. Here, my findings build on Boynton’s work in the sense that I not only argue that treadmills or earphones can assist individuals to experience a ‘space capsule’ that will allow them to focus on their own agendas; as well, I suggest that isolating interaction rules - together with gym technologies - help individuals to constitute their own ‘worlds’ in LABFIT. This means, in effect, that

individuals perceive their time in LABFIT as a ‘protected world’ in which they can reflect upon their experiences with their ‘exercising bodies’, associated feelings, and their thoughts, a ‘world’ in which they can both concentrate and ponder. In the following section, I outline more clearly how the key findings of the three data chapters in this thesis correspond to and complement each other. This will assist in providing more comprehensive answers to my core research question of what it means to people to visit LABFIT, and to the following four sub-questions.

- (a) How do people use LABFIT?
- (b) What do people’s use of LABFIT reveal about the meaning they ascribe to gym going?
- (c) How do people’s gym-going practices in LABFIT differ from/fit in with the literature on gyms?
- (d) How can gym trainers’ pedagogical strategies benefit from the study’s findings?

## **Section 2: LABFIT and gym-going. Is it more than ‘bodywork’?**

Most key scholars of gym studies claim that gym-going is related to ‘bodywork’ which helps individuals to invest in their ‘own’ bodily project’ in order to attain an ‘ideal’ body (Smith Maguire, 2008a,b). However, Sassatelli’s (2010) most recent work suggests that people ascribe different meanings to their gym-going. In essence, she claims, people’s motivations to commence gym-going may well be influenced by the neo-liberal ‘ideal’ of a healthy, valuable citizen or by the ‘fit’ body ideals popularised by the media. But, it may be that local gyms play an important role in motivating people to visit gyms.

Similar to Sassatelli’s work, I was interested to understand why I sensed that LABFIT ‘felt’ different from the fitness gyms I had experienced in the past. During my time as a trainer in LABFIT, I noted that people did not visit this gym primarily to work on their bodies. Rather, I sensed that they were using LABFIT for reasons other than simply ‘bodywork’. The structure of the three data chapters in this thesis enabled me to gain a clearer picture of what forms of gym-going practices people perform in LABFIT and, most importantly, what these practices mean to them individually. Based upon my findings regarding gym ‘technologies of the self’ and ‘exercising bodies’, it becomes evident that ‘body feelings’ play a central role in people’s experience of LABFIT. This is important because instead of focusing on or expecting to see visible changes on their bodies, people remember ‘feeling’ their bodies in LABFIT. Often people experience a combination of ‘bodily feelings’ when working out. For example, they remember the sense of elation, exhaustion or fluidity they experience when they realize they can perform a specific exercise - with relative ease.

Employing Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self' has proven helpful inasmuch as it has facilitated a more in-depth understanding of how the gym technologies that people are not limited to operating on their bodies. Rather, gym technologies assist gym-goers to discipline and manage their own exercise experience. My bigger point here is that gym 'technologies of the self' enable individuals to work on their bodily feelings in their own way. This means that by using certain items of gym equipment, for example, people not only work on their bodies, but also work on how they feel their bodies. Ultimately, it is during this experience of 'feeling' their bodies that people learn about their bodies and develop their sense of selves and, by extension, develop intuitive bodily know-how. The consequences of this are, rather than associating physical body transformations with their gym-going, people remember and reflect upon how they 'feel' when they visit LABFIT.

In addition, the findings of this study show that people construct their own 'conceived' space(s) in gyms. This is an important finding because it helps to understand what it means for people to use gym technologies and how they experience their 'exercising bodies' sense of selves. According to my data, people experience LABFIT in different ways. My point here is that some may use this gym to 'free' their mind, others use it to experience the 'fleshiness' of their bodies, to feel a sense of achievement about their bodies and sense selves. The reality is that LABFIT is not a 'single' gym space wherein only 'bodywork' is performed. Instead, through their differentiated usages, people construct their own meaning of gym space. I am not suggesting here that an individual creates her/his own 'perceived' space in isolation from other people's 'perceived' spaces. The point I am stressing is that

people's perceptions of LABFIT as a space is constituted by their gym-going practices, their experiences of their 'exercising bodies' and how they interact with other people and gym technologies in LABFIT.

Ultimately, I suggest that LABFIT and gym-going may be less about 'bodywork' and more about what it feels to do 'bodywork'. Here, my argument builds upon cultural theorist Lauren Berlant's (2010) work on obesity, eating, and the ambiguity of 'health' in which she labels obesity an 'epidemic of overfeeding'. Berlant (2010) suggests that people's commitment to work and home has led to exhausted individuals. She further argues (2010, p. 38) that 'the contemporary human is fatigued' not only in a physical sense but also in a mental sense. What in fact she is arguing here is that eating has become a 'self-medicating' practice, particularly for a fatigued individual's mental health. In other words, food has assumed the role of a mental health vacation from people's exhaustion. Instead of holding individuals responsible for the onset of an obesity epidemic, Berlant (2010) approaches obesity as a 'social' problem, supporting her argument by claiming that because work and leisure are no longer equipollent, individuals face difficulty generating a sense of well-being. But, while indulging in eating might pleasure their (mental) health, it works against their (physical) health. Berlant's (2010) views on health, eating and obesity are relevant for this thesis because they help shed light on that what people experience in LABFIT may be less about 'bodywork' and more about bodily feeling and fleshy sociality. In this sense, findings of this thesis do not contribute to a single set of literature. On the contrary, as much as this thesis employed an interdisciplinary approach regarding its theoretical

leanings, concepts, and disciplines, its contribution to the literature is equally interdisciplinary. The obvious contribution of this thesis is of course to the literature on gym studies. It offers a detailed, comprehensive and close up investigation of the meaning of gym-going. This advances the understanding of gyms produced by existing literature in the sense that it considers and links multiple concepts and disciplines to gain a more in-depth understanding of what it means to people to go to the gym. Moreover, the thesis contributes to the literature on pedagogies of gym trainers. This matters because the insights offered on practical strategies for gym trainers are invaluable for this set of literature, considering that most of the knowledge of gym training pedagogies are derived from a scientific, positivism background, rather than empirical, explorative and qualitative research in actual gym settings. Finally, similar to Berlant's views on obesity and 'unhealthy' eating habits, I argue that this thesis extends societal views that gyms are about body shaping and the striving endlessly for the 'ideal' body. My bigger point here is that that thesis' findings show that gym-going cannot simply be categorised as an individual's practice of discipline and self-control as suggested by the literature of the 'new' public health. Rather, gym-going may be as much as about one's physical shaping as it is about the mental. In essence, this means that further studies which are interested in exploring the meaning of 'gym-going should not limit their investigation to one particular theoretical leaning, concept, or discipline. Rather, in order to further advance our understanding of what gym-going means to people, future researcher ought to think in an interdisciplinary fashion.

My personal experience of fitness gyms (as well as the literature on fitness gyms) suggests that people perform gym-going in order to work their bodies. This raises the issue that that gym visits usually mean more 'work' for individuals. And, as suggested by McGillivray and Frew (2005), fitness gyms promote a never-ending cycle of constantly striving to attain a certain body ideal. However, my findings regarding LABFIT suggest that the meaning people ascribe to LABFIT is formed by how they experience their bodies as opposed to the outcome of their 'bodywork'. My point is that gym-going may, therefore, be less about working towards body ideals in LABFIT, and more about one's body/self 'feeling good'. In a way, during the process in which people exercise in the most efficient fashion, or elicit visible or measurable changes in their bodily appearance or performance, people continue to feel healthy and fit. More importantly, I maintain that feeling healthy and fit may be individually defined, rather than prescribed by neo-liberal 'ideals' or the media. This matters because I argue that gym-going in LABFIT is neither about fulfilling the neo-liberal 'ideal' of a healthy, valuable citizen, nor about attempting to secure - and symbolise belonging to - a particular social class status. Nor is it about attaining the ideal body images depicted in the media. Instead, visiting LABFIT and the ways people use it, enables attendees to free their minds, to 'feel' their bodies, to learn through and about their bodies and, most importantly, to construct their own perceived space(s) in LABFIT.

### **Section 3: The study's contribution to gym trainers' pedagogical strategies**

Gym trainers' education is predominantly centred on learning how the body as a machine can be transformed by altering its shape and performance (Tinning, 2010). Trainers are educated based on theoretical, objective and declarative knowledge about the physiological processes involved in stimulating bodily change in prescribing exercises that facilitate bodily change and performance. The issue here is that gym trainers are educated on how certain exercises target specific body parts or an individual's aerobic and anaerobic energy systems. For example, gym trainers are educated on designing running programs for endurance which are aimed to improve an individual aerobic energy system, enabling her/him to run for longer with less effort. So when working in gyms, the trainers' primary focus is on individuals and their bodies; that is, upon helping the former to stay motivated and to keep 'working'. A gym trainer's core 'job' is it to prescribe the most 'efficient' exercises that will assist individuals to 'achieve' their bodily goals. But, often these exercises are not prescribed according to their clients' liking but rather to help their bodies 'transform' in the quickest and most effective way. However, the study's key findings, together with the practical knowledge that I gained as a trainer-ethnographer, have enabled me to conclude with five pedagogical strategies that gym trainers' education should incorporate to improve: (1) their awareness and understanding of why people do the things they do in gyms; and, (2) to enhance their own pedagogical strategies when supervising and instructing people in gyms. These recommendations will contribute to gym trainers'

understanding that for gym-goers, visiting these space and what they do in them may be more meaningful and multifaceted than ‘working’ on their bodies.

1. Gym trainers should be educated regarding the fact that their prescribing of use of certain gym technologies may not affect people’s bodies only. Instead, trainers should take into consideration how these gym technologies make people *feel*. To this end, I recommend that gym trainers should not only consider what form of gym technology is most effective for shaping their clients’ bodies, but rather how it will make their clients feel.
2. I suggest that gym trainers’ education should focus more on facilitating people’s learning and knowing through and with their bodies when exercising. As of the present, gym trainers’ education includes the teaching and application of correct exercise techniques. Gym trainers are taught how to articulate verbal cues that assist their clients to execute prescribed exercises. However, trainers’ education should include more focus on how to encourage people to learn through their bodies’ feelings. I suggest that trainers should focus more attention on how their clients *feel* their bodies when they perform their exercises.
3. Gym trainers should make sure that their instructions will help their clients to develop bodily learning and know-how. This can be achieved by incorporating affective instructions or analogies that will ensure that clients feel what the execution of a movement ‘should’ make their body feel. Shifting the focus from teaching correct exercise techniques to teaching how to ‘feel’ the correct technique

through the body will assist clients to develop bodily know-how. This in turn will assist individuals to focus less on making gym-going about trying to achieve an unachievable 'body ideal', and more upon making their time at the gym meaningful for their own body/self.

4. I suggest that trainers should incorporate more socialising for the purposes of 'exercising' bodies. Trainers should be shown how to guide their clients to socialize through, for example, a designing group workout that may assist their clients to take up and adhere to exercising in the gym.
5. I suggest that gym trainers should also be educated on how individuals construct their 'own' perceived spaces/ worlds in gyms. This will enable them: (1) to be more considerate regarding people's 'own' spaces; and, (2) to help them understand their role in co-producing these spaces through, for example, their energetic performance

In short, these five recommendations aim to improve gym trainers' education and pedagogical strategies and, by extension, to broaden their understanding of how and why individuals go to a gym. I suggest that gym trainers should incorporate these recommendations in a loose and flexible fashion, together with employing 'walk-and-talk ethnographies' with their clients. This might help gym trainers to maximize the effectiveness of these strategies through gaining a more in-depth understanding of the kind of gym-going practices people perform, why they perform them, and the feelings and thoughts they experience during their performances. By incorporating these strategies, gym trainers have the opportunity to extend their horizons beyond regarding

gyms as sites wherein fit-looking bodies are created. Gym attendances may, in fact, signal more than people simply trying to transform their bodily shapes or enhance their bodily performance.

#### **Section 4: LABFIT - Epilogue**

My interest in this study developed out of my genuine interest in gyms, bodies, and exercising. Having already developed my personal and professional gym-related expertise of fitness gyms, I sought to understand why I sensed that LABFIT was different compared to the gyms I had experienced in the past; and, most importantly, what it meant to people to go to this gym. My experiences of gyms had always given me a sense of home, a space wherein I could spend time transforming my body through hard work. Before I started my role as a trainer in LABFIT, gyms - to me - were about hard work, my body, and constant focus on improving my bodily appearance and performance. But, during my time in LABFIT, I realized that people ascribed different kinds of meanings to gym-going. I noted: (a) that for people in this space, it was not about constant improvement of their bodies; and, (b) a much greater variety in the ways people exercised.

From a trainer's perspective, I learned that I needed to modify my instructions regarding - and prescriptions of - exercises. It was less about prescribing the most effective and efficient exercises for the gym-goers, and more about understanding what people wanted to 'do'/achieve in this space. Very much to my surprise, their 'achievements' were not centered on 'making the most of' their bodies. I have come to understand that gym-going

revolves around more than ‘bodies’; it involves the ways in which people experience exercising their mind, thoughts, memories, bodily feelings, learning and knowing. I strongly believe that conducting this ethnographically informed study of LABFIT has not only made me a better gym trainer; it has also enhanced my personal understanding of why people exercise, why I exercise, and why I was attracted to attending the gym, my home for so many years. Somewhat surprisingly, my personal and professional views of fitness gyms have changed. Although I am no longer a member of a fitness gym, I am still a firm believer in the ‘power’ of exercise. I still believe that the space that permits individuals to experience their ‘exercising’ bodies is essential for the ‘health’ of individuals (i.e., their minds, thoughts, bodies, feelings). I have come to understand that individuals ascribe much more ‘individual’ meaning to gym-going than portrayed in the literature and by gym trainers.

Lastly, while I have gained an in-depth understanding of people’s gym-going practices in LABFIT, their meaning, and how they compare with the literature discussions of what people ‘do’ in gyms, I suggest that there is more opportunity to explore the role and meaning of the gym instructor in LABFIT, indeed of gym instructors in general. This is particularly based upon one of my key findings, i.e., that people co-construct energy spaces with fellow gym-goers. Thus, it may be useful to study in more depth people’s relationships with their trainers. Furthermore, based upon my finding that people employ gender specific interaction rules, it would be interesting to undertake a more gender specific analysis of my data. When I started writing this thesis, my major concern was to gain an understanding of

what it means to people to visit LABFIT. Thus, I decided to focus on acquiring a detailed understanding of people and their gym-going practices in general.

In a future study, I would incorporate a more gender specific analysis to further deepen my understanding of peoples' gym-going practices, what gym technologies they use, how they develop their bodily know-how, and how they compare/contrast the construction of different spaces. For now, however, I am satisfied by the understanding that I have gained of why LABFIT 'feels' different from other gyms, and how people ascribe different meanings to their gym-going in LABFIT. In addition, I suggest that the key findings of this thesis may not be exclusive to LABFIT. People attending other gyms may also be able to construct their own perceived spaces and ascribe meaning to their gym-going beyond 'bodywork'. As I suggest in Chapter 1, Section 2, LABFIT was designed to replicate what other fitness gyms offer in terms of gym equipment and how they lay it out. This means that while LABFIT appears to be a modified version of a fitness gym, the exercises that people perform there are not completely different from the 'bodywork' people perform in fitness gyms. As my findings suggest, people ascribe a less 'bodywork' and more 'body feeling' kind of meaning to their gym-going in LABFIT. It is, however, difficult to evaluate the role that the organisation plays in people's experiences of the gym.

As I have stated in Chapter 1, Section 3, prior to undertaking my study, I realised that conceptualising LABFIT as an organisational gym - and positioning it in the literature of 'workplace health promotion' - could prove problematic. As I have inferred earlier, from the

perspective of a gym trainer in LABFIT, the predominantly quantitative approach of studies on workplace health promotion reveals little information to help explore the gym-going practices that people perform and what these particular gym-going practices mean to them. During my time as a trainer in LABFIT, I noted considerable variation in the ways in which people used the gym (see Chapter 1, Section 2). It seemed to me that there was more meaning to LABFIT than it being simply a ‘profitable instrument’ for the organisation. However, after analysing my data, I still claim that LABFIT and its usage designate it a fitness gym rather than an organisational gym. But, here I must acknowledge that LABFIT does not have all the characteristics of fitness gyms that I have outlined in Chapter 1, Section 3. Thus, future studies focusing on the structural and organisational features of LABFIT facilitates the gaining of a more in –depth understanding of whether or not this study’s findings will benefit future gym studies. Nonetheless, one of the most valuable contributions of this thesis lies within the pedagogical strategies for gym trainers, which ultimately enhances peoples’ experiences in gyms and maximises people’s benefits from their gym going beyond ‘body shaping’.

# Appendices

## Appendix: 1



### Information Sheet

#### Research project: ‘What do you think of your workplace gym’?

Lots of research has investigated how companies may benefit from offering gym facilities at the workplace. However, little research has questioned what YOU, as a member of a workplace gym, think about the gym and how you use it.

The researcher, Silke Motschieder, a PhD Candidate and gym instructor at the Douglass Hanly Moir Gym is conducting a research study, which is focused on whether you value having the opportunity to exercise at your workplace.

The research study will be undertaken in the period from:

**Monday October, 10<sup>th</sup> 2011 to Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup> 2012**

and is part of Silke’s doctoral studies at the School of Art and Social Sciences, at the University of Technology, Sydney.

#### The research project objectives are:

- to develop a better understanding of the workplace gym’s meaning to its members
- to develop insights into the relationships between attendance and value of the workplace gym

#### The outcomes of this research:

- contribute towards a better understanding how workplace gyms may have more complex and deeper meaning than previously investigated
- contribute towards the research on workplace health promotion

As a member of the gym, Silke would deeply appreciate if you were willing to participate in the research project.

The good news: You do not have to do anything to participate – except for carrying on with your normal behaviour at the gym. The researcher will simply observe your behaviour and may have informal conversations with you. If you volunteer to participate, please read through the next page and sign the attached consent form.

If you wish **NOT** to participate in the research project, please be assured that it will not interfere with any of your activities in the gym and you will not be included in the researcher’s observations. This the researcher will not make notice of any of your behaviour or activities in the gym for her doctoral studies.



## Appendix: 2

### Information Sheet For Participants

Research project: 'What do you think of your workplace gym'?

#### IF I SAY YES, WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

I simply ask you to continue with your normal behaviour and routines in the gym and encourage you to attend the gym without thinking about your actual participation in this research. You should go to the gym as little or as often as you like and if you decide not to go for a few days, weeks, months – that is fine, too. All I require of you is to allow me to make observation at the gym during the period Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011 – Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2012. During that period I may also ask you for an interview, which will be audio-recorded. The interview is absolutely voluntarily. Fieldwork won't be conducted every day and observations should not interfere with your exercise at the gym in any way.

#### What do I have to do to become a participant?

First of all, I would like to deeply thank you for agreeing to participate in my research! I would like to assure you that each participant will contribute to this doctoral study in a very unique and meaningful way.

All I need from you now is to **sign the consent form** on the next page.

#### ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

It is possible that you may feel a bit embarrassed at first by being observed. However, the research is absolutely confidential – which means I will not reveal your name in any way. I will give both you and the organisation a pseudonym - a fake name - to help keep your behaviour, actions and verbal expressions confidential. Nevertheless, it is possible that people who know you well (such as your co-workers) may recognise some things included in my report as having been said by you. As such you should avoid disclosing information which is of confidential status or which is defamatory of any person or organisation.

#### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Participating in this research may help you become more aware of what going to the workplace gym and exercising means to you. It may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your behaviour and thinking about exercise, the gym and your workplace. Additionally, if you are interested, you will be more than welcome to read the research findings at the completion of my thesis.

#### IF I SAY YES, CAN I CHANGE MY MIND LATER?

You can change your mind during or after the study and you don't have to say why. You can ask me not to use my observations about you at all, or you can select days, actions, verbal expressions that you don't want me to include in my research.

#### WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Silke on **0406-671-402** or email her **[silke.motschieder@uts.edu.au](mailto:silke.motschieder@uts.edu.au)**. If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772, and quote this number: *UTS HREC Approval Number3*



## Appendix: 3

### Consent Form For Participants

#### Research project: 'What do you think of your workplace gym'?

I have read the information sheet about this project and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to receive further explanations. I agree that:

- I allow the researcher, Silke Motschieder to make observations of my behaviour, interaction with others, and conversations with her or other gym member during the time of her study;
- If I choose to volunteer for an interview, I allow it to be audio-recorded.
- The research is confidential and will not reveal your actions or verbal expressions at the gym to anybody in the organisation or outside; and
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time during fieldwork and that this does not affect my right to continue using the gym, nor my employment at DHM.

#### The researcher undertakes to:

- Treat all participants and their actions with respect;
- Ensure that information from the observation will not adversely affect the character or reputation of gym members;
- Use pseudonyms for participants and their organisation in order to protect the identity of the participants in research publications, reports or presentations that include interview data; and
- Restrict access to electronically stored data to the principle researcher, namely Silke Motschieder, and her immediate supervisor.

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#### Participant Consent:

I understand both the project information and this consent form, and give my consent to participate in the project "*What do I think of the workplace gym?*"

Participant's Name:

Date:

Signature:

#### Researchers' undertaking:

I will abide by the undertakings made in this consent form.

Researcher's Name: Silke Motschieder

Date:

Signature:

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