

No Pain No Gain

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"The human body has to be constantly and systematically produced, sustained, and presented in everyday life...the body is best regarded as a potentiality which is realized and actualized through a variety of social regulated activities or practices" (Turner, 1996: 24).

A fitness centre as a place of self surveillance can be observed in relation to theories such as the risk society (Beck, 1992), information/knowledge society (Bell, 1999), technology (Lupton, 2012) and surveillance (Foucault, 1980). The theories will be examined through diary entries of my life as a gym member. The overall aim of this critical reflection will be to see whether aspects of these theories could be applied to the fitness centre as an institution in which power and knowledge relations encourage the maintenance of body ideals.

Dear Diary, It is Wednesday which means one thing - gym day. Looking at my smart phone, my "Fitnesspal" app is informing me what my target is for the day - a 50 minute cardio workout. How would I get by without this niche technology advising me what is "required" to do in order for me to stay healthy?

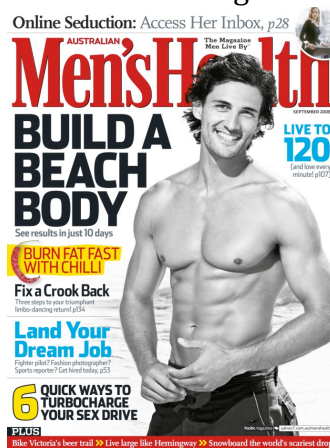
This is a contemporary example of ways in which new quantifications of the self and the expansion of self-surveillance technologies are

becoming increasingly optimal in our modern world. These digital technologies allow the tracking of our self data so we can monitor and regulate body progression (Lupton, 2012). Quantifications of the self also pose questions to our lack of engagement with the environment. Fitness centres provide members with self-quantifying equipment which allow individuals of all abilities to choose their own fitness regimes and fitness levels allowing a standard exercise of a 30 minute steady jog to be adapted with altering gradients and speeds. Therefore, all fitness training and regulation can be done under one roof – within the aesthetic (visual ideal) industry whilst removing the significance of outdoor exercise.

These developments are reflective of the Risk Society. By the risk society, Beck (1992) discusses a routine manner of thinking whereby individuals consciously focus on the negative outcomes of modernity which then

become embedded into our daily thinking processes (Hudson, 2003). Risk is a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernisation itself. As individuals become aware of these risks, individuals respond by intentionally devising prevention strategies whilst professionals, in turn, devise methods of harm reduction. In this case, dieticians

anticipate the possible harms or consequences of fatty foods and as a result raise public awareness through schemes i.e. "Change4Life".



This theory, however, can attempt to explain how self tracking devices (e.g. *NikeFuel*) may be used as an adopted strategy to prevent possible lifestyle risks - such as obesity and diabetes, giving individuals a sense of control over their own health. These technologies construct/deconstruct groupings of capitalist consumers that participate in the monitoring, surveillance and disciplining of their bodies as a way of sharing biometric data and minimizing lifestyle risks (Lupton, 2012).

Dear Diary, It is exactly one month until Christmas. Three words – food, food and more food. The gym was full of those with my exact intentions – fight now, binge later. All the fitness trainers are occupied, assisting those that consider themselves to be “unhealthy”. This made me curious; who decides what is considered to be a normal or healthy lifestyle?

Fitness trainers are a crucial aspect of fitness services due to their specialised knowledge and qualifications, reinforcing the ethos of exercise on to the body as a source of capital and investment (Maguire, 2008). This can therefore be developed further by reflecting on the knowledge/information society and the knowledge worker. According to Bell (1999), a post-industrial society is emerging due to radical changes in social structures, for example the occupational structure. The replacement of low skilled manual labour to a high-skilled service sector is emerging whilst in turn creating knowledge industries such as health and education systems. Therefore, new information is generated and embodied into education, for example sport and fitness degrees and experiences; alongside the emerging knowledge workers – fitness professionals.

With the development of health industries, we have witnessed the increased demand for instant health solutions (Turner, 1996). As a result, fitness professionals distribute their expert knowledge to a lifestyle needy society via institutions such as the gym. Including which exercise regimes are the most beneficial for losing weight and which foods we should try avoid. However, it is important to mention

that with the expansion of knowledge occupations comes a collection of corporeal products i.e. diet books, supplements and low-calorie foods. Therefore exercise professionals are not the only source whereby knowledge is dispersed; a consumer culture expands outside the gyms walls.

Dear Diary, unfortunately today is one of those “couch potato” days so I’ve decided to take it easy at the gym. Taking it slow gave me the chance to observe the environment around me. I couldn’t help but notice the gym was particularly gendered; males by the weight equipment and females on the cardio machines. Could we explain such stereotypical gender values in relation to power and discipline?

According to Garret (Cited in: Evans et al, 2004), physical bodies are gendered through institutions such as schools, health care professionals and undoubtedly the mass media, whilst in turn shaping and creating appearance and personal desires. The gym may therefore be an institution which promotes the ideal healthy body image as well as the maintenance of female/masculine identities. Giddens (1991) however explains how individuals are increasing becoming tied to their bodies, so body regulation is a matter of social construction. The media are increasingly encouraging this social construction of body ideals. For example, male magazines titled “Build a Beach Body” indicate the aforementioned social construction of the muscular physique and cosmopolitan magazines, “Get Rid of Muffin Top” encourage the thin feminine body ideal.

This is reflective of Foucault’s ideas on the disciplined subject as he claims power relations instil these values within individuals (Foucault cited in: Barker, 1998). One’s awareness of the body can be acquired through an investment of power exerted through exercises, muscle building, and desire for the “perfect” body (Foucault cited in Gordon, 1980). Foucault refers to this not as power but bio-power – ways in which power exerts itself



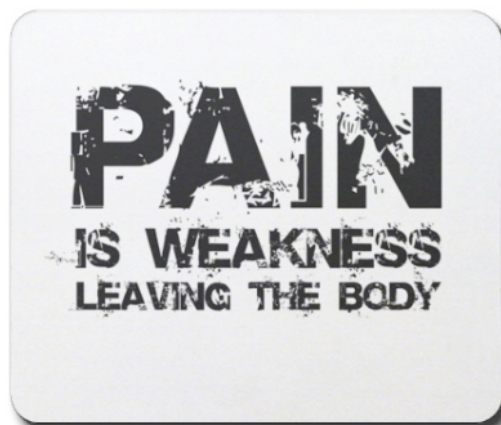
in forms such as daily practices. As a result individuals engage in self-surveillance, self-discipline and self-regulation (Pylypa, 1998). Bio-power functions through the development of scientific knowledge and so individuals conform to normative discourses. Foucault's ideas can therefore be used to explain the assumptions behind male and female body regulation within fitness centres. Due to the subjection of gender conformities individuals use exercise as a method of their discipline and power exertion.

As previously mentioned, individuals may engage in self-surveillance as a result of power and discipline. This is reflective of Foucault's concept of self-surveillance (1980); he defines this as the attention an individual pays to another's behaviour when facing observation usually by observers of the same or superior social position (Vaz & Bruno, 2003). Therefore, a fitness centre can be seen as the "central tower" of self-surveillance for the "ideal body image". According to Foucault, specialised knowledge strengthens the power of modern institutions creating categories by which modes of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours become more distinct. In other words, power and knowledge has led to a creation of a moral discourse (the unfit and overweight body as deviant and associated with irresponsibility). This moral discourse leads to conscious self-surveillance and so individuals may see a lack of exercise as a moral failing. Foucault (cited in Gordon 1980) argues that power produces the types of bodies that society requires, he terms these "docile bodies". He claims that "fitness and dieting creates disciplined bodies appropriate to the capitalist enterprise--productive, controlled, and habituated to external regulation and self-restraint" (Foucault cited in: Pylypa, 1998: 27). In other words, individuals are more appropriate, or

docile, in times of economic crisis when they are required to work more for less money.

It is important to be critical of these theories in order to provide a coherent analysis. It may be argued that a fitness centre is not a place for self-surveillance but a choice of free will. Foucault for example has provided a thorough understanding of power and discipline, yet he lacks the acknowledgement of individuality. Individuals respond differently to knowledge discourses, therefore Foucault fails to recognise that some individuals may resist conforming to social gender norms and choose to take part in fitness as a hobby or interest. However as previously mentioned, discipline and power is encouraged through mandatory social institutions such as schools. Schools encourage children to take part in sport curriculum activities through which children acquire their interests in certain physical activities. However there is also an ulterior motive: to prevent childhood obesity. Power and discipline is therefore exerted and instilled through physical education. Therefore this poses the question as to whether individuals do in fact go to the gym as a personal interest or it is in fact a subconscious outcome of self-discipline and power rooted within their educational experiences.

After acknowledging the epidemic of body image it is clear to note that the media has had a detrimental effect on both male and female gender conformities. Through the examination of the discussed theories it is evident that new knowledge, technologies, risks and increased self-surveillance are most definitely present within the fitness industry. The application of these theories has therefore not provided a conclusive argument as to the reasons behind an individual's gym participation. The fitness centre may be seen as a form of self-surveillance and self-discipline, however it can be argued some individuals choose to resist moral discourses entirely and simply adhere to their own.



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Picture 1:

<http://mediaandourbodyimage.wordpress.com>

Picture 2:

<http://jezebel.com/5408548/cosmo-puts-down-scrunchies-picks-up-petition>

Picture 3:

<http://pmpaspeakingofprecision.com/tag/production-machining-magazine/>