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**A PHENOMENOLOGY OF FITNESS
FROM CONSUMPTION TO VIRTUOUS
PRODUCTION**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Presented to the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism,
College of Arts and Tourism, Dublin Institute of Technology, Cathal
Brugha Street

September 2012

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Abstract

Although our imagination as policy-makers, legislators, academics, and members of the general public has been captured by the promise of fitness, what is meant by it and whether or not its individualising emphasis is a good thing is much less clear. In response to this question of cultural significance, this thesis provides a phenomenology of fitness. It does so in two important senses and in the context of two distinct parts.

The first half of this thesis (Chapters One and Two) is given to the task of bracketing the natural attitude with respect to fitness; that is, contextualising the question of its cultural embeddedness within processes of reflexive embodiment that are at play in modern society. “Being fit,” it is argued in this context, implies “being fit for something” (something other than health) or “being fit for someone” (someone other than oneself). And, having lost some (if not all) of its modernist illusions and its progressivist convictions to social regeneration, the task of “being fit” is framed as an ambivalent one, akin to the modern-day Sisyphus, and gestural of the self-reflexivity inherent in late-modern consumer society.

By shifting the organisation of attention from ambivalence, the second half of this thesis (Chapters Three and Four) examines the possibilities for a positive appropriation of fitness beyond mere consumption activity. By focusing on fitness at the level of action and interaction (where meaning relates to use and practice) the second half of this thesis opens up the possibilities for a re-description of fitness (of Sisyphus) on the basis of the following proposition: *fitness is something we negotiate, despite it being something we never really achieve*. Findings from twelve elaborative phenomenological interviews emanating from an ethnographic orientation over a two and a half year period are given towards this end. They indicate that

consigning fitness to mere consumption activity overlooks the importance of participants' meaning-making activities, their motivations, and the pleasures that accrue on the basis of ongoing activity and increased experience. They indicate that, if "doing fitness" enables individuals to become acquainted with these internal goods, then "being someone through fitness" can operate as an indexical marker of virtue.

The possibilities for a Complementary Model of Health and fitness and for a novel approach to talking about the fit body are discussed in conclusion (Chapter Five) and in the context of aligning the findings of this thesis to future research and practice.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the DIT's guidelines for ethics in research.

DIT has permission to keep, lend or copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Candidate

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I must extend my sincere gratitude to those who willingly gave their time in order to participate in this study. I hope that you are still negotiating the demands of fitness and, in this, continue to find meaning, motivation, and pleasure. To the owner, members, and staff of the Clane Health and Leisure Club in particular – who contributed more than they will ever know in shaping the contours of this thesis, and whose club sadly closed down in May 2011 – I hope that you have found meaning, motivation, and pleasure elsewhere.

To my family – my father Michael, my proof-reader Tom, and to Scott, Alison, Auntie Mary and Uncle Liam – thank you for your support and patience over the course of my writing this thesis. To Tom and Auntie Mary, I henceforth promise to stop my “I was reading something interesting there today...” conversation overtures! Finally, to Caroline, my girlfriend, thank you for your love, support, and encouragement from the very beginning. I promise I'll get a real job soon!

For Anna Marie Neville (27 April 1948 – 22 July 2002)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

‘Fitness: something everyone understands but no one can define precisely.’

Stephen C. Stearns, *Quarterly Review of Biology*

One of the most commonly visited sites for recreational consumption is the modern day fitness club. What was traditionally niche and merely the preserve of the barbells and beefcakes has spawned an infrastructure so vast that the fitness industry is now considered one of the true powerhouses in international commercial leisure. In fact, such is the extent of this proliferation that the practice of “going to the gym” and “working out” has sparked a cultural phenomenon offering opportunities for leisure from a variety of traditionally institutionalised disciplines. The industry boasts steady growth over the past four decades and, over the last number of years (since 2004) in particular, has come to the fore as the leisure facilities sector’s leading segment (Datamonitor, 2011). In 2010, for example, the fitness clubs segment of the global leisure facilities sector generated total revenues of \$62.9 billion – over 45 per cent of the sector’s overall value – representing a compound annual growth rate for the period 2006 to 2010 of almost 3.5 per cent (Datamonitor, 2011). This, however, appears to be a modest analysis of the industry’s vibrancy. A more encompassing analysis of the fitness industries conducted on behalf of the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA, 2010) reported

that, in 2009, the sector was worth \$70 billion. It is difficult to think of another industry, given such mitigating economic conditions, with such a strong growth trend. As Hans Muench, IHRSA Director (Europe) noted in 2008, not many people are aware of the fact that ‘for the last 20+years, our industry has grown consistently...proving itself to be recession resilient’ (Amend, 2008, p. 16; see also IHRSA, 2009). According to IHRSA (2010), over 128, 000 clubs served approximately 119 million members in 2009, many of whom, despite the economic adversity, were new members (see also Club Industry, 2009; Kufahl, 2010). But perhaps most striking among industry trends is the fact that growth in the fitness industries has been strong worldwide, as opposed to being confined to the traditionally high-performing North American and European markets; a testament to the global appeal of keep-fit culture (IHRSA, 2009, 2010).

In spite of the extent of this growth, it would be a perverse misunderstanding of the magnitude of fitness to consider its significance in mere quantitative terms. Rather, the modern experience of fitness is the product of the coming together of a great many social, political, economic, and material factors. Its significance, for example, is clearly evidenced by the fact that it is both shaped by and has shaped the major trends of contemporary leisure – e.g. privatisation, commercialisation, rationalisation, hybridisation, simulation. In particular, relentless processes of individualisation (and a general decline in the membership of traditional social, sporting and community organisations) have shaped the emergence and increasing prevalence of gym-going and working out as physically active leisure forms (Bauman, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2007; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Rojek, 1985, 2010a). In a more general sense, the prolonged success of fitness is related to the fact that our imagination as policy-makers, legislators, academics, and

members of the general public has been captured by the promise of fitness. It is a promise of actualising new standards of wellbeing in the public domain and of physical capital in the private domain; a promise that is driven by capitalism's much maligned relation with the body and self-identity. Whether fitness is analysed at the public or private level, however, one theme seems to resonate today: fitness has largely replaced health as the desired, normative status for individuals in advanced modern societies. It might be argued that these representations and the moralisation of body-work typically associated with fitness is not entirely peculiar to modern culture (especially given the prevalence of dietetics and physical regimen dating as far back as antiquity see e.g. Foucault, 1992; Giddens, 1993; Sassatelli, 2006a). The development of an elaborate and sophisticated discourse on body maintenance and modification practices, and an industry to serve the needs of an increasingly sedentary, consumer lifestyle-oriented, and body-conscious society, however, certainly is a modern phenomenon.

Of critical importance to this modern emphasis on fitness include such things as advances in modern medicine by means of the biomedical health model,¹ the near wholesale eradication of acute and infectious diseases, and the increasing prevalence of chronic and degenerative conditions in their place (Beaglehole & Bonita, 2004; Diez-Roux, 1998; Pearce, 1996; Petersen, 1997; Petersen & Lupton, 1996).

Understanding the magnitude of keep-fit culture implies an understanding of the general shift in emphasis in the model of healthcare that has occurred from reactive to proactive approaches to life-politics (e.g. towards practising preventative as opposed to only curative medicine). With Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, hypertension, high cholesterol, stroke, and high blood pressure among the major

¹ In using the term "biomedical" to discuss the modern health context, I mean to imply the dual aspects of both clinical practice (which focuses more narrowly on individual health) and epidemiological research (which focuses more broadly on public health).

social health problems of the 21st century, chronic conditions are now increasingly being framed as individual responsibilities to be obviated through an array of body modification and maintenance practices. The fact that autonomous, responsibly-informed individuals are now encouraged to make cost-benefit analyses of life options and trajectories is a testament to the conceptual importance of fitness in the modern health context. Public projects of wellbeing are now almost inseparable from private projects of self-creation. They have been aligned to the extent that, where health designates a public recognition of wellbeing, fitness acts as its private corollary. Although this model has roots that are over four decades old – having been reinforced on the basis of the naturalisation of self-work into the sphere of leisure time (see Rojek, 2010a, 2010b; Smith Maguire, 2008a, 2008b; Smith Maguire & Stanway, 2008) – it is most clearly evidenced in contemporary calls for healthcare reform, and in collaborative efforts of both the medical community and the fitness industry of which the recently established “Exercise is Medicine” programme is a product (Jonas & Phillips, 2009; Sallis, 2009; see also Bryant & Peterson, 2006; Burnham, 1998; Elrick, 1996). The logic is quite clear: if exercise is medicine, then fitness is the new health. But what is meant by fitness is much less clear.

1.1 Fit for What? Fit for Whom?

It seems reasonable at the outset of a thesis entitled *A Phenomenology of Fitness* to demarcate some distinct ground from which one can proceed. This means asserting what is meant by phenomenology in the first instance and by fitness in the second. The more daunting word perhaps, phenomenology, is one that, for present purposes, will be delimited to *a description*. To undertake a phenomenology is to undertake a description of some phenomenon (phenomenology, Husserl wrote, is a

descriptive science). So, what is fitness such that it might be submitted to a phenomenological description?

While our imagination has certainly been captured by the possibility of fitness, and we have been impressed by its apparent universality as a normative imperative, it would be remiss to attribute to it an assumed, stable and shared meaning. It is quite clear, for example, that there has been a shift in the ways in which people talk about and relate to their bodies. Expert knowledge about such things as exercise, fitness, health, wellbeing, obesity, Body Mass Index, calories, diets, nutrition, supplementation, vitamins, minerals, fats, proteins and carbohydrates, now play a large part in everyday language, the modern identity narrative, and the reflexive project of the self. In his *The Transformation of Intimacy*, for example, Giddens (1993; see also Giddens, 1991) makes the broad sweeping claim that everyone today in the developed world is on a diet. There is much truth to this. But it seems to only tell one part of the story. People today are not only concerned with what they put into their body (though this is significant enough in itself), but what they can get out of it. Concerns with respect to the normal functioning of the body are now coupled with – and have perhaps even been effaced in large part by – considerations with respect to the body's potential. That is to say, modern selves no longer merely bear witness to the body-in-itself, but to the body-for-itself, the body-for-others, and what the body can do (see Baudrillard, 1998; Bourdieu, 1984; Buchanan, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987; Fox, 2002; Fox & Ward, 2008a, 2008b; Markula, 2006; Pronger, 2002).

In spite of this performative shift and the widespread adoption of something like a fitness vernacular, what is meant exactly by fitness is much less clear. As the evolutionary biologist Stearns (1976, p. 4; see opening quote to this chapter) wrote,

fitness is ‘something everyone understands but no one can define precisely.’ Bourdieu (1998) made a similar point when trying to elucidate the role of sport in society. According to Bourdieu, talking about sport is difficult because it is too easy: ‘everyone has their own ideas on the subject, and feels able to say something intelligent about it’ (ibid, p. 15). This very fact, it seems, is exacerbated when it comes to talking about fitness. Having a body and being concerned with its status (its health, fitness, wellbeing, etc.) appears to be the most self-evident of things. ‘[O]ur body,’ Simmel (1997, p. 210) wrote, ‘is our first and most unconditional possession.’ ‘We have only one body and it has to be saved,’ wrote Baudrillard (1998, p. 129) in a similar vein. However, as Smith Maguire (2008a) has observed, asking people what they mean when they say “I think I’m fit,” or “S/he doesn’t look fit,” rarely leads to a straightforward definition. Making sense of fitness is a difficult task because it is within everyone’s purview; because it defines us as we try to define it as our object of attention. However, that fitness is a slippery concept is a fact cloaked by seemingly incontrovertible evidence in existing medico-scientific literatures, the media, and popular press to the contrary.

The elusive nature of fitness is surely related to general changes in the way people have viewed the body over time. And while this is likely associated with exercise’s shift in emphasis from the margins of conventional leisure practice, changes in our understandings of fitness are perhaps more closely associated with the intensification and sophistication of epidemiological research and the biomedical model. On the one hand, this has led to a more refined conceptualisation of fitness. For example, fitness was traditionally defined by the U.S. President’s Council on

Physical Fitness and Sports² (1971, cited in Casperson, Powell & Christenson, 1985) as the capacity to carry out one's daily activities without undue fatigue and with sufficient energy left in reserve to engage in leisurely activities or to attend to emergency situations (see also Bouchard, Shephard & Stephens, 1994; Greenberg, Dintiman & Meyers Oakes, 2004; Keong, 1981; McCormack Brown, Thomas & Kotecki, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). However, changes in societal conditions – i.e. changes in the nature of our social-material activity environments, work-leisure relations, and the growth of the consumer and service industry sectors – have now led to a re-evaluation of what is meant by the term. This has certainly been the case in the U.S. with The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (2000) declining to offer a simple definition, demarcating instead a number of identifiable physiological, health, skill, and sports related components.

Of particular note is the significant increase in attention being paid to matters of public fitness (though this is something of a logical misnomer), including the development of complex causal models of disease prevention and the subsequent development of interventionist approaches to public welfare. This “refinement,” however, has led to an increasingly reductive position, prefigured in large part by the growth and development of the new epidemiological research. As Casperson *et al.* (1985, p. 126) remarked, ‘[t]he epidemiological study of any concept or event

² The President's Council has undergone a number of name changes/extensions since its inauguration in 1956 as “The President's Council on Youth Fitness” under the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower. In 1963, John F. Kennedy expanded on the mandate of these original formulations to include all Americans with “The President's Council on Physical Fitness.” In 1966 Lyndon B. Johnson broadened the council's remit to include sports (“The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports”). And finally, in 2010 under the Obama administration, given the rising pressures at the level of public policy for the food industries to contribute in the efforts to combat the plague of adult and childhood obesity, the council has expanded to “The President's Council on Physical Fitness, Sports and Nutrition” (for an overview see Department of Health and Human Services, 1998; The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 2006; The President's Council of Physical Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, 2011). Where the council is referred in the text, its name at the time of the publication of the source will be used. This will help to avoid attributing outdated views to the council as it presently exists.

requires that the item under investigation be defined and measured.’ Under the commitment to this symbolic generalisation then, fitness has to be reduced from the very beginning in order that it might be observationally testable. Just as a whole host of diseases, disorders, perversions, and afflictions came to be defined in terms of identifiable and observable symptoms to be isolated and treated with the onset of the modernising world (see e.g. Foucault, 1998, 2001, 2003), so too the epidemiological emphasis on fitness has settled on a definition that underscores composites of individual physical abilities relative to established benchmarks. Operating from this individual base then, fitness is marked only by its proximity to statistically typical (and verifiable) functional abilities. Although there is much merit to be attributed to the relational basis upon which the terms of fitness are spelled out, something rather peculiar is happening – the more we talk about fitness the narrower its scope becomes.

It is important to note from the outset that this thesis will resist this latter position such is its timeless, asocial, and ahistorical approach to the study of fitness. This thesis will resist the temptation to constrain fitness in this manner. It will resist the temptation to locate fitness at the expense of the mystery that inspired it in the first place; namely, that fitness presupposes a culture and material environment in which certain functional abilities are valued. Fitness is nothing if not a cultural phenomenon (see Featherstone, 1982; Freund & Martin, 2004; Glassner, 1989, 1990; Sassatelli, 2005; Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a; Volkwein, 1998; White, Young & Gillett, 1995). That fitness is a cultural phenomenon implies grounding it in biological needs and physiological capacities only in so far as these are mediated by a dynamic set of complex, socio-historical and materially contingent, practices, values, and behaviours. It is to acknowledge that “being fit” implies, from the very

beginning, being “*fit for...*” (fit for something or, perhaps more insidiously, fit for someone). It is to acknowledge that fitness is a relational term and that comprehensive account must also express the way the body is related to a social, historical, and material order of causality.

1.2 Aims of the Thesis and Chapter Descriptions

Since, the general aim of this thesis is to provide a phenomenology of fitness, it will help to make a number of preliminary points as prolegomena. Firstly, while there are many reasons why certain phenomenological themes have fallen out of favour over the past half century, the notion that our descriptions of phenomena should proceed by way of bracketing commonsense (or “natural”) attitudes is not one of them. With phenomenology, Husserl famously stated, we are to put out of action that general positing of the natural attitude. Failure to do so, Husserl and others warned, merely leaves us blinded in a haze of biases, pre-notions, and pre-constructed discourses that do violence to our investigations (Husserl, 1983, 2001 cf. Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994; Foucault, 1991, 1995, 1998). Secondly, and on this basis, this bracketing of the natural attitude implies an acknowledgement that these biases exist. It also implies breaking with them as common representations so as to facilitate an attunement to those factors that remain implicit in our practices, discourses, and institutions. As the later Heidegger (1971, p. 178) argued, to undertake a phenomenology is to come to an understanding of the ‘thinging of the thing.’ It is to come to an understanding of how objects come to matter for us as things and how a great many objects, artefacts, ideas, practices, techniques, technologies, discourses, institutions, infrastructures, events, and associations have had to participate in the formation of a relational field of meaning

(i.e. in order to form a “world”). So, if for the phenomenologist the being of an entity is its being-in-the-world, then it is only by coming to terms with the assembly of these worldly relations that fitness can be understood and rendered amenable to conceptualisation.

This thesis undertakes a phenomenology of fitness in two important senses: (i) by bracketing the natural attitude with respect to fitness, and (ii) by providing a description of fitness from the perspective of this renewed contextualisation. It should be immediately clear that this chapter has begun this process, insofar as it has criticised tendencies towards reductionism, and insofar as there has been an acknowledgement of fitness’ cultural embeddedness. It is only through the chapters that follow that this phenomenology will take its full effect.

Chapter Two of this thesis, “Making Sense of Fitness,” contextualises the question of fitness within the processes of reflexive embodiment at play in modern society (i.e. modernity). In order to bracket the natural attitude with respect to fitness and to answer the question of fitness’ cultural embeddedness, Chapter Two examines the reasons why (in modern society) individuals reflect back on their bodies and upon themselves *as* bodies. That is to say, by contextualising fitness, its cultural imagery, practices, discourses, and institutions within a quite specific social-historical, material and political context, Chapter Two undertakes to make sense of fitness as a relational phenomenon. It takes as its primary objective the following question: *in what sort of a society has fitness come to the fore as a legitimate matter of concern?* In order to answer this question, the chapter makes a number of important moves. Firstly, it highlights what would appear to be the consensus position with respect to fitness prior to any unsettling of the natural attitude. It moves away from this view in order to frame this consensus in relation to the onset of

modernity, the neo-liberal (as opposed to merely biomedical) model of health politics, and the risk-centred, individualised orientation to the body and self-identity that they presuppose. Fitness' association with progressivist convictions (to health, wellbeing, social regeneration, etc.) is problematised and its association to the modern logic of consumption is underscored. The chapter concludes by outlining in more detail this problem of fitness: that is, the problem of fitness' intimate relation with idealised images of consumer culture and having become a matter of concern quite apart from health. It outlines how, despite the normative status of the fit body in modern society, the task of achieving fitness is akin to the task of Sisyphus. Fitness is framed as an ambivalent practice, something to be toiled at indefinitely without ever actually being achieved. In its concluding paragraphs, Chapter Two opens up the possibility for a re-description of fitness on new terms (or, a re-description of Sisyphus as will be seen).

Chapter Three, "Towards a Phenomenology of Fitness: Methodological Consideration," takes up the problem of fitness and this task of re-description in more detail. It summarises the thesis to that point, takes stock of existing critical accounts of fitness and, in particular, outlines the justification for a shift in emphasis from critique to matters of concern. In order to do this, a shift in the organisation of attention is made away from ambivalence in order to examine the possibilities for fitness beyond mere consumption activity. Chapter Three opens up the possibilities for a re-description of fitness on the basis of the following proposition: *fitness is something we negotiate, despite it being something we never really achieve*. Therein, the thesis is directed towards the generation of a phenomenological description based on the following question: *What is the structure of this process of negotiation?* In order to answer this question, Chapter Three directs the thesis towards:

1. An exploration of meaning-making in the context of fitness participant's lived descriptions.
2. An examination the motivational impulses that encourage and nurture development in fitness activities.
3. An examination the types of pleasures that accrue to participants through the engagement in fitness activities.

Further to this description, considerations (with respect to the research approach) including the methods of description, sampling, and pertinent revisions are also underscored. A summary of the data-generation situation, considerations pertaining to sensitive issues, the process of data interpretation, and the reliability and validity of the methodological approach are also presented.

Chapter Four, "Negotiating the Fit Body: From Consumption to Virtuous Production," presents a re-description of fitness by focusing on the pragmatic level of action and interaction where meaning relates to use and practice. Findings from twelve elaborative phenomenological interviews emanating from an ethnographic orientation over a two and a half year period are given toward this end. In this chapter, participants' own descriptions are deployed in order to follow through on the positive proposition that fitness is something individuals negotiate. Chapter Five offers a tripartite analysis of fitness' negotiated dimensions. It (i) reconsiders the possibilities for health as a broader narrative frame within which the ambivalent character of fitness tends towards coherence, (ii) underscores the dual importance of both "doing fitness" and "being someone through fitness" in the context of how agency is established with respect to fitness practices, and (iii) explores the possibilities for pleasure on the basis of a complex interplay of tension and release. The re-description presented in Chapter Four highlights the possibilities for fitness beyond mere consumption activity and, in line with the title of this thesis, offers a renewed and negotiated conception of virtuous production.

Finally, Chapter Five (“Conclusion: Towards A Complementary Model of Health and fitness”) provides a number of concluding remarks and assesses this thesis’ significant contributions. It underscores a number of possible limitations and examines some opportunities for future research on these bases. In particular, Chapter Five outlines the possibilities for a Complementary model of Health and fitness as a means of bringing together the findings of this research, consolidating some of its potential limitations, and providing an analytic frame under which health and fitness research might be undertaken in the future.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING SENSE OF FITNESS

‘That which was fit among the animals is not fit among human beings, not merely because the animals were non-moral and man is moral; but because the conditions of life have changed, and because there is no way to define the term “fit” excepting through these conditions.’

John Dewey, *Evolution and Ethics*

Making sense of fitness is a difficult task. In Chapter One, this point was pressed in relation to fitness’ status as a cultural phenomenon. It was established that fitness and its role in society could not be understood by recourse only to its significance on mere quantitative terms and that, in order to account for fitness in a manner that avoids reductionism, it was necessary to analyse its social-historical, material, and political relations (i.e. its conditions of meaning). Given this cultural embeddedness, this chapter treats fitness as akin to what Bourdieu (1998, p. 15) referred to as a ‘social object.’ That is, it treats fitness as something that is both ‘hidden behind a screen of pre-constructed discourses’ and in need of a ‘break with common representations’ (ibid). To reiterate a point that was made in Chapter One: making sense of fitness implies an understanding of how fitness has come to matter

for us and for how a great many participants³ have had to gather in order to form a relational field of meaning. If, as the opening quote from this chapter suggests, there is no way to define fitness without acknowledging how the conditions of life have changed, then the purpose of this chapter is to examine the mechanisms through which fitness has been harnessed as a means of salvaging the self and of reorienting the body in the face of the consequences of modernity. That is to say, the primary objective of this chapter is to address the following question: *in what sort of a society has fitness come to the fore as a legitimate matter of concern?*

The first section of this chapter, “2.1 The Consensus Statement with Respect to Fitness,” follows on from the Introduction in highlighting what would appear to be the consensus position with respect to fitness and its axes of intelligibility – hierarchical and multidimensional structuring. It gives an overview of pertinent distinctions between *physical activity*, *exercise*, *fitness*, and *health*, and of their relations as illustrated in various models. The section concludes by illustrating a comprehensive hierarchical model of physical activity, fitness, and health. The following two sections of this chapter (“2.2 Fit for Modernity” and “2.3 Fit for Consumption”) examine more closely the relational character of fitness, highlighting the fact that, as an ontological category, being fit implies being “*fit for...*” The section “Fit for Modernity” underscores the sociological importance of our present stage in the history of modernity for understanding the prevalence of fitness in modern society. Here, fitness is linked in a very specific way to the privatisation of risk typical of neo-liberal economies and a new configuration of power relations that treats individuals as the autonomous and creative centres of their own embodied

³ I use the term “participants” in a broad sense here following Hacking (1999) and Latour (2005) in order to refer to all of those acts, actors, objects, ideas, practices, techniques, technologies, discourses, institutions, infrastructures, events, associations, or actants (Latour’s phrase) that congeal over time in order to produce a specific social matrix (Hacking’s phrase). I also advocate the use of “relational field of meaning” here insofar as it maintains an emphasis on fitness’ relational character.

destinies. The importance of the organisation of the fitness field as an official discourse is also underscored. Section three, “Fit for Consumption,” discusses the importance of the role played by consumption in the production, legitimation, and reproduction of fitness as a field of practice. It illustrates how, in the society of consumers, investments in the body are not only directed towards the autonomous ends of subjects and the optimal performance of the body-for-itself, but on the basis of an instrumental rationality that requires bodies to be fit for consumption. Section four, “Fitness and Ambivalence,” highlights the incompatibility of the neo-liberal aspirations for fitness at both the public and private levels and problematises the common sense hierarchical associations of fitness, health, and wellbeing. On this basis, and in order to (re)configure the role of fitness in the modern experience, the grounds for its dislocation from health are discussed in the context of a number of important distinctions. This final section is given to the analysis of what might be disaffectionately referred to as the problem of fitness; that is, the problem of fitness at a normative, perspectival and interpersonal level. In the concluding section, a positive appropriation of “the problem of fitness” is established in order to point towards a re-description with which the remainder of this thesis will primarily be concerned.

2.1 The Consensus Statement with Respect to Fitness

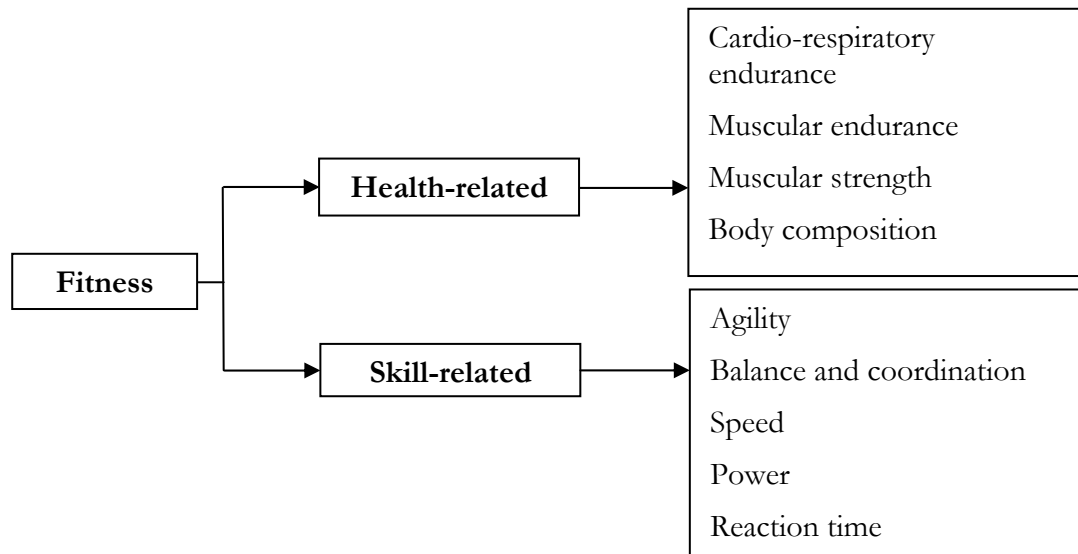
It was outlined in Chapter One that the main theme running through the various accounts of fitness over the past number of decades is its relational character. Traditionally speaking, this was thought to be a relation of a more general kind in which an individual's fitness was equated with daily, task-related, energy expenditure requirements (President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 1971, cited in Casperson *et al.*, 1985; see also Greenberg, Dintiman & Meyers Oakes, 2004; Keong, 1981; Malina & Little, 2008; McCormack Brown, Thomas & Kotecki, 2002; see also WHO, 2011). Although this view seems to resonate quite well with the notion of promoting relations *of fit* between individuals and their activity environments – a view that is increasing in appeal, though will not be of primary focus in this thesis save for a number of remarks in conclusion – such a view has largely been rejected as inadequate and has been replaced by a definition that is more “conceptually concise.” While there are a number of specific operational difficulties that the traditional definition poses for the epidemiological study of health statuses within modern populations, the two most prominent bases for a shift in emphasis are fitness' seemingly multidimensional and hierarchical structuring. Two formulations of fitness' multidimensional character appear to have been particularly formative in the literature.⁴ In the following subsections, the work of Casperson *et al.* (1985) and Bouchard and Shephard (1994; Bouchard, Shephard & Stephens, 1994) will be brought together in order to illustrate the general consensus hierarchical model of their structuring (in “Figure 2.3 The Hierarchical Model of Health and Fitness” on page 24).

⁴ For a historical overview of fitness' conceptual development, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1998) *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (see also Sharma, 1994). For a contrasting historical account of the cultural production of fitness see Smith Maguire (2008a).

2.1.1 The Components of Fitness and the Hierarchical Model

Building on the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports initial formulations (circa 1963/1966 under the Kennedy/Johnson administration; see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998), Casperson *et al.* (1985) drafted a position paper in which a number of definitions and distinctions for health-related research were underscored. For Casperson *et al.*, the need for a clarification of commonly used terms such as “physical activity,” “exercise,” and “fitness” followed from the epidemiological imperative to establish standardised terminologies and to promote a greater understanding of the relation between each of these terms and their subsequent relation to health statuses. They begin by distinguishing between *physical activity* and *exercise*. ‘Physical activity,’ Casperson *et al.* (ibid, p. 126; see also Dishman, Washburn & Heath, 2004; World Health Organization, 2011) explain, is defined as ‘any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure.’ As such, everyone performs physical activity in order to sustain life. Although it is often used interchangeably and shares common elements with physical activity, the term exercise is largely distinguished from it on the basis of its scope. ‘Exercise,’ Casperson *et al.* (ibid, p. 128) explain, is best understood as a ‘planned,’ ‘structured,’ and ‘repetitive...subcategory of physical activity’ that has a specific ‘regard [for] physical fitness.’ On the basis that there are a number of exercise-related components that contribute to it, fitness is defined as that ‘set of attributes that people have or achieve’ (ibid). As the illustration overleaf reveals, fitness is a property of individuals, and these properties are deemed to fall into two general groups – *health-related fitness* and *skill-related fitness*:

Figure 2.1 Casperson *et al.* Components of Physical Fitness



Adapted from Casperson *et al.* (1985, p. 128)

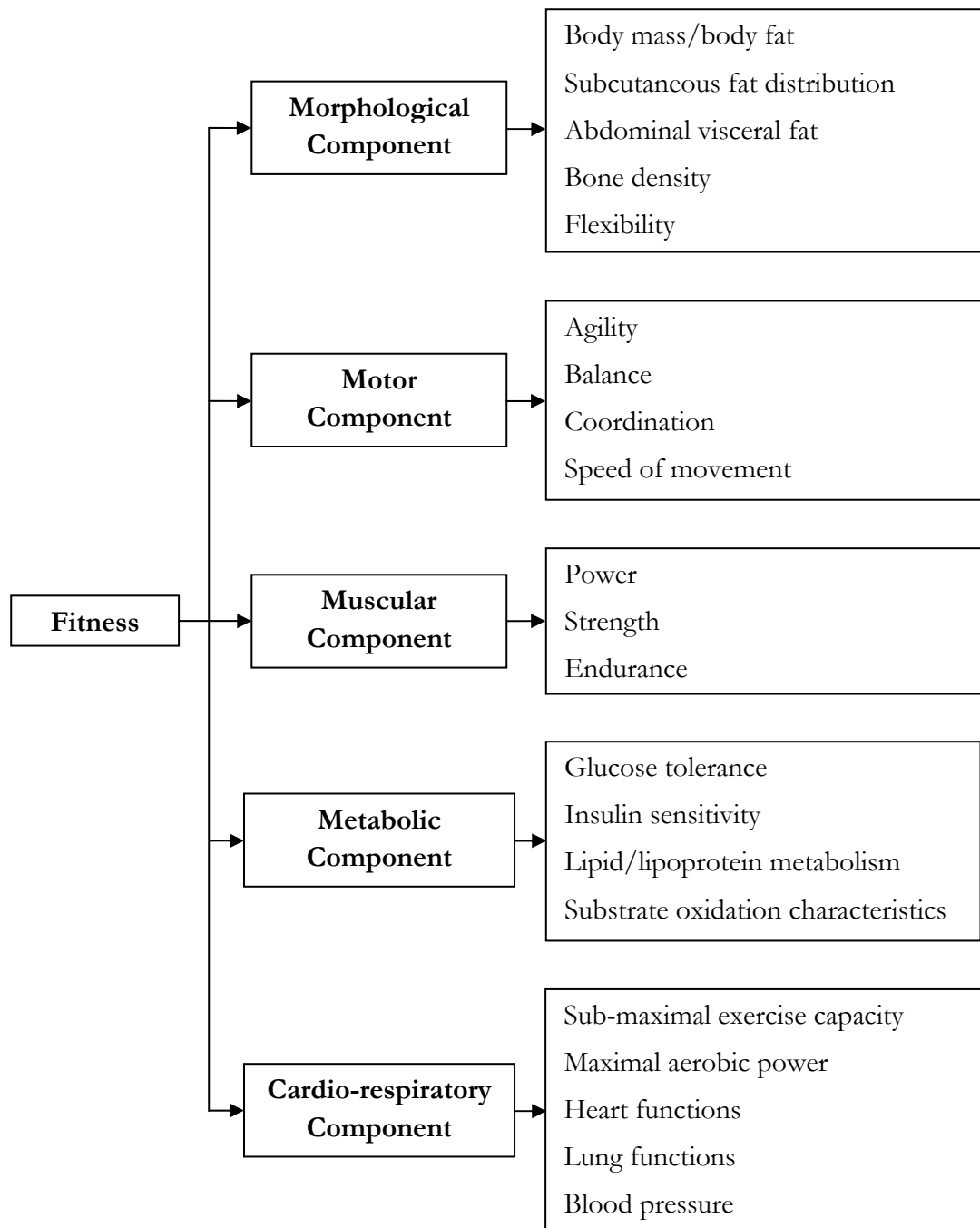
For Casperson *et al.*, it is clear that fitness is better understood on more specific terms than originally conceived, and on the basis of components that can be measured in relation to health and skills/athletic abilities. In fact, it might even be said for Casperson *et al.* that the move away from the traditional definition of fitness (as general energy expenditure in relation to some specified activity environment) towards a definition that accounts for measurable individual components is, in large part, attributable to increasing levels of engagement in exercise programmes as structured forms of physical activity and the need to account for the effects of this in a manner that is amenable to observational testing (a need that is neither epistemological nor ontological, but pragmatic).

Like Casperson *et al.*, and in the consensus statement from the Second International Conference on Physical Activity, Fitness, and Health (Bouchard, Shephard & Stephens, 1994), Bouchard and Shephard (1994) also emphasised the importance of a relation of fit between individuals and their social-material environment. ‘In general terms,’ Bouchard and Shephard (*ibid*, pp. 80-1) explained,

‘fitness can be conceived as the matching of the individual to his or her physical and social environment.’ In spite of this broad encompassing definition, they went on to define fitness in terms of ‘those characteristics that permit a good performance of a given physical task in a specified physical, social, and psychological environment’ (ibid). Like Casperson *et al.*, for Bouchard and Shephard the components of fitness are reduced to individual characteristics that can be operationalised within the context of two specific goals – performance-related fitness and health-related fitness. Their proposed multidimensional model is illustrated in “Figure 2.1 Bouchard and Shephard’s Components of Physical Fitness” overleaf.

In comparison to the work of Casperson *et al.*, Bouchard and Shephard’s multidimensional model of fitness is rather more extensive. For them, fitness is best measured in line with a broader framework of physiological indicators that include (as illustrated above) the workings of the body’s morphologic, muscular, cardio-respiratory, motor, and metabolic components. This, however, is very much a difference in extent and not a difference in kind. In spite of this difference, however, what is important for both Casperson *et al.* (1985) and Bouchard and Shephard (1994) is that, where fitness is conceived of as a relation (*matching or performance*) between individual characteristics (or *attributes*) and activity environment, this relation is deemed to be observational in terms of typical statistical efficiency. Taken together then, the consensus position entails treating fitness as a multidimensional phenomenon at the level of the individual and as a measure of individual bodily indices relative to acceptable and statistically verifiable parameters.

Figure 2.2 Bouchard and Shephard's Components of Physical Fitness



Adapted from Bouchard & Shephard (1994, p. 81)

At a more general level, the consensus position entails treating physical activity and exercise, fitness, and health in a discrete manner and as related to one another on the basis of a shared plane of causality. It is on this basis that the consensus position

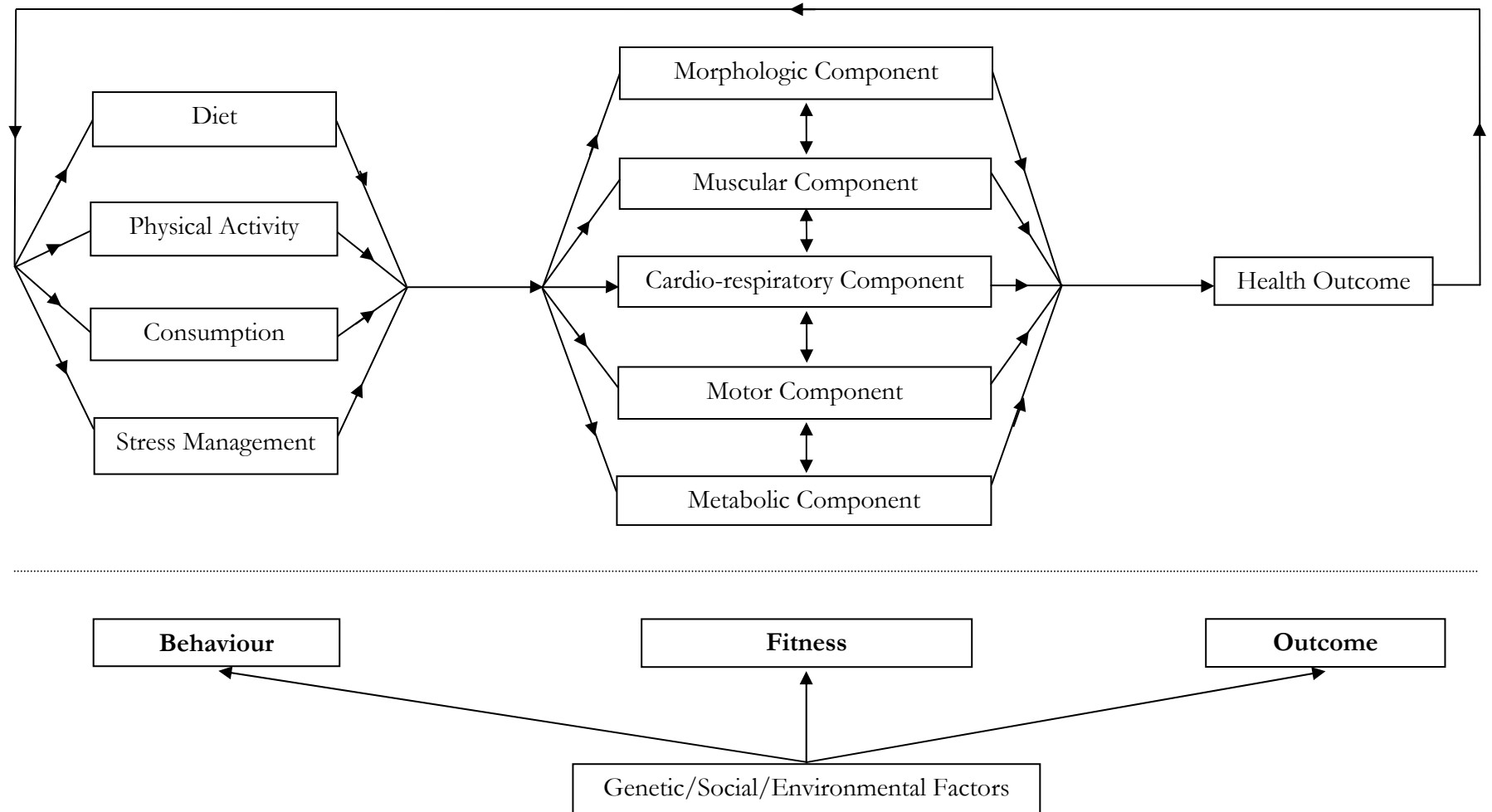
is referred to as being hierarchical and, thus, as exhibiting the following logical relations: physical activity and exercise contribute to fitness which contributes to a state of positive health, which is indicative of overall wellbeing. It is also notable that, for both Casperson *et al.* (1985) and Bouchard and Shephard (1994), health-related components (as opposed to performance-related ones) are deemed most important in the hierarchical configuration. That is to say, within the hierarchical model, it is health that functions as the most important goal or, more accurately, as the higher order construct. Although the consensus position evidences a clear commitment to public health research, it also clearly reflects an epistemological commitment to the methodological principles of epidemiological research *and* a political commitment to the alignment of the biomedical model's two principle referents (individual and public health). An updated hierarchical model which usefully conceptualises the consensus position and which outlines the aforementioned relations is presented overleaf on page 24.⁵

In order that this multidimensional-hierarchical model might be accepted as the consensus statement within the exercise science community, it will be useful to make three final observations. Firstly, the model continues to form the basis for the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition account of their key terms and definitions in the field (President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 2000). In fact, it forms the basis for the U.S Department of Health and Human Services (1998) most extensive report of the Surgeon General on physical activity and health which bring together, with the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, a consensus statement from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Secondly,

⁵ The relevance of this model might be further underscored by highlighting the fact that it was formulated on the back of a large-scale review of exercise-, fitness-, and health-related research between the period 1990 and 2000 (Blair, Cheng & Holder, 2001).

even a brief online search indicates that both Casperson *et al.* (1985) and Bouchard and Shephard (1994) serve as foundational source material for operational definitions of key terms within exercise science research across a number of sub-disciplines (and in an international context). Related to this, and the final reason for accepting this multidimensional-hierarchical model as the consensus position, is the fact that, where existing research is concerned, the nature and relations of physical activity, exercise, fitness, and health are deemed to be suitably amenable to empirical research and scarcely pose any significant conceptual issues. On these bases, it seems hardly an over-estimation of its internal validity to refer to this model as the consensus position within the international exercise science community.

Figure 2.3 The Hierarchical Model of Health and Fitness



Adapted from Blair *et al.* (2001, p. 380)

2.1.2 Towards an Account of Fitness and its Cultural Embeddedness

In spite of this internal validity, a number of problems with the hierarchical model have been highlighted within other (seemingly non-related) literatures. From the perspective of the sociology of the body and the sociology of health and illness, for example, the relation between health and fitness has been deemed especially problematic (see e.g. Bauman, 1998a, 2000, 2001, 2005; Bauman & May, 2001; Glassner, 1989, 1990; Smith Maguire, 2007, 2008a). And this is not merely for the well known fact that what makes one fit does not necessarily make one healthy, but also, because aligning health and fitness is deeply political (see e.g. Foucault, 1980; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Holmes, Murray, Perron & Rail, 2006; Markula, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2006; Pronger, 2002; Smith Maguire, 2008a; White *et al.*, 1995).⁶ Although this chapter will explore these political considerations in more detail, it will suffice to say for now that a general disillusionment with the consensus position has resulted from its neglect of contextual factors and its latent value neutrality.

There is clearly a broad emphasis within the consensus position on the social and material configuration of activity environments individuals inhabit. However, the more specific emphasis on the descriptive characteristics of individual bodies is a testament to this neutralist position. This construction of the individual on value-neutral terms is problematic. For one, it emphasises only what an *individual* can do (through diet, physical activity, consumption, and stress management, for example) to effect a change in *their* body's physiological systems (that is to say, morphologic, muscular, cardio-respiratory, motor, and metabolic systems) such that *they* can increase the chances of experiencing higher-order outcomes (notably, health). As such, accounts of fitness constructed in this manner merely become accounts of the

⁶ Whether this alignment is “political” or “pragmatic” is an issue that I take up in the following chapter (Chapter Three) and again in conclusion (Chapter Five).

individual that implicate them within already existing environments (rather than vice versa).⁷ Accounts of “individual fitness,”⁸ therefore, have proceeded at the expense of a broader range of relations that impact on the body. As Freund and Martin (2004) have explained, fitness is more than a mere property of individuals (or ‘mind-bodies,’ to use their term, *ibid*, p. 274). Fitness, they continue, is constructed within cultural contexts in which uses of the body occur. And, since the consensus position largely brackets this conditioning environmental factor, it has become largely disembedded from the context of habitual social practice. The result of this disembedding, Freund and Martin explain, is that fitness has been reduced to an individual commodity that is sequestered from the daily life-worlds in which it is a matter of concern. So, although consensus perspectives highlight social, cultural and environmental conditions in a general sense – and, thus, that fitness might be deemed to be a *valued* capacity in relation to such conditions – it is clear that this important value component is largely ignored. The often silent hand of culture, it seems, presents a broad suite of variables that extend too far beyond the remit of the controlled epidemiological research environment.

To use a phrase from Chapter One, the consensus position seems to proceed at the expense of the mystery that inspired it in the first place – namely, that fitness presupposes a culture in which certain capacities attributed to individuals are valued and that it is, therefore, a *cultural* phenomenon. This has at least two implications. At best, this value-neutrality proceeds at the expense of a whole host of relations that have sedimented in ideality over time. At worst, it proceeds at the expense of a more

⁷ One might even go as far as to say that the broken line traversing the illustration in “Figure 2.2 The Hierarchical Model of Health and Fitness” plays an important role in demarcating those variables which are related to the individual and, hence, amenable to close observation from those which are outside of the individual and are not.

⁸ As opposed to the earlier conceptions of fitness discussed previously. Or, for example, as opposed to Eisenhower’s (1956, cited in United States Government Printing Office, 1999a, p. 579) emphasis on ‘total fitness’ in the early days of The President’s Council.

deep-seated political agenda which shows how the notion of “being fit” can imply “being fit for something” (something other than health) and, perhaps more insidiously, “being fit for someone” (someone other than oneself).

In order to account for fitness’ cultural embeddedness, it is important to acknowledge that, as a widely used predicate, it does more than describe the characteristic features of individual bodies. Rather, our modern notion of fitness has served to create, shape, and utilise bodies in ways that align with the interests of our dynamic modern social configuration. It is in this sense that fitness has to be understood in terms of a social organisation of activity that implicates the body and the self in ways not prominent in previous modes of sociality. In order to outline the contours of this value-ladenness, it is necessary to understand how the dynamic and disembedding features of our present stage in the history of modernity (the shifting nature of time-space relations, risk, power, and capital) have imposed new meanings upon the body and self-identity (thus making them thoroughly reflexive). The following sections are given specifically to this task.

2.2 Fit for Modernity

My emphasis hitherto on “modern” society or “modernity” is noteworthy and, in general, I mean to invoke an image of social organisation that has proliferated from the seventeenth century onwards and which has become largely worldwide in influence (see Berman, 1983; Giddens, 1990). More specifically, with the term modernity, I mean to align this study with what Giddens (1990, 1991) referred to as “high,” “late,” or “radicalised” modernity, what Beck (1992) referred to as the “second” modernity, what Beck, Lash, and Giddens (1994) referred to as “reflexive modernity,” and what Bauman (2000) has referred to as “liquid” modernity. In fact,

in many respects, my use of the term modernity will align closely with many features associated with the mode of social formation that has been designated as “post-modern” (Lyotard, 1984; see also Baudrillard, 1983, 1994; Harvey, 1989). A number of points will suffice to make explicit what is meant by modernity before proceeding.

For Giddens (1990, 1991), who is arguably the most prominent sociologist of modernity, the modern world is not merely different in configuration and in relation to previous modes of sociality. Rather, it is more dynamic in both scope and profoundness. Although it has established a greater global interconnectedness which has been lauded, the distancing of time-space relations – a characteristic feature of modernity (see Berman, 1983; Harvey, 1989) – has also altered some of the most intimate and personal features of everyday life. Notably, and given this distancing of time and space, the private sphere has become increasingly influenced by areas quite distant from it. In fact, the configuration of modern institutions and political structures now connect the private and public spheres in ways not prominent in previous modes of sociality. Abstract and expert systems of knowledge now penetrate and organise people’s lives in ways previously accomplished by local systems of interaction. And since these systems have to organise and deploy technical and specialised knowledge in a manner that is amenable to action, trust acts as our primary re-embedding mechanism. ‘In respect of expert systems,’ Giddens (1991, p. 19) explains, ‘trust brackets the limited technical knowledge which most people possess about coded information which routinely affects their lives.’ Trust acts as a means of binding time and space. And since “moderns” are reliant on this as their primary means of reintegration and control in the face of ontological insecurity, the experience of modern life is tempered by risk. This notion that modernity is

unique in terms of how individuals relate to risk is an important factor in accounting for fitness and other culturally elaborated ways of attending to the body.

2.2.1 Fitness and the Privatisation of Risk

That modernity has become synonymous with risk culture is prominent in the work of a great many social theorists (e.g. Bauman, 1991; Beck, 1992; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994; Castels, 1991; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Giddens, 1990, 1991). Since the distancing of time and space has led to an undermining of locally based meaning systems (systems that had procedural rituals for legitimising shared identities) the onset of modernity has inflicted in individuals a heightened reflexivity and susceptibility to risk. In the modern world, for example, one can no longer rely on custom, tradition, or norms to frame an ascribed identity. Rather, by eroding traditions, secured identities, and templates for biographical trajectories, the advancement of modernity has implicated in individuals the requirement to construct their own identities. This declaration of the need to achieve self-affirmation (over self-determination) is nowhere more evident than in Nietzsche's opening of the modern self to the possibility of an infinite number of interpretations. As Nietzsche (1996, p. 30) explained, 'there is no 'being' behind doing, acting, becoming.' Rather, moderns 'become who [they] are – human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves' (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 189). Modernity is inherently risky because individuals are implicated in the creation of their own identities amidst a diversity of options and within a plurality of social worlds. Self-making is an inherently risky business because, as Nietzsche (1996, p. 42) warned, '[t]he ability to guarantee one's self with all due pride...is...a ripe fruit, but also a *late* fruit' (original emphases).

The modern world is inherently risky because it is characterised by a shift in the burden of risk associated with life options and choices. Self-making is no longer the remit of the social body in total. Rather it is the remit of the individual and characterised by what Foucault (2000) has referred to as individualising power. That is to say, if, as Foucault explained, each historical epoch has specific ways of producing the kinds of bodies that conform to its needs as an economic system, then the privatisation of risk is the means by which modern power has reached into the attitudes and actions of individuals. It is also the ultimate context under which fitness has come to the fore because it is under this intensifying risk context that individuals have on taken a more reflexive relation to their embodied self. It will suffice to make three important points concerning this connection.

2.2.1.1 From Dangerousness to Risk

Firstly, a necessary entry point for considering the relation between fitness and the risk society is the shift that has occurred from dangerousness to risk. While, for Giddens (1990) danger and risk are closely related – since ‘[w]hat risk presumes is precisely danger’ – it will be useful to propose a distinction. Castels (1991), for example, argues that risk has become autonomous from that of danger. ‘A risk,’ Castels (*ibid*, p. 287) writes, ‘does not arise from the presence of particular precise danger embodied in a concrete individual or group.’ Rather, ‘[i]t is the effect of a combination of abstract factors which render more or less probable the occurrence of undesirable modes of behaviour [or outcomes]’ (*ibid*). For Castels, the shift from dangerousness to risk is based on the Foucauldian premise that power is not to be sought in the existence of a central point, but refers to a complex and strategic relational configuration in a particular society (see Foucault, 1998, pp. 92-102).

Dangerousness presupposes a typically substantialist logic and can be localised to some specific referent whereas risk has no such centre because it is thoroughly relational.

In relation to the present study, it can be said that modernisation (which has brought with it advances in biomedical science and technology) has facilitated a shift away from the dangers of, say, acute and infectious diseases to a heightened awareness of, and anxiety with respect to, the risks of non-communicable conditions that are more chronic and degenerative in character. Modern epidemics are risky in character because they exist in an awkward relation to health and problematise the traditional paradigm of cause and effect. With modern epidemics, Boero (2007, 2010) explains, there is a lack of a clear pathological base. They are neither the effect of a single source, nor do they present the threat of widespread contagion. Rather, the moral panic that frames contemporary analyses of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol, stroke, and obesity, for example, is explained by the fact that *modern bodies are always potentially at risk*, not necessarily to some pathogen external to them, but to their very composition. Modern epidemics neither exhibit the need for concrete symptoms or diagnosis for their subjection nor do they exhibit the appearance of an internal or inherent truth to be brought to the fore. In fact, given their lack of a clear pathological base and the fact that they have become increasingly resistant to passive prevention, modern epidemics are, for the most part, outside of the purview of traditional conceptions of health. That they are being framed as the major health problems of our time is almost something of a misnomer. One might even go as far as to say that the major health problems of our time are not necessarily health problems at all. Quite the contrary, modern epidemics problematise health.

The type of risk to which modern individuals are now exposed produces its effects from the inside out (not the other way round as was traditionally the case). It is “subject-centred” as opposed to “object-centred.” And, borrowing from Foucault, it is everywhere in modern society, not because it embraces everything, but because it potentially comes from everywhere. As Petersen (1997, p. 195) has explained of the modern health context, ‘everything potentially is a source of ‘risk’ and everyone can be seen to be ‘at risk’.’ Modern individuals are not merely *subjected to risk*. Rather, they have become *subjects of risk* in and through their bodies.

2.2.1.2 Neo-liberalism

Secondly, given that the shift from dangerousness to risk implies a shift from object-centred risk to subject-centred risk, the question as to how it is to be obviated takes centre stage. How could the State foot the bill if health profiling is to take everyone into account, since everything is potentially *a risk*, and since everyone is potentially *at risk*? The short answer to this question – it can’t. The state cannot afford increases in healthcare costs associated with changing demographics, new technologies, and increasing demands (Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1990, 1991; Giddens & Pierson, 1998; Petersen, 1997; Smith Maguire, 2008a; Turner, 1991). The longer answer to this question (which will be pursued here in order to engender a confluence between risk and fitness) is that it doesn’t have to. The current paradigm of health promotion⁹ means it doesn’t have to because the State has sought to absolve from its traditional interventionist role and establish the market as the primary means of fulfilling welfare goals (Crompton, 2010; Glassner, 1989, 1990; Petersen, 1997). This is because the risk society of late modernity and its political

⁹ Since the early 1970s, at least. Though, as Foucault (1980; see also Leder, 1992a, 1992b) has explained, our current model of health politics was inaugurated at least as far back as the eighteenth century.

corollary, “neo-liberalism,” provides an environment under which the burden of risk is shifted from the formal mechanisms of democratic politics onto individuals.

Take, as a particularly revelatory example, the increased emphasis on physical fitness and individual behaviours in the context of the U.S. healthcare system. According to Patel and Rushefsky (2006) there has been an increased emphasis in the U.S. on containing rising healthcare costs over the past four decades. It is a legacy, the implications of which remain today, that can be attributed to the Nixon administration based on the policies implemented and bills enacted during his term of office. Take the following excerpts from former U.S. President Nixon’s address to Congress (on February 18 1971) and his remarks at the Reception for the President’s Council and Conference on Physical Fitness and Sports (on February 19 1971). With respect to the general healthcare context, at that time, Nixon explained how:

...today we devote almost 7% of our GDP to health expenditures...But what are we getting for all this money?...Because we pay so little attention to preventing disease and treating it early, too many people get sick and need intensive treatment. Our record, then, is not as good as it should be. Costs have skyrocketed but values have not kept pace. We are investing more of our nation’s resources in the health of our people, but we are not getting a full return on our investment...Because demand goes where the dollars are, the result is an unnecessary – and expensive – over-utilization of acute care facilities (Nixon, 1971, cited in United States Government Printing Office, 1999b, p. 171).

And with respect for the role of the individual, fitness, and the competitive spirit in the process of alleviating this strain on the state, Nixon explained that:

As a result of that program [The President’s Council of Physical Fitness and Sports], people around the country have been made aware of the importance of physical activity and what an individual can do about his health that will possibly not make it necessary for him to go to a doctor. And so much can be done if we do take care of ourselves properly...Let’s face it. This is a sports-minded country. That isn’t bad. It has a lot to do with the spirit of a country...[W]hat I am suggesting is this: that we need to alert the people of this country...that they can do something about their future to make them develop the health patterns which will avoid physical illness and very serious physical illness in the years ahead...[T]he point is that I feel that the emphasis on exercise, the fact that some exercise—call it what you will, jogging, walking, participation in competitive sports—some of this is so essential for the physical wellbeing of the people of this country...I believe in competitive sports...I believe in the spirit that an individual develops, either as he

watches or as he participated in competition...And if the individual is thinking in an optimistic and, in the best sense, competitive way, he will be a more healthy individual in every way. I believe in that (Nixon, 1971, cited in United States Government Printing Office, 1999b, pp. 194-5).

These passages are paradigmatic of the neo-liberal re-orientation to health politics that occurred around the middle of last century and has flourished ever since. Two points are especially noteworthy. Firstly, the neo-liberal orientation is underpinned by the privatisation of risk. And, as was mentioned previously, this privatisation of risk is essentially the *leitmotif* of the neo-liberal political project and late-modernity in general. Neo-liberalism, by encouraging market freedom and minimum intervention by the state, fosters an environment under which individuals are encouraged to exercise a regulated autonomy. It represents an ideological shift away from what Giddens (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 103) referred to as ‘external risk’ (the presumption that the state will intervene and protect its citizens when things go wrong) to a more active ‘reflexive risk environment’ (ibid, p. 163) under which people are encouraged to establish a different relationship to their social and material conditions (under which individuals are encouraged to act as autonomous and responsibly-informed). Secondly, in order that such a relation might be effected, the neo-liberal orientation has clearly emphasised the need to apply market principles in order to satisfy basic welfare conditions of modern existence. This has included such things as (i) increased competition and, therefore, choice, (ii) a greater emphasis on economic freedom and autonomy, as well as rationality and personal accountability, and (iii) the identification of all of these elements with the maximisation of self-interest. More broadly, the metaphor of the market has led to the treatment of bodies, health, and wellbeing as objects with utility functions and commodity status. As will be seen later in this chapter, the body (as fetish) is something that can be bought or sold or, indeed, traded within the positional economy

2.2.1.3 Individualisation

Finally, the lesson of this risk society is that the modern state is not developed above and independent of individuals. Rather the neo-liberal model refers to the organisation of risk according to a specific kind of individualising power. Foucault explains:

I don't think we should consider the "modern state" as an entity which was developed above individuals, ignoring what they are and even their very existence, but on the contrary as a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns (Foucault, 2000, p. 14).

The concluding sentiments of Nixon's address to Congress express something of a clarion call for this "specific pattern" by which individuals have been integrated into the modern state:

"It is health which is real worth," said Gandhi, "and not pieces of gold and silver." That statement applies not only to the lives of men but also to the life of nations. Not only is health more important than economic wealth, it is also its foundation. Nineteen months ago I said that America's medical crisis has deepened. All of us must now join together in a common effort to meet this crisis—each doing his own part to mobilize more effectively the enormous potential of our healthcare system (Nixon, 1971, cited in Mayes, 2004, p. 89).

Lest this be taken as an outdated philosophy in the context of current healthcare paradigms, consider the following presentation by former U.S. President George W. Bush to a local YMCA in 2003:

One of the things I talk about is the need to really work on cultural change in America to encourage a culture of personal responsibility, to encourage people to be responsible for the decisions they make in life...The initiative, the Healthier U.S. initiative, really speaks to personal responsibility, doesn't it? It says that we are responsible for our own health. By making the right choices, we can make the right choice for our future. By making health choices we can do the right things for our future. Moms and dads, by working on healthy choices, not only for themselves, but their kids, are doing their job as a parent. By exercising every day, by finding time, by carving out time, no matter how busy you may seem or how boring exercise may seem initially, it's part of a responsibility culture...[T]he truth of the matter is, one of the best reforms in America for health care is a strong, preventative health care program that starts with each American being responsible (Bush, 2003).

It is noteworthy to mention that, in these speeches, both Nixon and Bush are careful to address their subjects on nominative terms. Rhetorical strategies allow the listener to think that it is always someone else who is putting a strain on the system. *We* might not be the cause of *our* crippled healthcare system. But the strain on the system is one *we* all have to bear. It is *our* healthcare system and *we* are not getting the return on *our* investment. Where economic burden exists it is not only to be resisted through the promotion of individual market rationalities. Rather, it is compounded by the burden of moral responsibility. That the fitness of individuals is implicated in this process is quite clear. How this takes on a moral character will be discussed in the next section “2.3 Fitness and the Hegemony of Vision.” Bush’s address is considerably more sanguine than Nixon’s approximately three decades previously. However, the same message is clouded in this political rhetoric: an inversion in the burden of responsibility in health politics onto the individual.¹⁰

The lesson to be learned here is that, against this backdrop of increased demand, individual behaviours have become the linchpin in modern health economics. This is a process that has been increasingly refined over the past four decades in order to minimise socially borne risk and insert political and economic priorities into individual lifestyles. The transition from dangerousness to risk provided the impetus to rethink healthcare as disease prevention as opposed to only treatment-based. Since the increasingly prominent subject-centred risks of chronic and degenerative conditions had proven themselves to be without object (and thus resistant to passive prevention) support for the role of proactive measures in tackling modern epidemics

¹⁰ It is worth mentioning as an aside that, according to the work of Diez-Roux (1998) and Jacobs (1998), this has been shown to be the case in both a U.S. and European context. It is also notable to mention that this prioritisation of individual responsibility and individual lifestyle change forms the World Health Organization’s position with respect to the prevention of noncommunicable diseases. It also forms the backbone of their global strategy on diet, physical activity, and health (WHO, 2002a, 2002b, 2004).

has been deemed an economically prudent policy (cf. Smith Maguire, 2008a, pp. 46-61).

On this basis, it can be said that the prevalence of fitness in modern society is linked in a very specific way to this new configuration of power relations. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have argued that neo-liberal risk economies do not merely permit active contribution such that individuals can merely join together in a common effort. Rather, ‘individualization processes...*demand* an active contribution by individuals’ (ibid, p. 4). Although it has been deemed to be their greatest achievement in the name of championing the liberal agenda, this individualising trend can also be seen as a means of serving the needs of modern neo-liberal risk economies. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim and others (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor), individualisation is not a social condition arrived at by the free decision of individuals. Rather, in modern society, people are condemned to individualisation. The cogency of this process resides in the operation of power within it. It resides in the fact that, as Foucault (1980, 1998) has described, individualising power produces its effects at the level of desire. As Rose (1998, p. 151) would go on to suggest, power works through (and not against) subjectivity. It does not negate the vital capacities of individuals. Rather, it creates, shapes, and utilises them. The neo-liberal risk economy does not merely represent an ideological shift towards individualisation. Rather, it represents a shift away from ideology and from social engineering to individual performativity.

2.2.2 Fitness, Official Discourses, and the Hegemony of Vision

It was established in the previous section that the organisation of power in modern risk economies resides in the fact that it produces its effects at the level of individual desire. It is not only the case that there is an increasing emphasis upon privatised risk through self-regulation in late-modernity, but this burden of responsibility is reintegrated as an ultimately desirable process.

While the foregoing sought to explain *how* the transfer of risk has come about, it will also be instructive to reflect on *why* this depoliticising process has been so successful in continuously reproducing itself. One important way of coping with this question is to suggest that the desire for self-regulation presents itself, not necessarily as a conscious want or need, but is a force driven at the level of what Bourdieu (1984, 1985a, 1990, 2004; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) referred to as the *habitus*. That is to say, the desire for self-regulation is the result of a long process of inculcation through which class taste is inscribed into the body as an individual motivation structure or habit of action. This is a picture of modern body politics that Crossley (2006a, 2006b, 2006c) has closely considered. He explains that, even if gym-going itself is not rooted in, or a reflection of, class histories (most accounts date the growth in emphasis on fitness from the early 1970s onwards), self-cultivation, of which gym-going is a recent manifestation, *is*. It is plausible, Crossley concluded, that gym-going is the latest expression of a long-standing petit-bourgeois preoccupation with self-cultivation and self-improvement, alongside such things as dietetics, meditation, psychoanalysis, etc.

It is clear that the organisation of late-modern risk economies requires a normalising gaze be dispersed throughout society. And the function of self-regulation at the level of *habitus* goes some ways towards explaining its prevalence.

In terms of its effectiveness, however, it also seems perverse to speak of “power producing effects at the level of desire” without recourse to the presence of a willing body; one willing to bear witness to this normalising/rationalising process. It is not enough to be “under surveillance” or to merely act in a manner that is a reflection of “class taste.” Rather, the adoption of the role of modern risk manager is based on the premise that, where bodies are found to be lacking, they must come forward and plead their case before a witness. The legitimation and reproduction of this normalising/rationalising process requires that it be sedimented into what Bourdieu (1989, p. 22) referred to as an ‘official discourse.’ Or, to use Foucault’s (1980, p. 131) terminology, it must establish itself as a ‘regime of truth.’ In order for fitness to take on a central role in the economy of self-regulation, it must implicate the individual within the process and, therefore, come to the fore in terms of what Foucault (1998, p. 64) referred to as a ‘confessional science.’ It can only do this on the basis that it fulfils (at least) three quite specific interrelated criteria.

2.2.2.1 Systems of Classification

Firstly, establishing an official discourse requires the production of a system of classification that asserts what a person *is*, universally and objectively. And, with the development of multiple narrative fields related to physical education and sports over the past half century (i.e. biomechanics, kinesiology, sociology of sport, sport history, sports management and marketing, sports psychology, sport science, sport studies, etc.) fitness, like health, has been increasingly utilised as a central theme for legitimate areas of scientific inquiry. Over the past half century, fitness has functioned as an axial principle for its own ‘medical speciality’ (British Medical Association, 2002, p. 522), the objectives of which include ‘the welfare of

athletes...the prevention, protection and correction of injuries, and the preparation of an individual for physical activity in its full range of intensity' (Kent, 1994, p. 29). And with an increase in the use of the term sports *and* exercise science to designate this medical speciality in its broadest sense, we can also see how the importance of fitness has been extended in scope beyond the confines of formal sporting activities. Thus, under the modern programmatic, it is not only the status and normal functioning of the body that is brought into the realm of evidence-based inquiry and practice. Rather, even the performance of the body and its potential (for both sporting and everyday) fitness have their own metaphysics – what Glassner (1990, p. 215) referred to a 'biosocial realis[m].' Today, knowledge of fitness – knowledge of an 'ethnophysiological' kind (Monaghan, 2001a, pp. 45-72, 2001b, p. 337) – is both highly technical and highly specialised. It is for this reason that the welfare and preparation of individuals for physical activity and fitness is reliant upon the mediating effects of an equally specialised system in which knowledge about the active body can be translated into workable forms (that can be aligned to action). It is on the basis of this realist system of classification, Glassner explains, that individuals today accept and take up the well-confirmed medico-scientific evidence for the adaptive and aesthetic superiority of the mobile, strong, fat-free fit body (cf. Holmes *et al.*, 2006).

One can clearly see the evidence for this by reflecting back on the consensus position with respect to fitness. For example, it would hardly be remiss to say that the model outlined in "Figure 2.2. The Hierarchical Model of Health and Fitness" has become conceptually embedded within our system of both formal and informal inferences with respect to the body. One could generally accept that individuals now understand the extent to which their behaviour in various consumption roles can be

monitored (and moderated) in order to effect a positive response in health- and skill-related statuses. The increased provision of sport- and exercise-related degree programmes, the professionalisation of sports psychologists, fitness instructors and personal trainers, the prevalence of nutrition and (the re-emergence of) dietetics, the mass dissemination and consumption of lifestyle media and fitness texts such as exercise manuals, magazines, DVDs, and mobile applications, etc., are all surely testament to this claim, and a point of inquiry that has been developing in the extant literature (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009; Glassner, 1989, 1990; MacNeill, 1998; Mansfield, 2011; Pronger, 2002; Smith Maguire, 2001, 2002, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). To borrow a phrase from Smith Maguire (2002), it is through this process that we have acquired knowledge as body lessons and, through, gradual courses of instruction and inculcation, have come to self-consciously monitor our fitness as a socially-visible activity of consumption (more on this later in this chapter, section “2.3 Fit for Consumption”).

The consumption of scientific knowledge pertaining to fitness and its internalisation as a conceptual scheme has also been met with some resistance in the literature for treating individuals in a manner that has been described by Crossley (2001, p. 110, 2006b, p. 24) as ‘culturally dopey’ (see also Davis, 1995; Crossley, 2006a, 2006c; Fishwick, 2008; Gimlin, 2002). However, I think that a distinction made by Foucault (1980) provides a helpful middle-ground and will allow us to get at what is at stake here. As Foucault (*ibid*, p. 132) explains, rather than taking up and merely accepting an ‘ensemble of facts’ individuals will more likely reliably infer from medico-scientific evidence an ‘ensemble of rules.’ “You are what you eat”; “Watch what you eat”; “Eat this, not that”; “Count your calories; 2000 a day for women, 2500 a day for men”; “Don’t count calories”; “Focus on portion-control”;

“Eat plenty of fruit and veg”; “Eat your five-a-day”; “Eat low-fat;” Eat good fats”;
“Watch out for the sugar content in low fat products”; “Make sure its low GI”;
“Check for wholegrain”; “Smoking and drinking are bad for you”; “A glass of red
wine every now and again is good for you”; “Exercise regularly”; “30 minutes
exercise every day”; “Take the stairs instead of the lift”; “No pain, no gain”; “Don’t
overdo it!” “Everything in moderation!” When it comes to the uptake and acceptance
of scientific knowledge, one could easily make the argument for the aforementioned
as examples of rules that most people understand as conducive to healthy living. But
this is entirely different than saying that they merely accept facts and that their
reasons for doing so are epistemic. It is perhaps more helpful to think of individuals
as having made investments in the game of fitness (Wittgenstein, 1963; see also
Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Foucault, 1980; Lyotard, 1984).¹¹ As Wittgenstein
famously, remarked, to follow a rule is merely to know how to go on. And the
emphasis here is pragmatic, a rendering of scientific knowledge formal so as to
produce effects.

2.2.2.2 Diagnosing Bodies

Secondly, since official discourses function to assign an identity, their
legitimation is further premised on the extent to which they facilitate the
performance of diagnostic acts (Bourdieu, 1989; Foucault, 1980). In order to exist as
an institution of knowledge, fitness-as-confessional-science has had to codify its

¹¹ The notion of a game should not be taken as reflection of the level of seriousness individuals attach to their bodies and embodiment. Rather, it is just to say that it is more plausible to think of individuals as following rules on a day-to-day basis than it is to think of them as accepting truths. For example, it is unlikely that most individuals would be aware of the state of play in research that examines the differences between proteins, carbohydrates, and fats and how these macronutrient sources *affect* insulin responses in different ways. It is similarly unlikely that individuals (though perhaps not diabetics) are concerned with their insulin sensitivity when they look for low GI/wholegrain products in the supermarket. It is even more unlikely that individuals who drink a glass of red for health do so in order to specifically increase their intake of phytochemicals. But this does not negate the importance of these as habits of practice.

subject so that systems of classification can be produced. In fact, although Edwards and McNamee (2006) have problematised the relation of sports science (and, by extension, exercise science) to broader institutionalised medical practice, it is with this notion of diagnostics that we can see an extensive overlap.

It was made clear at the outset of this chapter that the consensus position emphasises fitness' multidimensional character and the importance of monitoring individual bodily indices relation to acceptable and pre-established parameters. It is also the case today that, since fitness is a relational term, there has been much emphasis on defining its other – unfitness. Today, for example, this mark of unfitness is principally defined in relation to the obese body-in-itself which varies in degrees of intensity in relation to a Body Mass Index ($BMI = \text{Weight}[\text{kg}]/\text{Height}[\text{m}^2]$). While there is clearly an interesting study in examining the reasons why our mark of fitness has changed over time, it is also quite true that this is of secondary importance. What matters here is what the measurement can do and an acknowledgement of the fact that diagnostic procedures more generally are central to the legitimisation of an official discourse. As Jutel (2009) explained, diagnosis is so central to the legitimisation of an official discourse because it “does the work.” It segments, orders corporeal states, and gives them material force. In creating order, it aids in the identification of options by predicting outcomes relative to pre-established explanatory frameworks. It allows for the social incorporation of an individual and provides a cultural elaboration of what is acceptable behaviour and what is expected of them. As Foucault (1998) explained, through diagnosis the individual can be fixed by a gaze. They can be isolated and animated by this attention they receive and can be designated a status, one that deviates in differing degrees from this locus of control. As Bauman (1991) explained, this sort of

classificatory clarity is our closest intellectual equivalent to behavioural certainty. It allows for the establishment of norms association, identification, and for the regulation of behaviour.

It is quite clear that the organisation of the fitness field has relied heavily on the development of systems of classification and diagnostic procedures that it has adapted from the broader medical field. It too combines examination and observation in order to codify its subject and, in conjunction with confessional practices (see next section), procedural examinations and interventions, seeks to reduce the frequency with which deviation from the norms occurs. One might even go as far as to say that the fitness field hangs on to the ‘epistemological coat-tails’ (Morall, 2009, p. 96) of the broader field of health and medical discourse. Just as a whole host of diseases, disorders, perversions, and afflictions came to be defined in terms of observable symptoms to be isolated and treated (see esp. Foucault, 1980, 1998, 2001, 2003), so too has fitness become a part of this normalising process. Conceptually, increased emphases on fitness have been a fitting response to the general tension that has existed (and continues to exist) in philosophies of health between neutralist (or value-neutral) (e.g. Boorse, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1997) and normativist (or value-laden) perspectives (e.g. Nordenfelt, 1986, 1987, 2007; Emson, 1987; Englehardt, 1975; Goosens, 1980; Guerrero, 2011; Scadding, 1988; Täljedal, 2004). Theories of health now encompass a broad spectrum which traverse the World Health Organization’s (1946, p. 1315) original formulation of health as, not merely the ‘absence of disease or infirmity,’ but the state of ‘complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing.’ Since nobody could qualify as being healthy on latter vitalist terms (see e.g. Engelhardt, 1975; Guerrero, 2011), fitness has been apt to fulfil health’s original descriptive role. The classificatory potential of a concept like fitness has

been a fitting and timely mediating variable in the context of trying to account for health on both materialistic *and* idealistic terms. It has played a critical role in the calls for increasing methodological refinement and for improvements in the cost efficiency of public health research. It has also been critical in the foundational welfarist basis of nineteenth century epidemiology having given way to an instrumental emphasis on the individual as the subject of moral conscience (Beaglehole & Bonita, 2004; Glasgow, 2005; Pearce, 1996; Petersen & Lupton, 1996). It has allowed for the alignment of public health concerns with individual behaviours, and is itself a reflection of the types of bodies that are now subject to diagnosis – “individual bodies of risk” as opposed to “the social body at risk.”

2.2.2.3 The Confessional Programmatic

Thirdly, and finally, the success and reproducibility of official discourses is related to its success in implicating individuals in this confessional process. If, as Foucault (1998) reminded us, the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise invisible, this is because individuals are invited to *see* for themselves.¹² The following excerpt from the American College of Sports Medicine’s (ACSM) *Fitness Book* under the heading “Why Fitness Testing is a Good Idea” provides a good example of this:

You discovered in chapter 1 that regular exercise produces a variety of important physical changes. *But*, changes are often *difficult to recognize* because most occur gradually. To identify your rate of progress, take the ACSM Fitness Test at regular intervals throughout the year. It will allow you to understand the effort required for you to *see* positive results from your exercise program. As your scores in the ACSM Fitness Test improve, you will enjoy a greater feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction...Plan to repeat the test again on the one-year anniversary of your first day of the program, and *see* the wonderful changes that have happened to you (ACSM, 2003, p. 60, emphases added).

¹² Though, as Bourdieu would likely observe, they are (ironically) blind to the processes of their construction in the first place.

Adopting the role of chief risk manager under ACSM guidelines then, is a process of discovery. To be sure, progress requires effort. However, by using the “ACSM Fitness Test” as a prescriptive guide, individuals can “identify” their “rate of progress,” “understand the effort required” and, most importantly, to “*see* the positive results from your exercise program.” Moreover, since “changes are difficult to recognise,” this process privileges *sight* as its most basic asset. Sight functions as the confessional programmatic’s most fundamental tool for distancing the subject (or individual) from its object (or bodily fitness).

Another prevalent example of this ‘hegemony of vision’ (to use Levin’s 1993, pp. 1-29 phrase) which infiltrates the fitness experience is also outlined in Phillips and D’Orso’s (2002) New York Times Best Seller, *Body-for-Life*. At the outset of the book, Phillips, himself a renowned fitness guru, laments the fact that ‘there are still millions of people who have yet to discover their *true* potential’ (ibid, p. 21, emphasis added). ‘What these people are missing,’ he explains, ‘is the ability to apply knowledge,’ the ability to ‘cross the abyss’ (ibid). But how does one cross the abyss? How does this relate to the modern confessional programmatic? According to Phillips, the following will help you find ‘*your* reasons’ (ibid, p. 23, original emphasis):

When you look at yourself, do you honestly like what you see? It’s important to *really* look. Since we all “see” ourselves every day, we often don’t notice if we’re slipping. If we’re not careful, before long, the image we have of ourselves in our minds will not be in sync with reality. I suggest that you...have someone take a photo of you standing relatively relaxed with your arms at your sides, in a pair of shorts or a swimsuit. Get that photo developed and *look* at it (Phillips & D’Orso, 2002, p. 23, original emphases).

For Phillips and D’Orso, the problem of fitness is a product of the inability to see clearly. “When you look at yourself,” they emphasise, “it’s important to really look.” Appearances, “if we’re not careful,” start to cloud reality. For Phillips and D’Orso,

the first step in the process of self-regulation (or “crossing the abyss”) requires only that the truth comes to the surface. Truth and visibility work together because, as Butler (1999) has explained, this truth is inscribed *on* the body. If, as Foucault (2000, p. 14) explained, the form of power associated with official discourses (or regimes of truth) is linked with a production of a specific kind of truth, it is a truth of the *individual* and one of *visibility* and *observation*. This is clearly reflected in Phillips and D’Orso’s (2002, p. 22) claim that, in order to cross the abyss, one has to ‘look inside – *deep inside* – for honest answers’ (original emphasis). The confessional programmatic reproduces, in the context of an interplay between repudiation and contrition (Boero, 2007, 2010; Monaghan, 2008; Smith Maguire, 2008a; White *et al.*, 1995). The confessional provides what Monaghan (2008, p. 48) referred to as ‘discursive space’ in which individuals can be absolved from past sins while, at the same time, leaving the path open for personal salvation through acts of contrition.¹³ It opens up a space for the *realisation* of a need for change. And this realisation, to quote Foucault (1998), exonerates, redeems, and purifies the subject. ‘[I]t unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation’ (ibid, p. 62). It is only from here that the process of reparation can take effect.

The lesson to be learned here is that the social organisation of fitness is not only individualising. Rather, as Foucault (2000; see also Baudrillard, 1998, pp. 129-50) explained, it is salvation oriented and oblativ. In fact, it provides a useful contemporary example of what Rorty (1979, p. 12) referred to as ‘the mirror of nature.’ In order to bear witness to this normalising/rationalising process, individuals

¹³ It is noteworthy to mention as an aside that the problematisations of the body in late modernity have, in some cases, been reconstructed in the context of victim blaming and stigmatization. For example Boero’s (2007, 2010) analyses of the promotion and implementation of bariatric procedures is a particularly useful example of the problems arising from this ethic of self regulation. According to her research, the promotion of these weight-loss surgeries is often positively framed: i.e. the blame associated with fatness and slothfulness is misplaced and obesity needs to be reframed as a chronic disease. Where bariatric surgeries fail, however, Boero argues that such positive framing is quickly dispensed with. Treatment becomes atavistically charged, and traditional notions of individual culpability are re-invoked.

are invited to look in this mirror. They are invited to look upon themselves from a third person perspective and to use, as their primary motivation, this visual demonstration *of lack*. The process begins by getting clear on what is reflected in the mirror, for truth is an object to be realised therein. The lesson of this confessional programmatic – and what distinguishes it from traditional conceptions of health and medical practice – is twofold. Firstly, when it comes to the lacking body, it is not enough to be told the truth. Rather, *it has to be seen for itself*. Secondly, it is not enough to wait idly by for this *lack* to be addressed. No one can do it for you. *You have to want to do it, and want to do it for yourself.*¹⁴

The social organisation of fitness by means of the confessional programmatic is an attempt at the sedimentation of an official discourse at the level of the individual body, a systematic effort to promote investments in the body so as to reduce the frequency with which deviation from the norm occurs. That fitness is now presented as a legitimate official discourse is, thus, both a reflection of the existing problems with the objective body and health within risk economies and a powerful vehicle in their perpetuation and reproduction as individual concerns. The importance of the role played by consumption in this process is underscored in the next section.

¹⁴ While this emphasis on the visual in bringing to the fore the truths about the body is clearly evidenced in the work of Descartes' and in the production of medical knowledge and technologies since at least the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1980a, 1995, 1998, 2001; Leder, 1992a, 1992b; Levin, 1993), this process has become increasingly radicalised since the middle of the twentieth century.

2.3 Fit for Consumption

At almost one and the same time, neo-liberalism both politicised and depoliticised the body. It led to a decreased emphasis on state intervention as a means of fulfilling welfare goals, bringing to light the importance of the individual body (in the context of the social body) and defending the efficiency and suitability of the market to fulfil this body's needs. Given this emphasis on the individual body and individual market activity, scarcely any work in the current realms of exercise, sports, and health sciences these days seem to (explicitly) identify fitness with what it was once commonly accepted to mean – environmental adaptation.¹⁵ What is even more scarcely acknowledged is the fact that, since this environment has become increasingly consumerist, there is also a need to understand fitness in terms of its association with the consumer leisure industries, products and services, advertising, and the construction of ideal body images to fit commercial logics. As Smith Maguire (2008a; see also Smith Maguire & Stanway, 2008) explained, compulsory self-production – that *leitmotif* of late-modern risk economies – has been harnessed as the engine of consumer industries and as the framework of everyday lives to the extent that these two have almost become one and the same thing. The problem of fitness – of re-orienting one's body in the face of risk – is not merely an individual problem. It's a consumer's problem. Neither is it merely a problem of individual activity, as many of the health industry's initiatives would have you believe. Rather, it is a problem of consumption activity. As such, it is not enough to merely discuss

¹⁵ This is a view that the philosopher John Dewey (2008) very much held. He thought that there was no way to define the term fit without recourse to the manner in which the conditions of life had changed. Although this is scarcely the case in the sport and exercise sciences today, the work of Malina and Little (2008), in their article 'Physical Activity: The Present in the Context of the Past,' is a useful exception to this.

fitness in the context of health (or even sport). Rather, it also must be framed in terms of its role in the logic of modern consumption.

2.3.1 Fitness and Consumer Society

To say that fitness is a consumer's problem is to say that the shift in emphasis from social engineering to performativity (established in section "2.1.1 Fitness and the Privatisation of Risk") – 'from building a better society...to better adapting to society' (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 40) – follows a more general shift in ours from a society that engages its members in their capacity as consumers rather than as mere producers (Baudrillard, 1998; Bauman, 2000, 2007; Campbell, 1987; Sassatelli, 1997). Moreover, if, under the conditions of modernity, there has been a shift in individual concerns about, and relation to, their bodies, then this is exacerbated within the consumer society. Baudrillard explains:

For centuries, there was a relentless effort to convince people they had no bodies...today, there is a relentless effort to *convince them of their bodies*...In capitalist society, the general status of private property applies also to the body, to the way we operate socially with it and the mental representation we have of it. In the traditional order...there was no narcissistic investment or spectacular perception of [the] body, but an instrumental/magical vision, induced by the labour process and the relation to nature. What we want to show is that [in] the current structures of production/consumption...it is important that, far from being denied or left out of account, there is deliberate *investment in it* (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 129; original emphases).

For Baudrillard, as for Foucault, power in consumerist societies does not deny the existence of the body. Foucault (1980, p. 57) writes: 'one must set aside the widely held thesis that power, in our bourgeois, capitalist, societies has denied the reality of the body in favour of the soul, consciousness, ideality.' Rather, there is a relentless effort to convince consumers of their bodies. There is a deliberate investment in the body in consumer culture since, as Simmel (1997) famously remarked, the body is an extension of personality and through its adornment we possess more. Consumer

society once more turns on its head the top-down, repressive and ideological conception of power that Foucault worked his entire career to undermine. Far from being *subjected to* strategic power relations, the body is *stimulated by* them.

[The body's] 'rediscovery', in a spirit of physical and sexual liberation, after a millennial age of Puritanism; its omnipresence...in advertising, fashion and mass culture; the hygienic, dietetic, therapeutic cult which surrounds it, the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatments and regimes, and the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness to the fact that the body has become an *object of salvation*. It has literally taken over that moral and ideological function from the soul (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 129; original emphasis).

Since contemporary consumer society needs neither the physical or productive exertion required in earlier modes of sociality, it is the desire for consumption and not necessarily the demands of work that play a formative role in shaping individuals' relations to their bodies (Baudrillard, 1998; Campbell, 1987; Featherstone, 1982; Featherstone, 2007; Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1991; Foucault, 1980, 2000). The mono-functional body of the society of producers is replaced by the multifunctional spontaneous body of the society of consumers, representing a more general shift in emphasis from ascetic or Puritan values to what Featherstone (2007; see also Berthelot, 1991) referred to as the aestheticisation of everyday life. For the society of consumers, the fit body aligns with the body beautiful and, as Frew and McGillivray (2005) have explained, being fat-free, toned, and in proportion have become rationalised and idealised images. Being fit implies, as it always did, being "*fit for...*" However, if, as Bauman (2005, p. 93) argued, '[fitness] is a certificate of 'being in,' of belonging, of inclusion, of the right of residence,' then being fit in modern society implies what Smith Maguire (2008a, p. 190) aptly referred to as being 'fit for consumption.'

2.3.2 The Consumer's Body: Fit for Consumption

That consumption plays such a crucial role here should seem hardly surprising since it is within the marketplace for products and services that the fit body's liquidity can be readily transferred. Baudrillard explains:

The body is not reappropriated for the autonomous ends of the subject, but in terms of a normative principle of enjoyment and hedonistic profitability, in terms of an enforced instrumentality that is indexed to the code and the norms of a society of production and consumption (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 131).

The major lesson of the reversals of production and consumption is that the value of the body is not to be located in its production. In the consumer society, rather, the body is invested in in order to re-evaluate it beyond its functional value. As both Baudrillard (1998) and Žižek (2004) have shown, in modern consumer society, few objects are offered alone without a context of objects which speak for them. That is to say, the object fetishes of modern society (i.e. the body) are largely valued as a coordination or bundle of related objects. And so it is the case with fitness since the fit body, too, is nothing without its network of tools.

In her textual analyses of the construction of fitness in lifestyle media, Smith Maguire (2002, 2008a, 2008b) makes this point explicitly in relation to pleasure. Her work shows quite clearly that, rather than being pleasurable or valuable in and of itself, exercising for fitness has been constructed as a means to some other end. Like consumption more generally, Smith Maguire argues that this activity exhibits an instrumental rationality. Value is to be located in the prospects of consuming for fit the body. In the following excerpt, Smith Maguire explains how this problematises the common sense association between fitness and leisure¹⁶:

[E]xercise is not itself pleasurable, but is a matter of discipline; pleasure comes from the effect one's fitter body has upon others, the satisfaction in having made "good" use of one's leisure time...Even when fitness activities are represented as

¹⁶ This is an important policy alignment, to be clear.

enjoyable, they are rarely constructed as ends in themselves. Exercise is instrumentally rationalized as the means to other ends (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 196).¹⁷

The task of achieving fitness exists in an uneasy relation to leisure, though it is often naturalised as a leisure activity. In fact, on Smith Maguire's account of media representations of fitness, exercising for fitness is constructed as a means of inserting the virtues of discipline and productivity into spaces typically associated with free time and freedom from obligation.

That the fitness field demonstrates an ambiguity between leisure and free time is also a point developed in Sassatelli (2007). For Sassatelli (*ibid*, pp. 168-9), while the time spent participating in fitness activities often subverts the body's daily constrictions and the different roles it is prescribed in everyday life (particularly the workplace), it is, nonetheless, time that is organised in terms of elements which derive their value from the world of work. Like work, it requires planning, goal-setting, organisation, time-management, evaluation, re-evaluation, etc. As Sassatelli (*ibid*; see also Sassatelli, 1999a) explains, time spent at the gym is not time spent free of all rules. Rather, it is, like work, based on shared rules and, at times, rigidly codified practices.

The implication of these analyses is that the cultural imagery of leisure, recast through the lens of fitness practices, is constructed as a sphere in which freedom is increasingly being replaced by the obligation of self work. Naturally, consumption plays a pivotal role in this process, since it is through the wares of the marketplace that the production of leisure selves is most often accomplished. Smith Maguire explains further:

¹⁷ This view is inherited from Bourdieu (1984, p. 214) who argued that 'health-oriented practices' are understandable only in the context of 'a rational faith in the deferred, often intangible profits they offer.' 'It is therefore understandable,' Bourdieu (*ibid*) continues, 'that they [health-oriented practices] should find the conditions for their performance in the ascetic dispositions of upwardly mobile individuals' (the type of individual for whom the modern consumer society provides a home).

[T]he prospect of shopping for a newly fit body is a means to reward discipline with pleasure...Reconciling the hedonism of consumer culture with the asceticism of exercising by linking them as cause and effect (work out now; shop later) serves as an engine for consumption, and perpetuates the double bind of indulgence and restraint characteristic of consumer culture (Smith Maguire, 2008a, p. 196).

Fitness discourse seeks to reconcile the aestheticisation associated with consumer culture with the asceticism of exercise by espousing what Featherstone (1982, p. 18) referred to as 'calculating hedonism.' And, since fitness does not lend itself immediately or easily to intrinsic rewards, material self-reward has become a standard technique through which to foster the habituation of healthy behaviours. As Smith Maguire has explained elsewhere:

If bribery is a way to motivate fitness behaviour, it is significant that the bribe is shopping, linking the field of fitness to the reproduction of consumption more broadly. Consumer culture's ethos of instant gratification is thus reconciled with the long-term self-discipline of fitness...Self-discipline and self-gratification are not irreconcilable, but are configured as temporally and spatially separate aspects of the same lifestyle (Smith Maguire, 2002, p. 461).

Modern society's shift in emphasis from production to consumption then, is one that takes place at the level of cultural imagery. In reality fitness is constructed as a precursor of consumption. It is a sphere in which cultural competence is developed, a necessary trait if one wants to be perceived as a good consumer. The production *of the* body and the consumption *for the* body are not incompatible. Rather, the consumption of pleasures is made permissible through the discipline of exercise. As Featherstone (2007, p. 45) has explained, (post-)modern culture requires a controlled decontrol of emotions in order to balance the instrumental and expressive dimensions of consumption. The point to be made here is that this lesson is now quite often being learned from the fitness field. Being a good exerciser requires self-discipline. Being a good consumer requires self-restraint (Featherstone, 1982, 2007; Phillips, 2005; Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a, 2008b; cf. Rojek, 2010a, 2010b).

2.3.3 The Consumed Body: Fitness as Physical Capital

In the previous section, it was established that the work of creating the fit body is not to be understood as merely the production of a use-value, but as the production of an exchange-value that has its meaning determined by its place in a self-referential system of signs. Where investments pertaining to the body are undertaken in the consumer society, they are, as Baudrillard (1998) explained, always simultaneously investments of an efficient, competitive, and economic type. The body is re-appropriated to meet market or capitalist objectives and rationalities or invested in to produce a yield. However, even though the production of consumer bodies always already presupposes their conversion, the body is not merely something to be consumed for itself.

That modern embodiment is now largely understood on the basis of a complex interplay between ‘my body for me’ and ‘my body for others’ is largely attributable to the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 122). For Merleau-Ponty, the body was characterised as much more than a mere instrument (or a means). Rather, it was the basis for our expression in the world and the visible form of our intentions. This notion that the body fulfils such a dual (and, notably, sign) function beyond itself and can be manipulated in order to stabilise meanings and foster improved social relations is one that has been taken up and developed across a broad range of sociological and anthropological research. However, the development of this view is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Bourdieu (1984) who takes up this discussion of the body-for-others in context of the transformational impetus that characterises the middle class *habitus*:

Everything seems to indicate that the concern to cultivate the body, in its elementary forms—that is, as the cult of health—often associated with an ascetic exaltation of sobriety and controlled diet, in the middle classes. These classes, who

are especially anxious about appearance and therefore about their body-for-others, go in very intensively for gymnastics, the ascetic sport par excellence, since it amounts to a sort of training (*askesis*) for training's sake (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 213; original emphasis).

The body-for-others is highlighted by Bourdieu in order to show how, in the absence of the economic and cultural capital typical of the dominant classes, the middle class are disposed towards investing in the body for its physical capital or symbolic power (see also Bourdieu, 1986; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Shilling, 2003; Smith Maguire, 2008a). The middle class are, thus, disposed to investing much of their time, effort, and personal cost in accumulating forms of capital such that the social norms of self-presentation are met or exceeded. If, for Bourdieu (1986, p. 241), '[c]apital is accumulated labor...which, when appropriated on a private...basis...enables [agents] to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor,' then physical capital is accumulated "self labour" that, if not given value by others, does not represent a tradable asset in the positional economy (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985b; see also Baudrillard, 1998; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Hirsch, 1977; Richins, 1994a, 1994b, 1999; Rojek, 2010a).

Building on these theoretical insights, Smith Maguire (2008a) has attributed this increased emphasis on, and pursuit of, the socially desirable body to the strategic dispositions of, what she refers to as, the 'post-industrial middle class' or 'service class' (ibid, pp. 53-4). The transition to a post-traditional service economy from more monolithic social and political configurations has, according to Smith Maguire, given rise to cultural intermediary occupations. Since the service economy requires the management of interactions – or, since interactions are central to the service-dominant logic of modern marketing (Holbrook, 1999; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) – the labour market relies increasingly upon impressions and appearances. Physical capital is, therefore, configured as an embodied, performative stance and as a means of

adding value. To borrow from Baudrillard (1998, p. 139), discrimination in the modern service economy always presupposes the sign function of the body to the extent that difference is, from the very beginning, 'somatized.' Since it is this fit body-as-status-object which is necessary in order to belong and compete in our culture of images and impressions, the closer the match between one's own body and normative ideals, the higher its exchange value (cf. Baudrillard, 1998; Featherstone, 1982, 2007; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Smith Maguire, 2008a, 2008b; Waring, 2008).

Where Smith Maguire departs from the standard sociological impulse is in her attributing the connection between fitness and consumption as a sort of somatic pragmatism rather than as merely symptomatic of a narcissistic personality. This finding was also prevalent in Waring's (2008, p. 306) analysis of how fitness and the pursuit of physical capital complement the 'workstyle' of the urban executive middle class by demonstrating and reinforcing the virtues of competition, success and professionalism. Waring explains:

...the tacit expectation that individual employees [in a professional context] should engage in health and fitness practices...creates a situation whereby employees can raise their physical capital and demonstrate certain positive traits...In this way, the city workplace can be regarded as a competitive social space and in turn professionals appeared to be drawn to the premier club environment as a means of enhancing their competitive edge, assuming that fitness is some kind of prize, something they can compete for in their quest for social achievement (Waring, 2008, p. 304).

In this sense, both Smith Maguire's and Waring's analyses of the centrality of fitness (of physical capital) for service/executive class lifestyles resonates particularly well with the work of Giddens (1990, 1991) who argued more generally that reflexive lifestyles and investments are not merely narcissistic defences to socio-political conditions. Rather, they are also positive appropriations of circumstances in which the sign function of the body impinges upon the conduct of everyday life.

To sum up, under the modern social configuration, fitness' traditional association with instrumental efficiency is also supplemented by a requirement for communicative efficiency. The reversal in the roles of production and consumption has also played an important role in this process. Since it is the desire for consumption that plays a formative role in shaping individuals' relations to their bodies, the production of modern consuming bodies always already presupposes their conversion. The fit body is an absolute imperative because it is itself a form of capital (and because it is convertible under certain conditions into other forms). Maximising one's potential under the modern social configuration – under which we are implored to establish ourselves as credible consumers – requires an instrumental relation to the body. In the consumer society, the fit body is not merely invested in for the autonomous ends of subjects. Rather, as Smith Maguire so aptly put it, investments in it are directed almost entirely towards the optimal performance of bodies that are fit for consumption – fit to consume, and fit to be consumed by others.

2.4 Fitness and Ambivalence

There has been a tendency, under the veil of neo-liberalism, to see fitness as “the new health.” There has been a tendency to see it as akin to what Petersen (1997; see also Petersen & Lupton, 1996; Sallis, 2009) referred to as a new social movement with a primary concern to empower citizens, or as the product of what White *et al.* (1995, p. 160; see also Blackman, 2008) referred to as the new ideology of healthism. One of the primary lessons of the foregoing, however, is that fitness does not necessarily serve an ideological function in the traditional sense, but corresponds to a particular relation of the individual to society. *Health* and *fitness*,

though they are often used synonymously, appeal to very different concerns (Bauman, 1998a, 1998b, 2000; 2001, 2005; Bauman & May, 2001; Glassner, 1990). This is because fitness corresponds to the needs of a very different society. It connects the body, self-identity and consumption in a manner that is peculiar to the reorganisation of risk under late modernity, and in a manner that is not well reflected in traditional conceptions of the contemporary health context.

That health and fitness remain largely conflated has been an important strategic move in that it serves to align both public and private hopes. It has led people to take for granted that exercise leads to fitness which leads to health which then leads to overall societal wellbeing. In the context of the sociology of the body literature, however, this connection has been deemed to be both complex and deeply political (Holmes *et al.*, 2006; Markula, 1997, 1998; Pronger, 2002; Smith Maguire, 2007, 2008a; White *et al.*, 1995). It is complex in the sense that fitness has lost some of its modernist illusions; or rather, it never adequately serviced them in the first place. As Smith Maguire and other followers of Foucault and Bourdieu have shown, since the middle of the twentieth century (in line with the growth of consumer industries and the emergence of the service/executive class), the notion of fitness as a means of achieving individual improvement has become largely estranged from its earlier political corollary, societal improvement. Under its neo-liberal guise, modernity has both directed its subject-centred risks onto the individual and towards the market for their relief. In line with the growth of consumer society, those typically modernist understandings of body politics with their progressivist convictions to social regeneration and collective self-improvement have largely faded into insignificance (Foucault, 1980; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Glassner, 1989, 1990; Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a, 2008b; White *et al.*, 1995). The public

hopes for fitness have, to a great extent, been met by a lament of private irony. This is not only because its instrumental logic appears to be at odds with civic responsibilities associated with neo-liberalism, but because exercising for fitness has been deemed an ambivalent practice. Although previous sections should be leading to the conclusion that matters of fitness have become quite apart from concerns with health, the purpose of the following sections is to explore this in more detail.

2.4.1 Configuring the Role of Fitness in the Modern Experience

Attention to the conditions under which fitness comes to the fore necessitates that a distinction be made between health and fitness since, as we have seen from the sections preceding this, fitness corresponds to a quite different relation of the individual to society. With sufficient consideration given to the foregoing (and on the basis of a number of important distinctions) the prevalence of fitness over health in the modern experience can be established on the basis of: (i) the type of risk engendered, (ii) the concerns with the body, (iii) the type of body presupposed, (iv) the relation to the body, (v) their orientation to time, (vi) the role to be undertaken by individuals, and (vii) the aims associated with this mode of sociality. These consequences of modernity within which fitness has become foregrounded are illustrated in Table 2.1 overleaf:

Table 2.1 Configuring the Role of Fitness in the Modern Experience¹⁸

	“Health”	“Fitness”
Type of risk engendered	Object-centred	Subject-centred
Concerns with the body	Epistemological Baseline requirements Inner/interior Effects Passive What is a body?	Ontological Potential Outer/surface Affects Active What can a body do?
Type of body presupposed	Body-object	Body-subject
Relation to the body	Having a body	Being one’s body
Orientation to time	History	Historicity
Role to be undertaken	Producer	Consumer
Aims	Social engineering	Performativity

Just as dangerousness and risk appeal to very different orders of power, so too do health and fitness. Health corresponds to object-centred risk in that its object of analysis is the body at stasis and its principle concern is with causes, effects and the normal functioning of the body. Fitness, on the other hand, presupposes anything but stasis with the physically active body providing the first line of defence in the face of subject-centred risks and the impossibility of establishing concrete causal relations. Given the prevalence of subject-centred risk in the modern experience, fitness has come to the fore as a rather specialised branch of social security, as a means of minimising the risks and maximising the opportunities that modernity has to offer.

¹⁸ This table is presented as the primary contribution in my own article: Neville, R.D. (2012a) Exercise is medicine: Some cautionary remarks in principle as well as in practice, *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*. doi: 10.1007/s11019-012-9383-y

Fitness is the equivalent of “covering one’s bases” in the face of unremitting ontological ambivalence and insecurity. Whereas health follows a typically substantialist logic, insofar as its locus of knowledge is abstracted from its context and foregrounded *in* the material configuration of individual bodies, fitness is ontologically relational.

Health and fitness appeal to quite different concerns with, and relations to, the body. With the onset of modernity, and the basis of this blurring of boundaries between inner and outer, there has been an overwhelming shift away from epistemological concerns with health and the effects imposing upon the normal functioning of the body to ontological concerns with its potential for fitness and the constitution of new sets of affective relations. In this sense, it is not only the case that modernity engages its members in an active rather than a passive manner. Rather, it implies a shift in emphasis from the body-object to the body-subject; that is, from *having* a body to *being* one’s body. In a manner akin to that outlined in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, it implies a shift in emphasis in life orientation from the question *What is a body?* to the question *What can a body do?* (see Buchanan, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox, 2002).

Because it has followed on from a seismic shift in social consciousness, the shift from health to fitness implies a general shift in orientation to time. Where health corresponds to history, fitness is linked to historicity. That is, fitness, unlike health, orients modern individuals primarily towards the future. Health speaks to the baseline requirements of the body for production and takes what has already happened as its principle referent. Fitness, on the other hand, speaks of the body’s potential; notably, it’s potential for consumption. As Bauman (1992, 1998a, 1998b) has explained, fitness is about the constant ability to move and to rise to ever higher

levels of experience. This is an imperative because it is deeply pragmatic, a means of reorienting the body and self-identity in the face of the consequences of modernity. In fact, for Bauman, fitness is a powerful metaphor for modernity itself, for that general cultural appeal to ever-greater levels of experience. Since modernity implicates in individuals a shift in concern from the ultimate ends in human life to pragmatic concerns about the optimal performance of means, it is fitness that has replaced health as the desired normative status for individuals in modern society. This, it seems, implies a shift in emphasis from social engineering to performativity.

2.4.2 The Problem of Fitness

In his analyses of what was referred to previously as liquid modernity, prominent sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (see Bauman, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2001, 2005; Bauman & May, 2001) underscores this health-fitness dichotomy as providing seminal insights into the emergence of a new mode of sociality. For Bauman, the fact that we are concerned about matters of fitness is both symptomatic and paradigmatic of the problem of normativity that infects modern social life. While modernity offers a lens through which fitness (as a horizon upon which modern selves might be thought to converge) can be examined, fitness too is revelatory of modernity. In spite of this connection, Bauman's account of fitness is largely polemical. Since modernity possesses an inherent ambivalence that extends to the body, Bauman argues that fitness presents problems of which the norm of health was free. The problem of fitness as it is presented in Bauman's work can be illustrated along three separate lines (corresponding to the earlier discussion of fitness' status as an official discourse). Though these are of course related in practice, Bauman's problems of fitness are (i) normative, (ii) perspectival, and (iii) interpersonal.

2.4.2.1 Normative

It is problematic for Bauman that fitness has replaced health as the desired, normative status for people in modern society because:

...‘health’ is a norm, and norms are clearly delineated from above and below alike. ‘Fitness’ has perhaps its lower, though rather blurred and murky threshold, but cannot, by definition, have an upper limit; ‘fitness’ is, after all, about the constant ability to move further on, to rise to every higher levels of experience. Hence ‘fitness’ will never acquire the comforting exactitude and precision of a norm. ‘Fitness’ is a never-to-be-reached horizon looming forever in the future (Bauman, 1998a, p. 23).

The problem of fitness is, first and foremost, one of legitimation. Fitness cannot acquire the comforting exactitude of such normatively articulated categories because health ‘is the proper and desirable state of the human body,’ whereas fitness ‘cannot by its nature be pinned down and circumscribed with any precision’ (Bauman, 2000, p. 77). This problem of normativity is undoubtedly related to the progress of ethnophysiological/ethnoscience knowledge. Recall (pace Giddens) that, under the conditions of modernity, scientific knowledge is both mediated through expert systems and constantly re-examined in light of incoming information. Like any other official discourse, under the de-differentiating conditions of modernity, knowledge of fitness is reflexively mobilised and performs what Giddens (1984, p. 284; see also Giddens, 1990, p. 15) has referred to as a ‘double-hermeneutic.’ The biosocial realist account of fitness through which social agents are taken in (or rather, the rules by which they are taken into the game) does not proceed ignorant of them. Rather, it is parasitical upon them for its legitimation.

This problem of legitimation is also linked to the fact that within the fitness field these expert systems are as disparate as they are varied. Given that the market for fitness abounds with multiple, and often conflicting, vernaculars (often fads!) there is

no distinct authority from which the truths of fitness can be seen as a legitimate responsibility. They are, at best, locally determined. Also, advocating one vernacular over another is a matter of opting to take part in a particular game (a language game to use Wittgenstein's well worn phrase). Knowledge pertaining to fitness, therefore, is partial. It is liable to re-examination and re-formulation in light of incoming information *and* because, unlike the more traditional hard sciences, there exists a great deal of internal dissention with the field of sport and exercise science itself.

Fitness, however, is not merely reflexively *mobilised* (as would be the case with most categories under modernity). Rather, as Bauman explained, it is reflexive by its very nature:

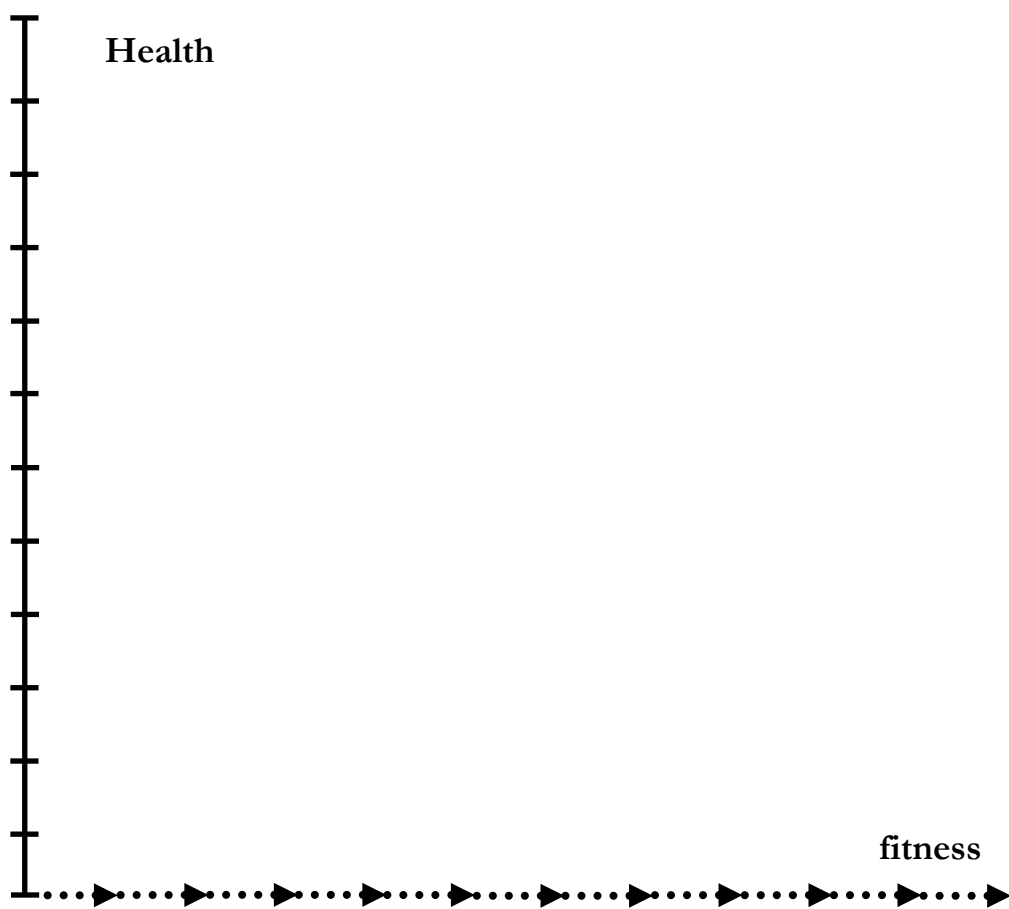
If health is a 'no more and no less' type of condition, fitness stays permanently open on the side of 'more': it does not refer to any particular standard of bodily capacity, but to its (preferably unlimited) potential of expansion... One may almost say that if health is about 'sticking to the norm', fitness is about the capacity to break all norms (Bauman, 2000, pp. 77-8).

While Bauman's analysis is nary on the empirical side, one might take as an example of this inherent ambivalence "generally excepted" principles as they are presented in sport, exercise and fitness manuals (see e.g. Bachl, Baron & Smekal, 2007; Rahl, 2010). For sports persons, best-practice guidelines for training include the following principles: *overload, adaptation, progression, reversibility, and variation*. The case is similar for the general public. The F.I.T.T principle encourages participants to add variation and, in most instances, to increase the *Frequency, Intensity, Type, and Time* given to training. Fitness implies by its very definition the process of applying workloads through the organised sequence of exercises and in order to stimulate improvements or adaptations in individual anatomy and physiology.

Even where principles are generally accepted, Bauman is at least correct in stating that fitness is an ontologically mutable category. In fact, there is much merit

in the argument for the dislocation of health and fitness since, with fitness, sticking to the norm is most certainly contraindicated. In fitness discourse, the term norm is about as desirable as the dreaded *plateaux*. The following “Figure 2.4 Planes of Health and fitness” below usefully illustrates Bauman’s account of the dislocation of, and incommensurability with respect to, health and fitness:

Figure 2.4 Planes of Health and fitness¹⁹



On the basis of this illustration, it might be said of Bauman’s work that, where Health (upper case) corresponds to a bounded vertical (or epistemological) plane of experience upon which norms can be imposed, fitness (lower case) represents its

¹⁹ This visual interpretation of Bauman’s views on health and fitness is presented as the central point of inquiry in my own article: Neville, R.D. (2012b) Considering a complementary model of health and fitness, *Sociology of Health & Illness*. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2012.01494.x

boundless horizontal (or ontological) corollary which is (by its very definition) resistant to any code of normativity.

2.4.2.2 Perspectival

For Bauman, the problem of fitness is also a perspectival one (cf. Frew & McGillivray, 2005). In section “2.1.2 Fitness and the Hegemony of Vision” it was demonstrated that the accrual of fitness requires that the body be frozen under the gaze of the third person. According to Bauman (1998a, 2005), however, this reifying process requires an unreasonably detached and instrumental relation to the body because the instruments with which consumers are exhorted to play are themselves. Whereas Smith Maguire (2008a, 2008b; see also Levin, 1993) has referred to the double-bind of modern consumption, according to Bauman (ibid), sensation-seeking through the body requires consumers to simultaneously play three different roles – ‘the player, the listener, and the instrument’ (Bauman, 2005, p. 92) – and are prompted (and expected) to synchronise all three. These roles, Bauman concludes, are inherently incompatible and the reconciliation of these demands –for immersion, self-abandonment, distance, and sober judgement – is a tall order (if attainable at all).

This perspectival problem is compounded by the fact that, in the social world (and in the social space of the gym in particular), individuals are often confronted not by, say, the unity of classical bodies, but by the fragmentation of carnivalesque ones. According to Frew and McGillivray (2005), individual body-parts tend to carry their own capital. Fit bodies are often negotiated, compared and contrasted on the basis of the objectification of particular body parts and not the objectification of the body as a whole. Fitness consumers, Frew and McGillivray (ibid, p. 172) conclude, tend to ‘construct physical capital in ‘Frankenstein’ fashion with aspirational body

parts cut from the carcasses of celebrity icons.’ Therefore, despite the unified bodies that are on sale in the fitness field, it is often fragmentation that abounds.

This fragmentation is not only concerned individual body-parts. In his study of the relationship between bodybuilding, drugs and risk-taking in the context of modern identity work, Monaghan (2001a, p. 51) found that bodybuilders’ ethnophysical knowledge of the ‘fragmented and divisible body’ was an important aspect of success. Bodybuilders actively engaged in weightlifting for the purpose of breaking down as many individual muscle-fibres as possible, so that muscular hypertrophy (growth) can occur. Thus, it is not only the case that the body needs to be broken down into individual body-parts (and then exercises) in order to instigate its (re)construction, but it is the muscles themselves that need to be broken down at an even greater micro level. Fitness workouts, even for those at the novice level, require the isolation of individual muscle groups – through mind-muscle connection – so that the body-part under tension/construction can be experienced as being figural. For those more experienced participants, workouts often require a wholesale desubjectivisation. The unity of the body is to be sacrificed so that individual muscles may speak, and that they may come to life as objects of *jouissance*²⁰ in a manner that resonates with what Braidotti (1989, 1994a, 1994b) and Žižek (2004) referred to as “organs without bodies.” ‘[T]he whole discourse of the biosciences [sport and exercise sciences notwithstanding],’ Braidotti (1994a, p. 47) has explained, ‘takes the organism as its object [as *an* object], and it therefore takes the

²⁰ It is noteworthy to mention in this connection the fact that corporeal sensations such as “the pump” have long been associated – psychoanalytically – with libidinal arousal. ‘The pump,’ according to Johnston (1998, p. 255), ‘is the result of high intensity training and muscle stimulation...[in which] [m]uscles become engorged with blood...short of oxygen...[and] [t]he skin stretches tight over the muscles.’ In the biopic *Pumping Iron* (1977), which documents the events leading up to the 1977 Mr. Olympia bodybuilding competition, Arnold Schwarzenegger famously described this experience as being “as satisfying...as coming is,” and “as satisfying as having sex with a woman.” He continued “so can you believe how much I am in heaven?”

body as a mosaic of detachable pieces.’ It is in this sense that the project of fitness has become a perspectival problem – not of unifying bodies, but of prosthesis.

2.4.2.3 Interpersonal

Since it is “change” that the principles of fitness have in common, and since the nature of this change has become increasingly fragmented, Bauman also recognises the social burden with which fitness is now laden. According to Bauman (1998a, p. 24), public hopes of fitness are met by private irony because it is about ‘Erlebnis,’ or ‘subjective experience’ (Bauman, 2000, p. 78). Therefore, arriving at an interpersonal norm is a tall order since there is no objective criteria with which to make comparisons between individual degrees of fitness. ‘[L]ike all subjective states,’ Bauman (1998a, p. 24) continues, ‘the experience of ‘being fit’ is notoriously difficult to articulate in a fashion fit for interpersonal communication, let alone interpersonal comparison.’²¹

On Bauman’s account, the pursuit of fitness is ambivalent by its very definition (or nature). The certainty afforded by official discourses is eroded by the fact that fitness consumers are unable to establish interpersonal norms for the regulation of behaviour. ‘[C]ertainty,’ Bauman (1998a, p. 24) explains, ‘can be only an interpersonal, social achievement.’ The search for fitness is sure to be one that will face ongoing hermeneutical problems resulting from the aim, on the one hand, to maximise the body’s potential, and also the inability to establish any reliable standards of reference. In place of this behavioural certainty is ambivalence – the acute discomfort that fitness consumers feel results from being unable to know how

²¹ In the sports and exercise science literature, this issue is referred to as ‘[t]he principle of individual differences’ (Bachl *et al.*, 2007, p. 12). According to Bachl *et al.*, however, the problem of individual differences may be sublimated: ‘[b]ecause we cannot expect...that all people will respon[d] to exercise in the same manner, *a proper training program should be modified to take individual differences into account*’ (ibid; emphasis added). Bauman is clearly much less sanguine about this fact.

far they have gotten and how far they have yet to go. It is on this basis that fitness' normative status for individuals in advanced modern societies has become an illusion. To borrow from Baudrillard (1998, p. 49), it has become merely a 'vehicle of an egalitarian myth.' Fitness, as a means to achieve individual improvement, has been estranged from its earlier political corollary, societal improvement, because it is, somewhat ironically, "unfit" for purpose. As Bauman and May (2001) explained, although the prime motive in the turning of our attention toward bodily fitness was meant to offer security and certainty in a radically disembedding social-material environment, our preoccupation with matters of superficial embodiment has resulted (somewhat paradoxically) in the generation of more anxiety than less.

2.4.3 Fitness and Sisyphus

Bauman paints with a very broad brush, something which is sociological commonplace. His thinking on fitness, however, is equally broad and, with caricature-like effect, he conjures an image (shared by Frew & McGillivray, 2005) of fitness consumers as modern-day Sisypheans. The Gods, Camus (1983) wrote, condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. '[T]hey had thought with some reason,' Camus (ibid, p. 123) continued, 'that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor.' While the notion that leisure and consumption are forms of "hopeless labour" is one that few scholars these days would entertain as being adequate, the view that fitness is a form of "hopeless *self*-labour" is one that has earned greater merit.

Like Sisyphus contemplating his torment, Bauman (1998a) argues that the plight of the fitness-seeker is an agony of which our health-conscious ancestors had

no inkling. This is because the common sense assumption that exercise leads to fitness, that fitness leads to health, and that health leads to overall wellbeing has turned out to be somewhat illusory. The logic of fitness is not one of health and wellbeing. In fact, as has been established in the preceding section, it never functioned entirely in this manner in the first place. Rather, the logic of fitness, like that of consumption, is one of the production and manipulation of social signifiers, whose nature implies both difference (evidenced in section “2.2.3 The Consumed Body: Fitness as Physical Capital”) and deferral (evidenced in section “2.3.2 Fitness and the Problem of Normativity”). It is this logic of *différance*, to use Derrida’s (1976, 1982, 2001) famous phrase (a logic of difference and perpetual deferral of gratification) that accounts for the ambivalent character of fitness.

This ambivalent view of fitness consumption, the view that modern embodiment generates so much anxiety that it is never likely to be cured or stopped, is one that is very much reflected in Frew and McGillivray’s (2005) account of fitness body-politics. On their account, by placing themselves within the fitness environment (health clubs in their case), individuals expose themselves to an ongoing embodied penance. Subject to the allure of the desirable body – ‘the desire for physical capital’ (ibid, p. 163) – consumers advance with pre-defined notions of male attractiveness and leanness and female beauty and shape. For Frew and McGillivray (ibid, p. 173), consumers willingly enter fitness clubs ‘keen to worship an aesthetic purity hoping to attain the robes of physical capital and its salvatory symbolism.’ What they experience, however, is something less sanguine. This is because the fitness club industry occupies a rather unique position within the leisure industries insofar as the final product desired by the consumer is seldom achieved (although consumers return again and again). They conclude thusly:

As consumers pursue physical capital they occupy the consumer role of pseudo-sovereignty, believing in the subjective attainment of capital, yet, naïve or ambivalent towards the mechanisms that drive and promote its consumption. The body beautiful becomes a rationalized and idealised image that is constantly displayed but, even for the few who attain it, an embodied state that is enjoyed ephemerally. Tantalized by, and desiring physical capital and its dreamscape symbolism, consumers find themselves caught in an aporia of capital. They become the modern day Sisyphus, where any physical peak and symbolic honour is quickly met with a return to dissatisfying desire (Frew & McGillivray, 2005, pp. 173-4).

As consumers pursue physical capital, Frew and McGillivray argue that they are met with, and are constantly reminded of, the inappropriateness of their carnivalesque bodies. Moreover, it is within this ocular space that consumers are met with unrealistically high expectations, often lacking the cultural capital needed to transform their bodies to fit contemporary ideals (see also Philips & Drummond, 2001). Fitness occupies a unique position within the leisure industries because it is a practice in which the ends almost entirely justify the means, even though we are often uncertain as to whether these ends can be defined, not to mention achieved. Hope in achieving fitness, like hope in the body beautiful is, for Frew and McGillivray as it is for Bauman, false hope and misplaced as the product of modern consumerism.

It is clear for both Bauman and Frew and McGillivray that fitness consumers embody the modern day Sisyphus. Like Sisyphus ceaselessly rolling the rock to the top of the mountain, both Bauman and Frew and McGillivray argue that the pursuit of fitness turns out to be an inexhaustible source of self-reproach and self-indignation. However, it is unclear as to why they fail to afford the Sisyphean task the same respect as Camus does in his original formulation of *The Myth*. In spite of the absurdity of his nauseating task Camus (1983, p. 123) concludes that we must 'imagine Sisyphus happy.' And the words that best sum up Sisyphus' noble heroism are those of Oedipus: 'despite so many ordeals, my advanced age and the nobility of

my soul makes me conclude that all is well' (Camus, 1983, p. 122). Sisyphus becomes intensely aware of the fragile wonder of existence. His rock becomes his thing and he becomes the master of his days. Even much less clear is why Bauman fails to afford fitness as much respect as he does Sisyphus in a most recent work. According to Bauman (2010, p. 185), 'even within the apparently hopeless and prospectless plight of Sisyphus...[he] may yet turn from a tragic figure of a slave-to-things into their joyous *doer*' (original emphasis). Might one suppose that fitness could be afforded a similar *performative significance*? Is there, contrary to the foregoing, value to be found in the *doing* aspects of fitness? Like Camus (1983) and Bauman (2010) I, too, would like to hold out more for Sisyphus. However, unlike Bauman (1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2001, 2005; Bauman & May, 2001) and Frew and McGillivray (2005), I would like to hold out more for fitness as well. The remainder of this thesis is given almost exclusively to this task.

2.5 Summing Up: Re-Describing Sisyphus?

In the opening chapter, it was argued that, in order to take fitness seriously, one would have to consider the type of society in which it comes to the fore. It was argued that making sense of fitness implied a break with its common substantialist representation (as a mere physiological phenomenon) in order to account for its social-cultural embeddedness. It was argued that a comprehensive account of fitness must also express the ways in which modern bodies are related to this second order of causality. In this chapter, the question of fitness' cultural embeddedness was brought to the fore in order to identify its status as a "social-object" (to use Bourdieu's phrase). In relation to this chapter's primary objective – to answer the

question: *in what sort of a society has fitness come to the fore as a legitimate matter of concern?* – a number of important findings have emerged.

It was illustrated that the configuration of modern social life and its institutions have created an environment of risk that is very different from that of other modes of sociality. This individualising, neo-liberal risk environment is one in which individual bodies are affected, influenced, and infected by factors quite distant to them. On this basis, it was shown that fitness comes to the fore in terms of a society in which the bodies of individuals are emphasised and in which one is encouraged to act as autonomous, responsibly-informed, and to make cost-benefit assessment of life options. The organisation of society within which fitness is embedded emphasises the privatisation of risk and the desire for self-regulation. Importantly, this chapter has shown that, even in the context of an increasingly sophisticated official discourse which underpins claims to knowledge, the truths of the fit body are framed as truths of the individual. It was shown that, in the context of necessary improvements in cost-efficiency due to changing demographics and increasing demands, the social organisation of fitness is a reflection of a systematic effort to promote investments in individual bodies and to reduce the frequency with which deviation from the norm occurs. This, it was argued, has had a number of implications.

One major lesson to be gleaned from the second half this chapter is the cogency of the proposition that fitness is not, *prima facie*, the sort of thing that sports, medical, and exercise scientists have supposed in the past. Rather, it was shown that, as an explanatory variable, being fit implies being “*fit for...*” and, nowadays, this invariably means being “fit for consumption.” Despite its somewhat utopian beginnings, it has been shown in this chapter that fitness has lost some (if not all) of

its modernist illusions. It was shown that fitness comes to the fore in the context of a society emphasising consumption over production. It also comes to the fore in the context of a society that emphasises sensation-seeking, appeals to ever-greater levels of experience, and the manipulation of social signifiers. Fitness, it was also argued, is a reflection of how modern society's politics of embodied self-identity is now one of *différance* (of how the modern identity narrative is one of difference and perpetual deferral of gratification). It is an ambivalent practice (or Sisyphean task), and lamentably, a paralysing gesture of the self-reflexivity inherent in modernity.

The possibilities for re-describing fitness (Sisyphus!) are discussed and further developed in the following chapters. In spite of the obviously lamentable reduction of fitness to matters of individual consumption, the following quote from the late neo-pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty exemplifies the nature of the task of retrieval that is to be confronted herein:

There is no way to rise above the conversational moment in which one finds oneself, survey the conversation as a whole and make principled recommendations. The most one can do is say something like: "This segment of the conversation...is getting a bit boring; it might profit from a little attention to what is going on in another segment" (Rorty, 2000, p. 152).

CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF FITNESS: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

‘Modernity has its boosters as well as its knockers. Nothing is agreed here, and the debate continues.’

Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*

In his short treatise, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, philosopher Charles Taylor marked as a distinguishing feature of modernity a sharp distinction between cultural optimists, on the one hand, who champion a neo-Nietzschean ethic of self-creation and cultural pessimists, on the other, who see this as nothing more than flabby pluralism and the latest expression of moral laxity. The freedom to affirm oneself and orient one’s life towards self-fulfilment is deemed modern civilisation’s finest achievement. At the same time, however, the thoughts of a society of self-fulfillers is deemed to be at odds with (and presents the gravest danger to) the identification with the community necessary for public freedoms to exist in the first place. Taylor (1992, p. 11) writes: ‘[m]odernity has its boosters as well as its knockers. Nothing is agreed here, and the debate continues.’

Although not previously stated in this manner, this tension also seems to capture the problem of fitness as it was portrayed in Chapter Two. Fitness too has its boosters as well as its knockers. For example, in Chapter Two it was illustrated that

our current understanding of fitness has come to the fore in the context of an increasingly individualised, risk-centred, neo-liberal economy. It was established that, on the basis of a shift in individual orientation to the self and society, our imagination as policymakers, legislators, and academics has been captured by the promise of fitness. From the perspective of those who might usefully be labelled “boosters” then, fitness has emerged as the desired normative status for individual bodies in modern society, providing nothing less than the opportunity for new and improved standards of wellbeing in the public domain. For yet others however – those who might usefully be labelled “knockers” – this emphasis on fitness is merely illusory, demanding nothing less than the squaring of a circle. For the “knockers,” fitness is disparaged at the level of cultural imagery for its almost wholesale association with consumer industries, products and services, and the construction of ideal body images to fit commercial logics. Most disconcertingly for the “knockers” is the fact that fitness, as a means of achieving individual improvement, has become estranged from its earlier political corollary societal improvement. It has failed to follow through on its modernist promise. It has become estranged from health. In line with the growth of consumer society, the progressivist convictions to social regeneration and collective self-improvement upon which the fitness field were built have largely faded into insignificance. For the “knockers,” fitness is not only revelatory of a reorientation towards the body and the self in liquid modernity. Rather, it is paradigmatic of the ambivalence that now extends to the body. Its logic today is one of consumption, scarcely health. Its logic is one of *différance* (of difference and perpetual deferral of gratification) and, on this basis, can be aligned with the plight of Sisyphus. For the “knockers,” exercising for fitness is framed as

modernity's ambivalent practice *par excellence* and as a paralysing gesture of the self-reflexivity inherent in our present stage of modern life.

Taylor's position relative to the "boosters" and the "knockers" is neither wholly optimistic (in the sense that everything is as it should be in modern culture), nor is it wholly pessimistic (in that he does not take authenticity seriously). Taylor is neither a cultural optimist nor pessimist about modernity. Rather, his position is pragmatic (or meliorist, to use William James' famous phrase) in the sense that the picture he offers is 'neither root-and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise' (Taylor, 1992, p. 23). 'What we need,' Taylor (*ibid*) urges, 'is a work of retrieval, through which this ideal [of authenticity] can help us restore our practice.' To borrow an equally pragmatic phrasing from Latour (2004a, 2008), what we need is an acknowledgement that critique has run out of steam and a thorough refocusing of our attention towards authenticity as a legitimate matter of concern. I, too, think that fitness is an ideal that has degraded but is still worthwhile. And, in seeking to hold out more for fitness herein, I hope to capture the spirit of this pragmatic attitude.

The purpose of this chapter is to take stock of existing research and to acknowledge that critical accounts of fitness are perhaps running out of steam. In doing so, this chapter seeks to outline the basis for a work of retrieval in the second half of this thesis and an orientation towards matters of concern on the basis of the following proposition: *fitness is something we negotiate, despite it being something we never really achieve*. The first section of this chapter, "Re-Describing Fitness," takes stock of existing, critical accounts of fitness and outlines the justification for a possible positive re-appropriation. Section two, "Ascertaining a Phenomenological Description," addresses the phenomenological nature of this task of re-description. On the basis of an illustrative step-by-step model of the research, it outlines the

research question and objectives of this second aspect of the study, the nature of preliminary fieldwork, the methodological considerations with respect to data-generation, sensitive issues, interpretation, validity and reliability. In this chapter, fitness is framed as a set of relations that have to be negotiated. On this basis, a turn is made towards the lived-description of the structure of this process of “negotiation” in three important areas: (i) the meaning of fitness, (ii) the motivations for engaging in fitness practices, and (iii) the possibilities for experiencing pleasure.

3.1 Re-Describing Fitness

The task of the second half of this thesis was introduced in the concluding sections of Chapter Two. It was suggested that descriptions of fitness, especially as they have been portrayed in the sociological literature, have tended to be overly (and overtly) critical. While there is no way to step outside the conversational moment in order to ground an alternative view and make principled recommendations, it was suggested in contradistinction that the negative segment of the fitness conversation might be getting a bit boring and that there might be an opportunity to hold out for fitness by attributing to it a performative significance. But what does it mean to hold out for fitness? It will suffice to make three important points before answering this question in more detail.

3.1.1 From Critique to Matters of Concern

Firstly, if for parsimony we view the nature of social science as being divided into inquiry based on (i) social units (i.e. individuals, communities, subcultures, organisations, societies etc.), (ii) social processes (i.e. exercising, consuming, eating, mating, fighting etc.), and (iii) social products (i.e. fitness equipment, media, art

works, literature, music, etc.),²² it is clear that the existing research on fitness has focused almost exclusively on the latter two. That is to say, existing research on fitness has taken its impetus from grand theoretical accounts of reflexive embodiment (or “body work”), and has tended towards structural explanations of how modern society has re-appropriated the body through consumption in order to meet increasingly superficial social norms of self-presentation.²³ In spite of their importance in contributing to sociological understandings of the body, reflexive embodiment, and physical culture, the overly deterministic, critical thrust, and relative quietism of this research is lamentable in that it has tended to emphasise the socio-cultural production of the fitness consumer without also emphasising how we might go about rectifying some of the putative problems with fitness consumption.

Secondly, and on this basis, where sociological accounts of fitness and body-work are concerned, there has been a firm insistence that fitness is to be analysed at the level of signs. There has been an insistence that the body is merely a semiotic vehicle and that fitness is merely sign material being exchanged (to use Baudrillard’s phrasing). This approach, however, is insufficient insofar as it fails to account for a wide range of pragmatic considerations with respect to bodily fitness at the level of action, interaction, and where meaning relates to use and practice. Borrowing from Csordas (1990, 1993, 1994; see also Crossley, 1996, 2004a, 2005, 2006a; Latour, 2004b), there has been a failure in the overemphasis of how people *attend to* their bodies as vehicles with semantic or semiotic properties at the expense of how they

²² This tripartite model of social science research is borrowed from the work of Hirschman (1986).

²³ Much of this research has taken impetus from the work of Foucault (1980, 1988, 1995, 1992, 1998; see also Bordo, 1993; Duncan, 1994; Kennedy & Markula, 2010; Lloyd, 1996; Mansfield, 2010; Markula, 1995, 2001; Vertinsky, 1994). As can be seen from Chapter Two, the work of Giddens (1990, 1991, 1993), Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 2004; see also Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a, 2008b; Waring, 2008), and Baudrillard (1998; see also Glassner, 1989, 1990) are also notable in this regard (though less so). In the area of health more specifically, applications of the work of Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987; see also Buchanan, 1997; Fox, 1993, 1999, 2002; Fox & Ward, 2008a, 2008b; Holmes *et al.*, 2006; Markula, 2006; Pronger, 2002) are also noteworthy.

attend with them as vehicles of practical activity. There is a failure in methodological impetus since it has tended almost exclusively towards the examination of the body as a site or field of representation, as opposed to an arbiter of practice. In their *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari get at this issue in a way that is helpful for present purposes. They remark:

In successive challenges, philosophy confronted increasingly insolent and calamitous rivals that Plato himself would never have imagined in his most comic moments...[T]he most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the word *concept* itself and said...This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the *ideas* men! We are the friends of the concept (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 10; original emphasis).

I would hardly be remiss in saying that fitness too has confronted calamitous rivals. And the methodological impetus towards examining fitness as it is represented in field texts such as official documents, prescriptive texts, workout manuals, lifestyle media, glossy magazines, etc., is not only a testament to its seizure at the hands of the disciplines of communication but tends towards a gross overstatement of their representative character (cf. Collins, 2002; Crossley, 2004a, 2006c; Davis, 1995; Fishwick, 2008; Gimlin, 2002).

Finally, in spite of their seeming importance in contributing to the sociological understanding of the body in physical culture, one might even go as far as to say that the critical attitude has hampered our understanding of fitness. As Latour (2004a) has explained in his scathing critique of critique(!), to accuse something of being a mere fetish – i.e. an object of representation and desire – is the social science's ultimate gratuitous, disrespectful, and barbarous gesture. The problem with this critical barbarity, Latour argues, is that the critic is always right:

When naïve believers [i.e. research participants] are clinging forcefully to their objects [or practices]...you [the critic] can turn all of those attachments into so many fetishes and humiliate all the believers by showing that it is nothing but their own projection, that you, yes you alone, can see (Latour, 2004a, p. 239).

The problem with critique, for Latour, is that none of us would like to see our most cherished personal objects or practices treated in this way: ‘[w]e would recoil in horror at the mere suggestion of having them socially explained’ (Latour, 2004a, p. 240). The problem with critique, Latour explains, is that most of those involved in it hold multiple conflicting perspectives. The critic is an anti-fetishist (or, at least, a social constructionist) in respect of all those things they do not believe in, an unrepentant positivist for all the sciences they do believe in, and a sturdy realist for all of those things that they truly cherish. The trick is merely to avoid occasions in which this mismatch can be detected.²⁴ A more helpful strategy, according to Latour, is to associate inquiry within a suite of positive metaphors. A more helpful strategy is to acknowledge that ‘if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution’ (Latour, 2004a, p. 246). In the chapters preceding this one (while I have had to incorporate a broad range of conflicting literatures), I hope to have been more cautious than critical. In this section in particular, I hope to have shown that, not only is the critical orientation unfortunately abstracted from any concrete phenomenological engagement, it is poorly equipped to cope with the pragmatic turn that has taken effect in the social sciences. It is poorly equipped to cope with the need to explore the limits of concepts, the uses they have for us, and the need for a refocusing of attention away from critique towards matters of concern. I hope to continue this careful approach herein since fitness is nothing if not a matter of concern.

²⁴ Smith Maguire’s analysis of the fitness field is a good example. That is, Smith Maguire is an avowed structural constructivist and anti-fetishist about fitness (having written about the problems with the cultural production of the fitness consumer; Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a, 2008b), a positivist about health (fitness is problematic in terms of, poses challenges for, and is poorly equipped to address the problems of health; Smith Maguire, 2006, 2007, 2008a), and a sturdy realist about the value of physical education (fitness provides nothing more than an individual solution to a social problem, which has resulted in the decline of childhood physical education and activity and other collective exercise, leisure, and recreation opportunities; Smith Maguire, 2008a). It is noteworthy to mention that I agree with Smith Maguire on the value of physical education. I would be less inclined to agree with her position on fitness and health.

3.1.2 Negotiating the Fit Body

We can now take up the question again: *what does it mean to hold out more for fitness?* For one, and taking into consideration the points outlined in the previous section, holding out more for fitness requires a reinvigoration of the critical attitude by being reflexive, yet remaining cautious. This attitude is exemplified in the following excerpt borrowed again from Latour:

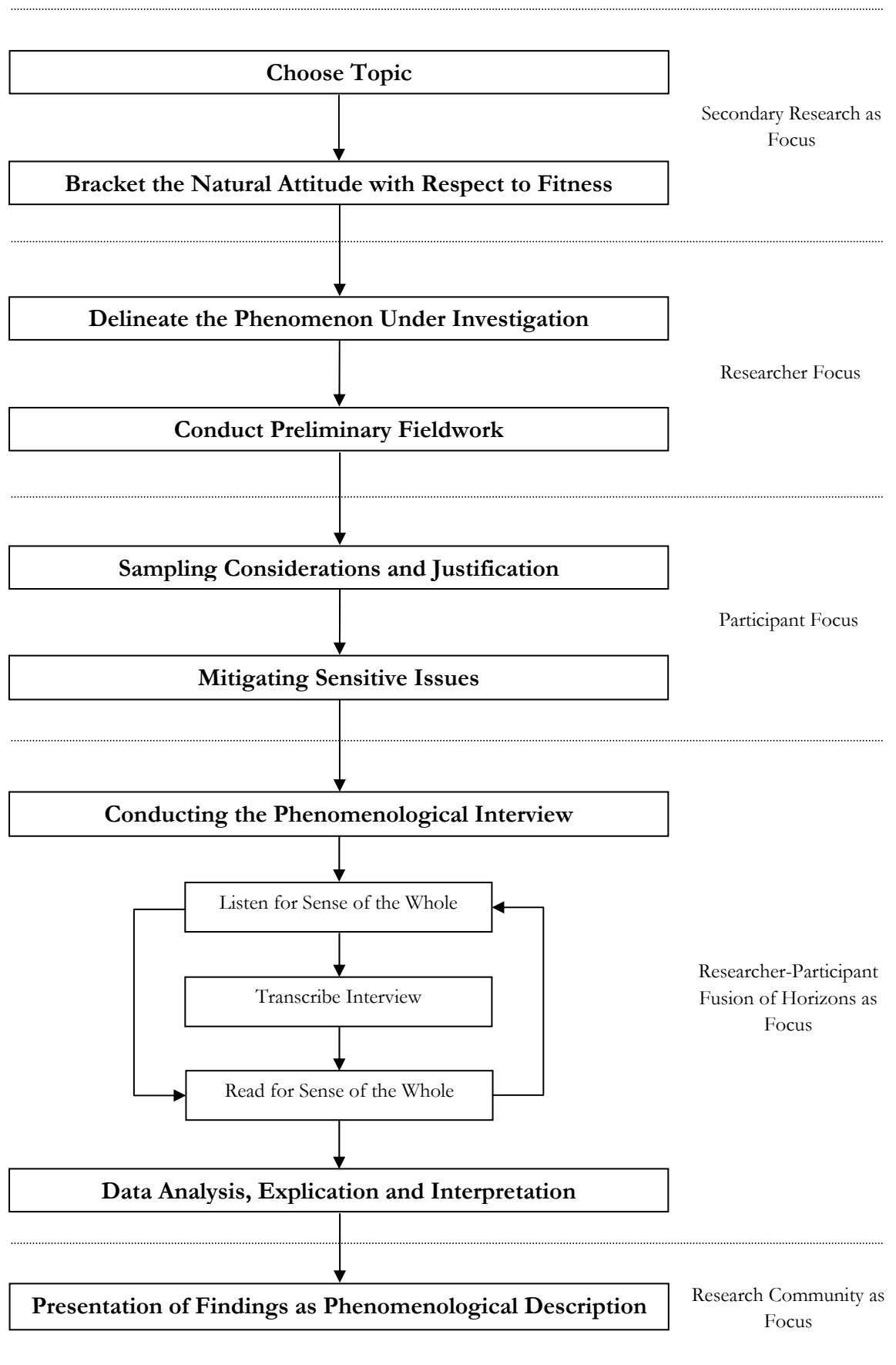
The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast...but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution (Latour, 2004a, p. 246).

Being critically reflexive, then, is not about being dismissive. Rather, it is a refusal of intellectualist tendencies towards pure theory and interpretation in favour of approaches that confront problems at the level of practice (where they have, in fact, gathered as “matters of concern”). Secondly, and related to this commitment, since much previous fitness research has tended towards the general (and generally critical) cultural overview, holding out more for fitness implies the need for a pragmatic methodological strategy in considering fitness as a reflection of reflexive embodiment or body-work (e.g. Deleuze and Guattari emphasise this notion of using concepts as strategies). If there is both attention *to* and attention *with* one’s body (as Csordas has usefully explained), then it is incumbent upon us to acknowledge that the body is not merely an object in the world. Rather, the body is of the world; it is “worldly.” It is a vehicle of practical activity (*pratiqement*) on the side of the subject that exists in an embodied relation to the world (Bourdieu, 1990, 2004; Marcel, 1977; Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 2002; Shilling, 2003; Todes, 2001). To emphasise the dual structure of the phenomenological body is to emphasise that, in action, we are bodily and open to multiple perspectival and temporal orientations

(Crossley, 1996, 2001, 2004a, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Csordas, 1990, 1993, 1994; Heidegger, 1962; Leder, 1990, 1992a, 1992b). Moreover, it is to emphasise that it is only through this dual structure that we can come to have an understanding of meaningful and morally valenced lived experiences (see e.g. Shilling, 2005; Shilling & Mellor, 2007; Shusterman, 1999, 2008; Throop, 2005, 2010). Thirdly, and on the basis of this embodied practical emphasis, holding out more for fitness requires the acknowledgement that fitness participants are not merely the passive recipients of projects determined over and above them in objective structures. Rather, it requires the acknowledgement that they are active in the meaning-making process, that their actions (and interactions) have both a structured and structuring effect, and that this generative process is worthy of our deep consideration (cf. Crossley, 2006c; Sassatelli, 1999a).²⁵ Finally, and on this basis, holding out more for fitness requires the acknowledgement that we have not yet come to terms with the task of talking about the fit body and that there is scope to follow through on the *positive* proposition that fitness is a negotiated endeavour. The negotiated nature of this research process is reflected in “Figure 3.1 The Phenomenological Research Process” overleaf and discussed herein.

²⁵ Although both Bourdieu and Foucault’s accounts of reflexive embodiment reflect this dual character of the *structured* and *structuring* body, with interpretations and applications of their work there has been a general tendency towards critique based on structural explanations of power acting upon the body. This is largely a fault of Bourdieu and Foucault themselves (though not entirely, of course). Despite arguing vehemently to the contrary, Bourdieu certainly exhibited clear bias towards the objective configuration of structured fields of practice as opposed to the structuring effects of the embodied *habitus* (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Johnson, 1993). Likewise, Foucault’s use of the term power to discuss the configuration of modern discursive relations acting upon the body is largely pejorative (see Rorty, 1982). These seemingly monolithic and negative structural emphases have had a large impact upon sociological understandings of the body and embodiment. And, because of this critical bent, these understandings have scarcely accounted for the fact that, in many instances, people *do not* attend to their bodies as sexed objects of representation. And even if they once did, they have a hard time accounting for how reflexive-embodied practices can change and acquire new meanings over time (see e.g. Collins, 2002; Crossley, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Fishwick, 2008; George & Rail, 2005; Monaghan, 2001a; Sassatelli, 1999a, 1999b).

Figure 3.1 The Phenomenological Research Process



3.2 The Phenomenological Research Process

While traditional phenomenological analyses relied on disciplined forms of eidetic reflection, it is reasonable to say that recent phenomenological work has been broadened to fit into a suite of naturalistic research that undertakes to describe the *made* experiences of individuals from a contextualised perspective. And, while there are few immutable rules as to the appropriate means of conducting phenomenological work, the notion of ascertaining a description in response to a relatively direct question (or set of questions) has almost always been emphasised.²⁶

Clearly, much of this descriptive work has already been done in positioning this study in relation to existing research. You may recall that in Chapter One the decision to undertake a phenomenological description of fitness was made (i.e. a description of all of those things that have gathered in order form a relational field of meaning). Moreover, in bracketing the natural attitude with respect to fitness, Chapter Two was given to a lengthy description of fitness' cultural embeddedness and the type of society wherein fitness has come to the fore as a legitimate matter of concern. Taking this into consideration, it is clear that the first two steps outlined in Figure 3.1 (Secondary Research as Focus) have been completed. It is now time to discuss more directly the unique focus of this research and how it attended to a positive re-description of fitness (Sisyphus).

3.2.1 Delineate the Phenomenon Under Investigation

In order to move forward with this positive appropriation of fitness, it will be necessary in this section to delineate the phenomenon under investigation and to

²⁶ Here, I mean to refer to the tendencies of those empirical-phenomenological approaches that were developed at Duquesne University (see e.g. Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi, Barton, & Maes, 1983; Giorgi, Fischer, & Murray, 1975; Giorgi, Fischer & von Eckartsberg, 1971; Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979; Valle, 1998; Valle & Halling, 1989; Valle & King, 1978).

carve out a research focus of my own. Specifically, the purpose of this thesis herein is to build on a number of studies that have granted ontological weight to the local organisation of the fitness experience and to examine the possibilities for fitness if the following proposition is taken to be the case: *fitness is something we negotiate, despite it being something we never really achieve*. The remainder of this thesis is directed towards the generation of a phenomenological description based on the following question: *What is the structure of this process of negotiation?*

In order to answer this question, and to shed light upon what it means to participate in fitness activities on an ongoing basis, it is necessary:

1. To explore meaning-making in the context of fitness participant's lived descriptions.
2. To examine the motivational impulses that encourage and nurture development in fitness activities.
3. To examine the types of pleasures that accrue to participants through the engagement in fitness activities.

The account of fitness participation presented herein is unique in the sense that, rather than asking about *why* people engage in fitness activities, it asks only *what it is like*. By indicating a special meaning for the word negotiation (the process of navigating obstacles along a leisure trajectory) the remainder of this thesis seeks a phenomenological description of the factors involved in negotiating one's fitness activity in the context of everyday life, its commitments, and its responsibilities.²⁷

This deontological re-description of fitness (as opposed to a self-refuting fixed ontology of fitness) is not only a heretofore neglected area of inquiry, but reflects a phenomenological response to those hermeneutical problems associated with fitness

²⁷ The question of "negotiation" is of much greater significance than mere critique when you take into consideration the fact that over half of people who begin a structured exercise programme give up within the first six months (Courneya & McAuley, 1994; Dishman, 1982, 1988; Dishman, Sallis & Orenstein, 1985; Duncan & McAuley, 1993; Mintel, 2003, 2007; Robinson & Rogers, 1994).

in our present stage in the history of modernity. The following sections illustrate the means through which this thesis' *re-description* of fitness was ascertained.

3.2.2 Conduct Preliminary Fieldwork

Since it was reasoned that fitness is a negotiated endeavour undertaken in a consistent manner over an extended period of time, it was deemed necessary that at least one of the means of data-generation should have a logical relation with the temporal flux of the activities in question. While retaining the centrality of a contextualised description as the unit of phenomenological analysis, this aspect of the research took neither the written nor the verbal account as its primary method (see e.g. Colaizzi, 1978; Fisher, 1985; Kvale, 1983, 1996; McCracken, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1989; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989, 1990; van Kaam, 1966). Rather, in fulfilment of the objectives of the second aspect of this research, it was deemed both appropriate *and* necessary to combine both real-time *and* retrospective data.

A preliminary phase of ethnographic fieldwork proceeded from the position that, in order to understand the structure of the process of negotiation, there needed to be an acknowledgement that the research situation was complex and diffuse and that there was a need to experience the phenomenon in a contemporaneous manner as it was "lived through." Although this type of fieldwork turned out to be an ongoing endeavour over the course of this research, a specific stage of preliminary fieldwork took place over a five-week period in a rural fitness club in Clane Co. Kildare (formerly, "Clane Health and Fitness"). The site was a commercial club within which fitness activities were undertaken through fee-based club membership and in participants' leisure time. The reasons for the emphasis on commercial fitness clubs

will be discussed in the following section. However, it will suffice to say for now that, since the majority of previous research has taken the fitness club as a general locus of activity for the field as a whole (and since the second aspect of this research was directed towards a re-description of fitness) it was deemed to be particularly useful in gaining an experiential insight into the vagaries of fitness participation.

Material for this ethnographic work was ascertained not only through a variety of observations and interactions with fellow participants, but also through a variety of roles undertaken by the researcher. Given my qualifications and previous experience as a fitness professional, approval was given by the club owner and manager to undertake two primary roles with respect to club member observation and interaction. The first role was undertaken in club uniform and involved an ethnographic stance from the perspective of “The Fitness Team.” This involved shadowing other members of the fitness team in the context of their interactions with club members (consultations, demonstrations and assessments, as well as group exercise activities). However, in certain circumstances, it also involved a more direct interaction with club members. This was especially the case since staff in fitness clubs are often inclined to spend time around the reception area of the club (a significant locus of activity in itself when the manager is not around!). In their absence, club members often asked for help with finding and using equipment, suggestions pertaining to exercise choice (“What’s a good exercise for toning my X?”), stretching (“How do I stretch my X?”), and timetabling of activities (“Is there a class on at X am?” “What class is on this morning/evening?” “Who is teaching X?” “Where do I need to sign in for X?”).

Although descriptive material was ascertained through a participant and non-participant role, an overly (and overtly) non-participant observation role was avoided

in order to increase the naturalistic flavour of data-generation.²⁸ The second role involved a more traditional participant observation where there was a concerted effort to immerse myself within the activities undertaken by participants. This involved participating in both individual and group exercise at various times and on various days (see next paragraph). It involved relating to others both in and through my body (i.e. intercorporeally) so as to be deemed a credible participant. This credible participation was an embodied activity. It was not primarily cognitive. It required “getting a feel,” “letting go,” “loosening up,” “going with it.” It required taking risks, not being afraid of doing something wrong, doing something incorrectly and being corrected. And, in the end, it often required a level of practical mastery (proficiency, at least) in relation to specified activities and in relation to others. For example, in an exercise class, participants not only have to manage posture, movement, balance, coordination, rhythm, tempo, and sequence demands, they also have to keep up with the instructor and others around them (i.e. you have to keep up with others in the class and they have to keep up with you). This phenomenon is not limited to group exercise classes. In an individual training session, for example, participants often ask for (or are asked to give) a “spot” while lifting weights so as to improve on previous workouts in a safe manner. In both instances, participants tend to help each other, talk themselves and others through the workout, and do this in a manner that elicits desirable responses (i.e. they psyche each other up, they get each other in the zone, etc.). Successful workouts not only tend to have a fluid feel about them, they tend to elicit *shared* affective responses. This is something that enables

²⁸ Like Crossley (2004a, 2006c, 2008), general note-keeping was kept to a minimum and, instead, the observations and findings were written up and refined over the course of a number of drafts of the paper that was prepared for the ISTTE conference at the end of the summer of 2008: Neville, R.D. (2008) Peculiarities and Parameters Affecting Health and Fitness Research in C. Hu, (ed.) *Proceedings of the 2008 International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators (ISTTE) Conference*, Dublin, September 30 – October 2, 2008, St. Clair Shores, MI: International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators, pp.197-211.

the experience of working out to tend towards consummation (i.e. it lets participants know when they are done). And notably, it is often the topic of post-workout (watering hole!) conversations.

The time brackets in which observations were undertaken were (i) from 9am until 12pm, (ii) 3pm until 6pm, and (iii) 6pm until 9pm. The framing of observational work within these periods is significant. For one, it was agreed with staff at the club that these times (particularly on weekdays) were significant for engaging in formal activities and engaging with members in the pre-/post-workout periods. For example, it is generally agreed that fitness clubs are busiest in the post-workday period (from about 6pm onwards) and that the majority of organised fitness would be allocated to this time bracket. The 9am to 12pm time bracket was also significant. Since the fitness club in question had a crèche, many non-working parents and those on shift-work would drop their older children to school for 8:30am/9am, drop the younger children into the crèche, and then use the fitness club for anywhere between one and two hours. Organised fitness classes were also scheduled to cater for this demand. On most days, I stayed to cover two blocks of time. This often meant staying from 9am until 12pm and coming back at 3pm until 6pm or coming into the club at 3pm and staying until closing time (often 10pm). In terms of undertaking a participant role (which, after a number of weeks appeared to have been the more fruitful of the two roles undertaken), it was often the case that the researcher would participate in club activities between 9am and 12pm and then again between 6pm and 9pm. These were certainly the club's two busiest blocks of time during the weekday and the times at which one would encounter a diverse range of participants. The fact that the club would go on to ask their full-time staff to work split-shift hours during the week (post-economic downturn) is a testament to the

importance of these two time periods over the middle of the day. That all observational work was undertaken on weekdays is also significant. Informal reviews of the study format with staff at the club confirmed my initial belief (based on previous experience) that the weekend was not a busy time (save for the use of wet facilities) and would be unsuitable for the purposes of this research.

It is significant to mention as a final remark that, although only initially planned for a five week period, the latter participant role was maintained over the remainder of this research until the club closed down in May 2011. This not only helped in fostering a close working-out relationship with a number of participants (discussed in more detail in the next section) and in meliorating the existence of an explicit power relation between the *researcher* and the *researched*, it also allowed for an immersion into the experiential aspects of fitness consumption at a personal and inter-personal level. Though the researcher had been involved in working out at a fitness club in an on-and-off manner for most of his adult life, the time spent in this space during the second phase of this research was more structured – typically within the 9am -12pm or 6pm – 9pm time brackets previously discussed – amounting to approximately 1000hrs (a period of approximately two and a half years, going to the gym on average 5 times per week, and spending on average 90 minutes per session). The importance of this role cannot be overstated since it was central to the development of a phenomenological sensitivity to those parameters affecting fitness research, to coming into contact with “experienced fitness participants” (on this, see section “3.2.1 Sampling Considerations and Justification”), and to the phenomenological processing of researcher-participant relations which will be discussed in the following sections.

3.2.2.1 Parameters Affecting Fitness Research²⁹

Building upon this practical involvement, the first major output emerging from this fieldwork undertook to describe some of the peculiarities and parameters characterising the fitness club environment as a meaningfully-infused social space. Various general matters that were already apparent (from previous research and my own experience) were reinforced during this stage. For example, the fact that the consumption of fitness for leisure exhibits patterns of seasonality making it appear like a different place at different times of the year became clear. This stage also reinforced previous research's emphasis on the fitness club's private status as a space for leisure, as reflected in my early observations of Clane Health and Fitness Club:

Upon entering the club, one encounters a contained and protected space...At this point there is no confusion that this is a private club where rites of passage are either granted by a swift swipe of one's membership key-ring or by the member of staff who occupies this first area of physical space – reception. Non-members are routinely dismissed...although the option to join...is certainly available as the plethora of information upon entry will attest.

What this stage of the research emphasised most was the fact that, as a meaningfully-infused social space, the fitness club also exhibited its own experiential aspects. That is, it appeared to exhibit aspects that made going to the gym and working out feel like an experience in itself rather than just another leisure activity.

Following Spradley's (1980) dimensions of a social space, this early descriptive work emphasised a number of important experiential aspects under the following headings: (i) participants within the setting, (ii) what participants do within the setting, (iii) the objective-material environment, (iv) the temporal sequencing of events, (v) salient goals, and (vi) related affective responses.

²⁹ Material discussed in this section is adapted from early observations presented in: Neville, R.D. (2008) Peculiarities and Parameters Affecting Health and Fitness Research in C. Hu, (ed.) *Proceedings of the 2008 International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators (ISTTE) Conference*, Dublin, September 30 – October 2, 2008, St. Clair Shores, MI: International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators, pp.197-211.

Following the objectives outlined in section “3.2.1 Delineate the Phenomenon Under Investigation,” this descriptive work sought to meaningfully capture an everyday experience of going to the gym to work out. This was done by making considerations for the negotiated character of this endeavour, its motivational impulses, and the emotive responses that it likely engendered. The following (part autobiographical) passage is taken from my early phenomenological reflections on the factors involved in negotiating physical activity in the context of everyday life and its various commitments and responsibilities:

It’s 16:55pm and Enda, a young professional who commutes to work every day, is getting ready to leave work. On his way home he will, as he does every Wednesday, drop into the local gym for his scheduled workout. After all, Wednesday is “legs and abs” day, as Bill Phillips has informed him in the book he recently read, *Body for Life*. He estimates that the bus will make it to the gym at approximately 17:50pm, as it usually does. Once he gets there, he has about ten minutes or so to swipe into the club, briefly flirt with the receptionist and, finally, hit the changing rooms. Then, he will adorn himself with his exercise specific training gear, mentally preparing himself for the workout to follow. Ready to work out, he will bound up the flight of stairs, briefly pause at the doors to the gym and organise the playlist on his i-pod. At the same time, he will gaze through the small window in the door to see if the gym is as busy as it was on Monday, when he had to wait for almost every machine. His disdain for the “resolution-makers” is quite strong, as it is for most regular gym-goers. After all, this is his midweek break, his chance to disengage from both the responsibilities he has left behind in work, and the ones he will face when he gets home to his wife and young child. Once he enters the gym, he will follow the dominant discourse of entering the weights area to mould, sculpt, and/or build the version of his desired body that has been branded into his mind (only, of course, after a brief five minute warm-up as the aforementioned book suggests). Among the many things he will do in the gym, Focus, Sweat, Push, Grunt, and Endure, are high on his agenda – all of which will be rewarded with a well-deserved cool-down, stretch and figurative pat on the back. Once he has finished his workout, he will stride proudly, flushed with positive workout endorphins, out of the gym and down the stairs to freshen up and go home. After all, dinner is always at half seven. However, it is now 17:10pm and the bus is late. He is starting to get agitated, as he will not start his workout until 18:10pm. He wonders if the gym will be packed. In fact, he wonders if he will make it there at all.

Nothing I have seen over the course of my ethnographic work prompted me to alter my views here significantly. At a general level, what this description emphasised was the complex, multidimensional, apparently ritualised, and clearly engrossing nature of going to the gym to work out. To use a distinction developed in the

following sections, it emphasised that going to the gym to work out is not merely an activity. Rather, it emphasised that activity is often accompanied by a continuous focus of attention outside of the gym that is unlike other leisure forms. It is a focus of attention that provides conditions for the possibility of working out and, hence, enables participants to become entirely engrossed within the activity. In fact, it emphasised the fact that exercising for fitness can exhibit an orientation so vigorous, energetic, and seemingly agonistic so as to seem aberrant to those outside of it (cf. Chelladurai & Chang, 2000; Hill & Robinson, 1991; Lehmann, 1987; Sassatelli, 1999a). What would emerge more specifically from this ongoing phenomenological sensitivity are two considerations that are worth underscoring before proceeding: how my understandings of (i) *negotiation* and (ii) *experience* would change over the course of this research.

Firstly, it emerged that, although almost exclusively framed as an encapsulated experience, going to the gym and working out is not merely sequestered from everyday life. It would emerge that, although the fitness club appears open to anyone with the economic capital to act as a consumer, going to the gym and working out is not mere consumption activity. Rather, success in acquiring the requisite cultural competence or capital to even act as a credible consumer requires a seamless weaving of tools, tactics, and affective responses into the life-world. Indeed, acting as a competent and credible gym-goer does not leave the life-world go unaffected. Rather, it often contests and, at its best, refreshes and renews it (see, in particular, section “4.3.1.3 Pleasure as Tension-Release” in Chapter Four). Importantly then, these thoughts left me to reconsider the implications of the fact that fitness is not merely negotiated in the context of everyday life (its commitments and responsibilities). Rather, it is always already a part of it. Acting as a competent and

credible gym-goer is a commitment in itself, it is an important responsibility to uphold, and, therefore, requires the creation of a life-world of its own. This, perhaps, is something that I should have known only too well given my acquaintance with the phenomenological literature – that self-making is always already a world-making activity. However, perhaps it was a lesson better learned in practice.

Secondly, and on the basis of this reorganisation of attention, my own general understandings of what it meant to explore *experience* changed (an epistemological shift informed by practice). It became clear that, if going to the gym and working out is not merely an encapsulated experience (or consumption activity) then it was not merely something that could be bought or sold. It was made. Or, more specifically, going to the gym and working out was a *made* experience. It became clear that, in order to come to terms with the meaning of fitness, I would have to focus, not only on individuals and their experiences, but on the factors involved in the *making* of individual experience. I would also have to focus not only on experience *per se*, but on the acts that constitute it, the environments in which these acts take place, and the significant others that render them meaningful. To use a phrase discussed in the following sections, I would have to focus on the shift from *mere* activity to *made* experience. Sampling considerations and a more thorough description of what is meant by this *made* experience (and *experienced fitness participants*) are offered in the next section.

3.2.3 Sampling Considerations and Justification

From a phenomenological perspective, the use or selection of research participants is not defined within any specific parameters. In fact, of the various anthologies that have presented the foundational principles of an empirical-

phenomenological inquiry (e.g. Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi *et al.*, 1971, 1975, 1979, 1983; Valle, 1998; Valle & King, 1978; Valle *et al.*, 1989) there is scarcely a paragraph, let alone a chapter, devoted to sampling considerations. In spite of this, a number of important criteria can be outlined.

In terms of selecting research participants for the second part of this study, a number of preliminary requirements should be clarified. In line with the ethical standards and guidelines pertinent to the Institute in which this research is being undertaken, (i) all study participants had to be over the age of eighteen, (ii) they had to have participated in a de-briefing interview with the researcher prior to consent, and (iii) they had to provide written consent to take part in this research (see Appendix A). More specific secondary requirements, however, were based on the following four conditions.

Firstly, the participant had to have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and be willing and able to talk about it. They had to have been participants in fitness activities at the time of the interview. Secondly, since the second aspect of this research was oriented towards description of patterns of negotiation, and since attrition has been a longstanding problem associated with exercising for fitness, study participants had to have had some level of experience and consistency along their fitness trajectory. “Experienced fitness participants” were defined specifically as having developed a steady trajectory of participation for a period greater than one year, where steady implied working out, on average, three times per week. “Experienced fitness participants” were also defined more broadly as those for whom a particular subjectivity had been constructed on the basis of this ongoing organisation of activity. This view of experience was an important factor in

operationalising the emphasis on negotiation outlined in previous sections. And it is precisely for this reason that I will hopefully be excused for citing its source in full:

I should say from the outset that, by experience, I do not mean the mere registering of sensory data, or a purely mental (psychological) relation to objects and events, or the acquisition of skills and competencies by accumulation or repeated exposure. I use the term not in the individualistic, idiosyncratic sense of something belonging to one and exclusively her own though others might have “similar” experiences...but rather in the general sense of a *process* by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed...The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction...which I call experience...[I]t is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s...engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 159; original emphasis).

This account of experience emphasises that individuals do not necessarily have experiences in some substantive sense but are, themselves, involved in a process of *made* experience. This is a use that resonates closely with the French *expérience*, which brings with it connotations of experimentation (of having undergone a trial, of having been tried and tested, and having changed).³⁰ It is a use that is compatible with the work of Dewey (1958, 1997, 2005, 2009) whose distinction between “mere activity” and “experience” will be important herein. Notably, it is a use that resonates with my emphasis on the term negotiation as the basis for a positive appropriation of the term fitness. I use this account herein not to designate individual experience but, rather, to refer to this research’s broad engagement across all chapters with a variety of participants (i.e. those acts, actors, objects, ideas, practices, techniques, technologies, discourses, institutions, infrastructures, events, associations, etc.) that have had to congeal over time in order to *make* individual

³⁰ It is also worth noting that this use retains much of the etymological richness of the term (Ayto, 1990; Barnhart, 1988; Dewey, 1958; Jay, 2006; Turner, 1986; Williams, 1985). However, it is also a view of experience that largely ceased to be associated with Anglophone uses of “experience” from the eighteenth century onwards.

experience in the first place (see also Butler, 1990, 1993, 1994; Scott, 1991; see esp. Geertz, 1986).

Thirdly, in order to further delimit the sample so as to increase the likelihood of generating such a performative account, fitness participants were defined as those who were members of private gyms.³¹ By using the gym as the primary site (for this research), considerations with respect to membership, average number of visits per week, length of membership, etc. could also be more clearly defined within the context of measurable parameters. It is almost impossible, for example, to define all of the parameters of what constitutes, and what contributes to, fitness. Indeed, considerations with respect to people's general activity levels are extremely wide in scope. Whether people walk, cycle, drive, or get public transport to work, the choice to take the stairs as opposed to the lift/elevator at work, the increasing use of pedometers over the course of the day, etc. all clearly contribute to persons' overall fitness and, as such, present a significant problem when it comes to sampling. As Crossley (2004b) has explained, because much of our lives are routinised, it is likely that we have little or no reflective access to many of the factors that impact upon our body composition. The use of the private gym, and the average number visits per week over a period of one year as a measure of experience then, was a pragmatic consideration made on the basis of this difficulty.

The fourth and final consideration that was made with respect to participant selection was the issue of reliability. What constitutes a reliable participant? How does one define a reliable participant? In order that problems associated with reliability might be obviated, the selection of participants was undertaken in

³¹ The terms "health clubs," "fitness clubs," "health and fitness clubs," "gyms," "leisure clubs," etc., have been used interchangeably to this point (as they have in previous research). The term "gym" is used herein in order to correspond with research participants' own preferences in Chapter Four.

conjunction with gatekeepers.³² In this study, four of the gatekeepers were fitness instructors working within the aforementioned gym that both vouched for and introduced me to participants. The three other gatekeepers were colleagues of mine at the DIT who, similarly, vouched for three additional experienced female participants and helped to level out what was (at the time) deemed to have been a gender bias. In addition to this, three participants undertook this gatekeeping role themselves having referred me on to previously unknown participants. The total number of elaborative phenomenological interviews undertaken in the second phase of this research was twelve. Save for the final three interviews (numbered 10-12 below) that were undertaken in the DIT (meeting rooms in Cathal Brugha St.), all other interviews were undertaken in the researcher's home office (having previously arranged to meet the participant in the gym prior to this). The following table overleaf illustrates a general breakdown of participant demographics as per the interview (and Appendix A):

³² The gatekeeper represents an authority figure in social science research and has been utilised in studies of diverse and sensitive populations, such as substance abusers (Goode, 2000), socially excluded people (Emmel, Hughes, Greenhalgh, & Sales, 2007), lesbian, gay and bisexual communities (Lee, 2008; Yip, 2008), and abuse victims (Chatzifotiou, 2000) with great effect.

Table 3.1 Breakdown of Participant Demographics*

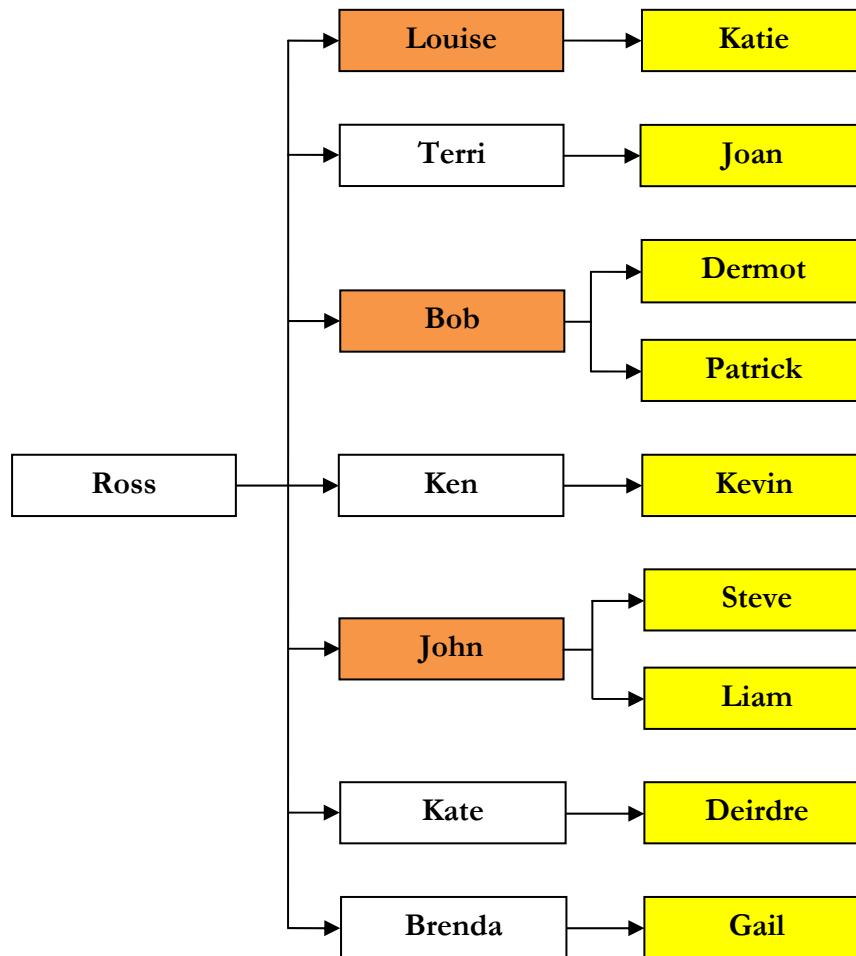
No.	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	Gym Experience
1	John	Male	54	Secondary	On disability leave	8 years
2	Bob	Male	22	College**	Full-time student	5 years
3	Steve	Male	74	Primary	Retired farmer	5 years
4	Kevin	Male	34	College**	Construction worker	7 years
5	Louise	Female	34	Graduate	Consultant	14 years
6	Katie	Female	26	Graduate	Clerical worker	3 years
7	Dermot	Male	28	Graduate	Credit manager	15 years
8	Patrick	Male	27	Secondary	Clerical worker	10 years
9	Liam	Male	45	Secondary	Taxi driver	23 years
10	Joan	Female	22	College**	Full-time student	1.5 years
11	Gail	Female	45	Postgraduate	Academic	20 years
12	Deirdre	Female	42	Postgraduate	Academic	8 years

* All information accurate at the time of interview ** In college at time of interview

With respect to this participant profiling, seven were male and five were female, with a diverse age range from twenty-two to seventy-four. The participant profile was also diverse in a number of other respects: varying levels of education (primary school education to postgraduate PhD), occupations (from being out of work due to disability to being a senior university lecturer), and levels of

“experience” participating in fitness activities (one participant having been working out for longer than the youngest participant has been alive!). In addition to the table outlined above, the following figure illustrates the relationships between the researcher, gatekeepers, and these eventual interview participants:

Figure 3.2 Breakdown of Researcher-Participant Relations



All participants are highlighted in the boxes above, with each having either a direct (orange) or indirect (yellow) relationship with the researcher. All gatekeepers are represented as having a direct relation and, where the gatekeeper acted him/herself in the role of interview participant, they are highlighted in orange. All other participants are highlighted in yellow. It should be made clear that the number here grossly underestimates the level of depth that was ascertained in this research

process – given the level of experience of many of the participants and the amount of time and level of action and interaction invested by the researcher in the gym space itself (approx 1000hrs). Moreover, the nine initial interviews outlined above in “Table 3.1 Breakdown of Participant Demographics” were precipitated by a degree of involvement that is not typical in traditional phenomenological research. These relationships were sedimented over a number of years (some even longer than the number of years it has taken to complete this study). The elaborative interviews, therefore, should themselves be viewed on performative terms and seen as a coming together of a confluence of events, sedimenting over time in the context of a researcher-participant relationship. The elaborative interviews do not seek to merely *represent* participants’ experiences. Rather, they should be seen as the effect of a broader phenomenological processing of researcher-participant relations that have allowed for the comprehending of this *made* experience *as* subjective.³³ Ethical considerations with respect to exploring this relationality are described in the following sections.

³³ This is a distinction that continues to plague social scientific uses of the term “experience.” It is a distinction between treating experience as the matter and *not* the method of inquiry – an ontological as opposed to an epistemological emphasis on experience, as Lash (2006) has explained. Moreover, it is one that I explore at length in my own paper under review: Neville, R.D. (Under Review) Leisure, and the luxury of experience, *Leisure Sciences*.

3.2.4 Mitigating Sensitive Issues

Although the threats posed when conducting research relating to fitness participation were unlikely to equate with those prevalent in studying deviant, unethical, or addictive behaviours (see e.g. Cooper-Martin & Holbrook, 1993; Goode, 2000; Hill, 1995; Hill & Robinson, 1991; Moschis & Cox, 1989; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Rojek, 1999; Rook, 1987; Truman, 2003), a number of sensitive issues with respect to reflexive embodiment were taken into consideration.

Firstly, the private gym space was respected as a protected environment in which participants occupy very different social roles that would likely be expected of them outside of it. Participants were thought of as engaging in activities, caring for their bodies, and exhibiting postures and movements that might be thought of as being aberrant, if not indecent, outside of this space (Crossley, 2006c; Lehmann, 1987; Sassatelli, 1999a, 1999b). Secondly, a sensitivity to the fact that fitness (and body-work more generally) has been commonly associated with carnal body-work was necessary (Featherstone, 2007; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Lehmann, 1987; Monaghan, 1999, 2001a; Philips & Drummond, 2001).³⁴ A great deal of research has shown that, even outside of the gym environment, exposure to media images of beauty, excessive thinness, and overt muscularity can negatively affect self-perception, regardless of bodyweight or gender (see e.g. Cash, 2004; Kilbourne, 1994; Philips & Drummond, 2001; Tiggemann, 2004; Wedell, Santoyo & Pettibone, 2005).³⁵ The second aspect of this research, therefore, had to be especially sensitive

³⁴ The meaning of carnal body-work can be phrased thusly: engagement in practices that, while stimulating short-term changes in body composition, have adverse longer term health effects. Examples range from those that might be framed as "occasional" (where somebody loses weight quickly in order to look better for a holiday or a wedding and puts back more weight) or "pathological," where more serious conditions (such as anorexia- and bulimia-nervosa and body-image-dysmorphia) are concerned.

³⁵ The introduction of the international research journal *Body Image* in 2004 to the Elsevier collection is a testament to the importance of this claim. Even more revelatory of this issue is the fact that body image

to participants' body-image perception since probing into such topics could be construed as inappropriate, if not incriminating, and serve to amplify anxieties in the research process.

In order to combat the threat of sensitive issues and honour standard ethical boundaries, a number of strategies were pursued. The gatekeepers were invaluable in at least two respects. Firstly, undertaking this work in conjunction with gatekeepers helped to rule out a number of potentially sensitive encounters by acting in this intermediary role. Secondly, where the gatekeeper in question was a qualified fitness professional, it was often the case that a great deal of rapport had been built between them and the prospective participant. This was a powerful relationship that was harnessed so that a greater level of trust could be extended to the research. The choice to focus on participants' own descriptions in this phase of the research was also deemed of fundamental importance to this process. For example, the general approach to asking participants *what it is like to go to the gym* instead of asking them *why they go* was one of the most basic ways of avoiding situations of judgement or, indeed, ones in which participants needed to react with defensive responses. On this basis, it can be seen that the procedures for establishing a safe and supportive environment for study participants was established before they were solicited.

Also noteworthy is the fact that, prior to being recruited for the study, each research participant:

1. Participated in a debriefing session with the researcher in order to (i) clarify the intentions and length of the study, (ii) communicate the requirements of them in the fulfilment of research objectives, (iii) outline what's in it for

classes are being piloted in primary schools for the first time in the UK this year (source: <http://www.channel4.com/news/body-image-classes-piloted-in-primary-schools>)

them, and (iv) give (potential) research participants the opportunity to ask questions.

2. Was given a form to sign indicating consent and reassuring the maintenance of confidentiality. The form was to be signed by both researcher and participant. A participant was not considered a part of this research until they were been given the opportunity to participate in a de-briefing session and have committed on an informed consent basis.
3. Was given a pseudonym to mitigate the possibility of their identity being unintentionally revealed.
4. Was given the opportunity to withdraw their involvement at any time during the research process.

See Appendix A for a copy of the participant information and study consent form utilised in this research as per the study's correspondence with the DIT ethics committee.

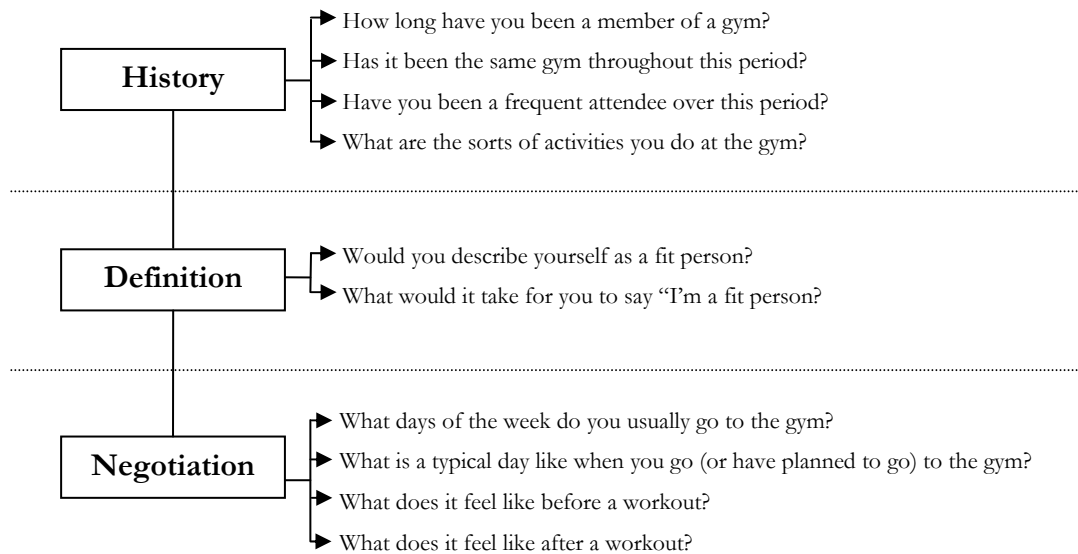
3.2.5 Conducting the Phenomenological Interview

Although preliminary fieldwork provided a contextualised insight into the local organisation of the fitness experience, it proved to be less effective in terms of examining this experience as it was lived through and, in particular, from the perspective of the other. Material elicited also often turned out to be rather perfunctory and repetitive at times, scarcely offering more than mere lists of interactions and activities observed and undertaken. As the philosopher John Dewey was wont to say: '[m]ere activity does not constitute experience. It is dispersive, centrifugal, dissipating' (Dewey, 2009, p. 153; see also Dewey, 1958, 1997, 2005; Turner, 1986; Turner & Bruner, 1986). An experience that is *made* involves change

and stands out from the banality of mere activity. It is active as opposed to arbitrary and merely passive, involves an interplay of affect and being affected, and is structured according to lines of initiation, immersion, and consummation. An experience that is *made*, then, involves doing *and* undergoing. It erupts from (or disrupts) mere repetition and is characterised by a quest for meaning in that which has disconcerted us. As Dewey (ibid) explained, it is only when an activity is ‘continued into the doing and undergoing of consequences,’ when a ‘change made in action is reflected back into a change made in us,’ that ‘mere flux...is loaded with significance.’ In order to facilitate a transition from mere activities to experience, the second part of this research sought to elicit an elaborative dialogue based on the stories participants had to tell about their everyday engagement with fitness activities and how this takes on an affective structure *as* experience.

Whereas phenomenological interviewing has tended to be open-ended, eliciting a discussion on the basis of an opening statement or question, each interview in this study was framed around three overlapping themes relating to the study’s objectives: participants’ (i) fitness *history*, (ii) *definitions* of fitness, and (iii) descriptions of how fitness activities are *negotiated* in the context of day-to-day activities. The following figure overleaf presents a breakdown of the themes and questions attached to them (see Appendix B for a copy of the prompt sheet used during this stage of the research):

Figure 3.3 Breakdown of Interview Themes and Questions



The questions outlined above were posed to all participants. They were deemed to be revelatory of this study's objective of trying to elicit a description of how fitness activities are negotiated in the context of everyday life. Moreover, they were deemed to be revelatory of how this is a meaningful endeavour, how participants motivate themselves in order to encourage and nurture development in this leisure specialism, and how this process elicits affective responses. There were two primary reasons for following an explicit thematic structure and, hence, departing from the traditional open-ended phenomenological stance. Firstly, it was thought that eliciting a description of the participant's history of undertaking fitness activities would provide a dual purpose. It would enable participants to adopt a reflexive position relative to the researcher without them even realising they were doing so. It was also reasoned that getting them to talk a little bit about themselves (as opposed to merely answering questions) would make them feel more comfortable. The second reason for departing from the traditional, open-ended repose was to facilitate some modicum of control across interviews. That is, since the second aspect of this research was given to a phenomenological response to issues previously outlined in

Chapter Two, the thematic approach ensured that all participants sufficiently covered items of interest in their descriptions (as far as possible).

While the interview protocol facilitated a thematic structure to each interview, the ensuing dialogue was (following Thompson *et al.*, 1989; see also Arnould & Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997a, 1997b; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Pollio *et al.*, 1997) necessarily open-ended so as to encourage elaborative dialogue. My role in this elaborative process was to facilitate a greater immersion on the part of participants into the lived dimensions of their experiences. It was deemed that this would provide an opportunity for expansion and would lead participants beyond the particularities and peculiarities of “mere activities,” to the nature, structure, and meaning of lived “experiences.”

3.2.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation

While the early philosophical-phenomenological tradition sought eidetic conditions from which the object of experience would “tell us what it is,” the pragmatic description sought herein aligns with no such Archimedean point. Instead, there was an acknowledgement of the role of the researcher within the process, such that the interpretation could be said to have emerged on the basis of a cumulative and interactive growth. The steps outlined below have been adapted from those outlined in Valle’s (1998) edited volume *Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology* and detail the process through which individual interviews were framed and subsequently interpreted. While the following sections describe this phase of the research as a step-by-step process, this does not do justice to the back-and-forth nature of the interpretive process and how established meanings only became sedimented over time through multiple iterations.

1. Transcribe the interview recording to get a sense of the whole

This first stage of interpretation involved an analysis of the text in order to ascertain a preliminary understanding of it as a whole. This involved a close listening to audio-taped interviews in order to get a feel for the material. Listening to interviews allowed for an initial familiarisation with the material that would otherwise have been missing. The second component of this initial phase involved manually transcribing the interviews. Over the course of the research, it became evident that the transcription process was itself a useful means of increasing familiarisation with the interview material.

2. Review transcript for significant statements

Once a sense of the whole had been grasped, the transcript was read over and over again (as many times as was deemed necessary) in order to extract significant statements and break the text down into manageable units. Significant statements were selected according to what von Eckartsberg (1998, p. 22) referred to as an ‘explication-guiding question.’ That is, they were selected on the basis of their relevance to the objectives outlined in section “3.2.1 Delineate Phenomenon Under Investigation.” Each statement was considered in terms of its relevance to how fitness activities are negotiated in the context of everyday life and its responsibilities. The following explication-guiding question was used: *what does this statement reveal about how this individual negotiates fitness activities into their everyday life?* Statements relating to meaning-making, motivation, and affective responses also guided interpretation. Only statements that were deemed revelatory of the phenomena under investigation were retained for further analysis. All other statements were discarded.

3. Review transcripts for local themes

The process of establishing local themes followed a similar process to that outlined in the previous step. However, instead of considering significant statements at the intra-interview transcript level of analyses, local themes were considered at the inter-interview level (i.e. across interview transcripts as opposed to within them). Interpretation was undertaken on the basis of part-to-whole iterations so that separate themes could be evaluated in terms of one another and so that potential themes that did not stand up to inter-interview comparisons could be discarded. Furthermore, a local theme was not considered unless it had emerged from a participants' description (that is, unless it could be directly highlighted in one or more transcripts).

4. Transformation of local themes into global themes

At this point in the process, interpretation began to move from situation-specific elements of participants' descriptions to constituents that are mindful of the whole. The transformation of *local* themes to *global* ones was facilitated by a movement from participants' point of view to a more abstract theoretical description (in line with previous or complementary research, say). The establishment of a global theme required seeing what Wittgenstein (1963, p. 32) referred to as a 'family resemblance.' This notion of a family resemblance (following Bambrough, 1968; Fogelin, 1979; McNamee, 1995, 2008) is illustrated below:

1	2	3	4	5
abcde	bcdef	cdefg	defgh	efghi

(McNamee, 2008, p. 11)

To say that participants' experiences at the local level (indicated by lower case letters a to i) came together to form a global theme (indicated by numbers 1 to 5) is to say there was a strong connection (a strong set of resemblances) between one

grouping and the next (e.g. between 1 and 2, 2 and 3, and even 1 and 3), but there was no single common element holding all of these experiences together.³⁶

5. Transformation of global themes in a phenomenological description

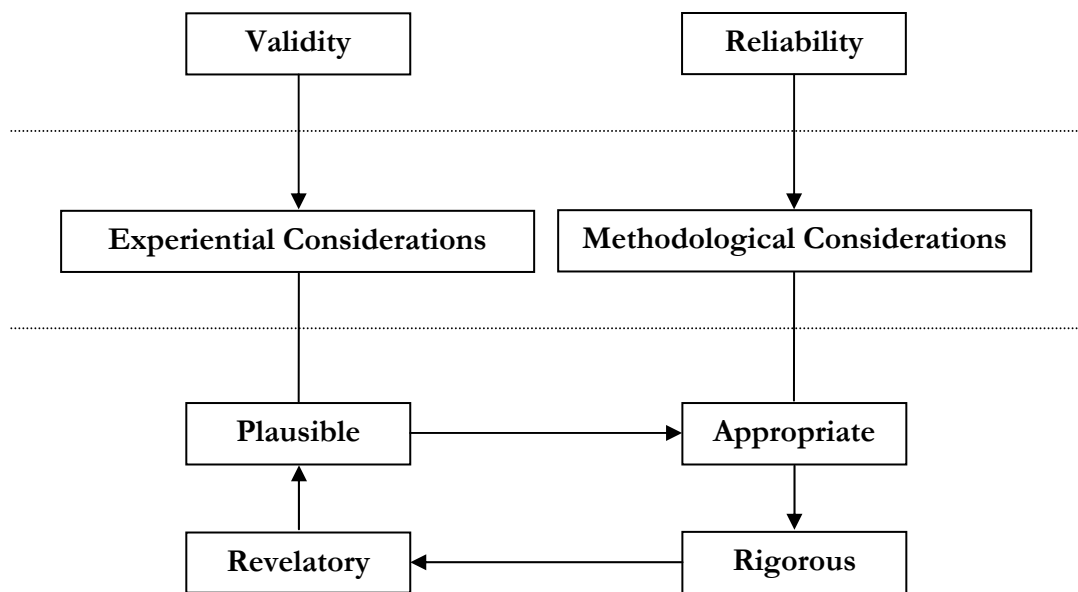
In the concluding sections of Chapter Two, fitness was rendered problematic on the following three counts: (i) there are no norms pertaining to fitness (ii) fitness has no upper limit, and on this basis (iii) fitness is an ambivalent practice. It was in the context of this tripartite problematic that the present study's global themes and phenomenological re-description were developed and refined. The final stage of the interpretive process involved the working out of a description that would provide a phenomenological response to the problem of fitness under late modernity. It meant confronting the problem of fitness as it was outlined in Chapter Two (i. there are no norms pertaining to fitness, ii. fitness has no upper limit, and on this basis iii. fitness is an ambivalent practice) with the findings of this study under each the following pertinent objectives: (i) exploring meaning-making in the context of fitness participant's descriptions (ii) examining the motivational impulses that encourage and nurture development in fitness activities, and (iii) examining the types of pleasures that accrue to participants through the engagement in fitness activities. Notably, this involved the confrontation of the findings of this research with previous (supporting and critical) accounts in order to create a synthesis of ideas. In order to facilitate a shift in emphasis from interpretation to phenomenological description, Chapter Four presents the findings of this stage of the research in the context of a corresponding tripartite structure of "meaning," "motivation," and "pleasure." Chapter Five presents the concluding synthesis of ideas in the context of a Complementary Model of Health and fitness.

³⁶ For a discussion of this in relation to leisure research, see Blackshaw's (2010) *Leisure*.

3.2.7 Considering Validity and Reliability

In phenomenological analyses, validity and reliability are deemed to be mutually reinforcing, and conceived of on the basis of a relation between methodological and experiential concerns. This is expressed in the following “Figure 3.4 The Validity-Reliability Dialectic:”

Figure 3.4 The Validity-Reliability Dialectic



Adapted from Pollio *et al.* (1997, p.55)

Methodological concerns were deemed to be procedural and included the structure of the research and research design. Experiential concerns, on the other hand, focused on the meaning and significance of the interpretive process. Taking into consideration “Figure 3.3 The Validity-Reliability Dialectic” above, it can be said that the validity and reliability of the research approach was evaluated on the basis of (i) being rigorous and appropriate to the study at hand and (ii) that descriptions elicited were revelatory of the phenomenon under investigation and plausible across a number of experiences. In this sense, many of the delimiting and control factors have been discussed in the previous section. In terms of the interplay between the

four factors, one had to consider whether the research question was *appropriate* (in the second half of this study, seeking a re-description of fitness was deemed an appropriate response to problem positions outlined in previous research). The *rigour* of the process was linked to how the question was operationalised (the use of a tripartite thematic structure and following an explicit protocol in the elaborative interviews was important in establishing a level of rigour that is often missing in more open-ended phenomenological analyses). It was deemed that the more rigorous the process, the more likely the participant's descriptions were to be *revelatory* of the phenomenon under investigation (again, the use of a tripartite thematic structure and following an explicit protocol in the elaborative interviews was important in establishing what more traditional, quantitative studies would refer to as convergent validity). Finally, the *plausibility* of the overall description was linked to its resonance across the entire scope of interviews (if a description was thought to be implausible, then the question asked of the participant was discarded as inappropriate and the loop started again). Taken in the context of an interplay of methodological and experiential considerations, validity and reliability were thought of as being mutually reinforcing.

3.3 Summing Up

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and methodological considerations pertinent to the project of re-describing fitness and the project of uncovering how fitness activities are negotiated in the context of everyday life. It has positioned this thesis in contradistinction with critical accounts of fitness, ambivalence, and superficial representations of embodiment under late modernity. It is on this basis that it has opened up the possibilities for a refocusing of attention towards fitness as

a negotiated endeavour, and as something undertaken by individuals (and with individuals) at the level of action and interaction. This project of re-describing fitness (Sisyphus) is taken up further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4
NEGOTIATING THE FIT BODY
FROM CONSUMPTION TO VIRTUOUS PRODUCTION

‘If...the machinery of culture is not to spin on in some frictionless paradise...it must engage some sort of felt life, which might as well be called experience.’

Clifford Geertz, *The Anthropology of Experience*

In a famous anthology entitled *The Anthropology of Experience*, prominent anthropologist and ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1986) remarked that, without an account of experience (or something like it), analyses of cultural phenomena seem to float several feet above their human ground. In Chapter Three of this thesis it was argued that analyses of fitness (as they have been portrayed in the extant literature) are, in many respects, guilty of this shortcoming. To be clear, sociological understandings of fitness have been useful in highlighting social, political, and historical relations, in facilitating a bracketing of the natural attitude, and in making explicit the conditions under which people come to have a natural attitude about fitness in the first place. In their extensive treatment of the relation between fitness, the body, and society, Chapters One and Two clearly testify to the importance of this type of contextualising strategy. In spite of this, however, it was also argued in Chapter Three that abstract contextualisation can stray too far from the natural attitude, painting in strokes too broad to account for the phenomenological context in which meanings are taken up, negotiated, and breathed with new life. It was argued

that, when it comes to fitness and its place in relation to modern embodiment, this abstract contextualisation has tended to be overly (and overtly) critical and that, perhaps, this critique was running out of steam.

Although previous sociological accounts have provided the preliminary conditions in this thesis for *A Phenomenology of Fitness*, it was illustrated that they have conjured a negative image of the fitness industry (as a gestural field in which the ambivalence of social action and embodied identity politics are played out) and a negative image of fitness participation as the modern-day Sisyphean task. This view was criticised in Chapter Three for failing to account for (i) pragmatic considerations with respect to how fitness is taken up and negotiated at the level of action and interaction, (ii) how the meaning of fitness might relate to use and practice, and (iii) how this practical context might be thought of as eliciting its own affective responses and outcomes. It was criticised for failing to account for the active role played out by fitness participants in the meaning-making process of negotiation. By indicating a special meaning for the word negotiation (the process of navigating obstacles along one's leisure trajectory) the second aspect of this thesis has been framed around the task of holding out more for and re-describing fitness (or re-describing Sisyphus, as it were).

In order to provide conditions for this re-organisation of attention, this chapter follows through on the positive proposition that fitness is something one negotiates by focusing on fitness at the pragmatic level (where meaning relates to use and practice). The chapter presents a re-description of fitness in the context of the twelve elaborative phenomenological interviews discussed previously, participants' descriptions contained therein, and in the context of three interrelated dimensions

which correspond to the three primary objectives outlined in Chapter Three: (i) meaning, (ii) motivation, and (iii) pleasure.

The first section, “Fitness, Health, and Meaning Holism” undertakes to establish the conditions under which meaning-making occurs in the context of fitness. It explores a number of definitional ambiguities and considers the possibility for health as a broader frame within which fitness makes sense. The implications of using the term “health *and* fitness” are also reconsidered. Section two, “Fitness, Motivation, and Performativity” configures the importance of fitness on performative (as opposed to instrumental) terms. In order to do this, Robert Nozick’s (1974) “Experience Machine” thought experiment is utilised as an analytic frame and as a means of understanding the motivational impulses that drive “doing fitness” and provide the conditions for the possibility of “being someone through fitness.” These two factors (it will be shown) are central to understanding how agency is established (and maintained) in the context of fitness participation. In light of this performative account, section three, “Rethinking Pleasure: From Tension to Release,” reconsiders the relation between pleasure and fitness activities. It argues that pleasure pertaining to fitness activities is a passive-active affair, presupposes a context of affective relations, and a body that is wholly animated through an experience of tension-release. The chapter concludes with an overview of the main findings and explores the possibilities of a virtuous production through fitness.

4.1 Fitness, Health, and Meaning Holism

In this section, the findings in respect of Obj. 1 are presented: *to explore meaning-making in the context of fitness participant's lived descriptions*. However, one has to be cautious when discussing meaning-attribution under the conditions of modernity. Recall that in Chapter Two, the status of knowledge and fixed meanings were undermined in relation to a distancing of time-space relations. While such cautionary remarks apply to any concept under our present stage of modernity, it is also important to mention that this very fact is radicalised when it comes to fitness. Fitness is reflexive by its very definition. Taking this into consideration, the use of the term “meaning” as a dimension of interpretation and analysis in this chapter is notably pragmatic. What is at stake in this chapter is how meanings are taken up and negotiated in the context of use situations. That is, this section does not seek to uncover what fitness means to participants *per se*. It does not seek a fixed ontology of fitness. Rather, what is at stake in this section is an examination of how participants used the term fitness, how it related to their everyday life, what sorts of commitments and responsibilities it elicits, and the implications arising therefrom. It seeks a deontology of fitness, as it were.

In order to explore the meaning of fitness in the context of use and practice, the following sections discuss an array of responses to the questions: (i) “Would you consider yourself to be a fit person?” and (ii) “What would it take for you to say “I’m a fit person?”” The following sections locate, in the responses to these and similar follow up questions, some ambiguities *and* some conjunctive relations which helped participants in the organisation and understanding of their experience of fitness. Perhaps, even more interestingly, the following sections can be taken as

revelatory of the way in which participants' descriptions of fitness cohered in the context of health as an important standard of reference.

4.1.1 Definitional Ambiguity

Broached with the question "Would you consider yourself to be a fit person?" all study participants – however hesitantly at first – responded in the affirmative. For example, though Joan (22, female) wasn't sure at first, she said "I'd like to think so:" "I know that when I'm doing activities with my friends I'll be like "Oh come on, it's not that hard!" Others seemed to think of fitness on terms that were subject to gradation. Though she is not at her "peak fitness level," for example, Louise (34, female) "would still consider [her]self a fit person." For Deirdre (42, female), while she is "reasonably fit," she "wouldn't say very fit." Similarly so, self-proclaimed "gym bunny" Gail (45, female) acknowledged that, while she is "reasonably fit," she was "not super fit." And finally, Patrick (27, male) said that while he was not "100% fit," he was "not a couch potato!" Although he had a "certain level of fitness," Patrick went on to explain that he "would like to be a lot fitter" since he still wasn't where he would "like it to be."

Others such as John (54, male) and Steve (74, male) also acknowledged that, while they were "fairly fit," the answer to this question was also dependent on other factors, particularly age or broader health circumstances and/or concerns (more on this later in this in section). For Katie (26, female), fitness was also dependent on other factors beyond herself. While she said "I wouldn't describe myself as being fit" she went on to explain that "people who know that I work out on a regular basis – but don't necessarily go to the gym themselves – would say I'm fit." Like Kate, Bob (22, male) and Dermot (28, male) exhibited what might be referred to as a

comparativist view on fitness. Bob was quite explicit about being able “to go for seventy minutes in a [football] match.” However, he didn’t know if he could “run a marathon...because of the specifics of his training.” Similarly so, while Dermot said “I do not believe I am fit in the conventional sense,” he did believe he was “in better shape than would be average for the general population.” He explained: “I mean, I would struggle badly with running at 10kph for more than five minutes, yet I could probably run someone into the ground with weight training over the course of an hour.”

Contrary to the other participants, both Kevin (34, male) and Liam (45, male) were much less hesitant. Kevin was “definitely fit.” In response to the question “Would you describe yourself as a fit person?” Liam responded “Ah yeah,” laughed, and said “That’s basically it” (as if, in a zero-sum sense, “You either are or you aren’t”). In the context of Kevin’s narrative in particular, it was even suggested that one “can’t go to the gym and not consider oneself fit.”³⁷

Also noteworthy was the fact that telling somebody one is fit and explaining what this meant turned out to be two entirely different tasks. That is, when participants were confronted by a follow-up question to the effect of what they might mean when they say they are/are not fit – or, more precisely, what it would take for

³⁷ Perhaps a more appropriate way of articulating Kevin’s position would be to say that one can certainly go to the gym and consider oneself unfit. However, one’s chances of success in negotiating the demands of this social space (without possessing the requisite cultural capital) are significantly diminished (Bourdieu, 1984; Crossley, 2004a, 2006c; Frew & McGillivray 2005; Sassatelli, 1999a, 1999b). It is also worth noting here that this phenomenon was encountered in the preliminary phase of research. During ongoing conversations in this ethnographic work, one particular personal trainer (Matt) discussed how he was helping a client to lose weight in the confines of her own home so that she could muster up the courage to do it by herself in a gym environment. This is a finding that seems to further radicalise Smith Maguire’s (2008a) notion that to be fit is to be “fit for,” whilst bringing to the fore an even deeper level of sensitive issues than previously research seems to have acknowledged (e.g. Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Philips & Drummond, 2001). In terms of what Kevin said, it is perhaps more reasonable to assume that this *not* what he was alluding to. Rather, as more excerpts from his narrative (and other’s) are utilised in the text herein, it will become clear that his comment more likely meant “shouldn’t go to the gym” (see section “4.2.2.4 *Not Being Someone Through Fitness*”).

them to describe themselves as fit/unfit – participants were (although no less forthright) far less explicit.

Perhaps the clearest example of this definitional ambiguity came from former fitness instructor Louise's (34, female) narrative:

Ross: What would it take for you to describe yourself as being fit?

Louise: Ooh, that's a tough one. I think if somebody can actually motivate themselves to go to the gym three or four times a week and get through a workout of an hour long, then they have a reasonable level of fitness. Yeah, I don't know, I have a weird idea of what fitness is. Fitness to me is like if someone can push themselves beyond a comfort zone and remain there. I don't know if I'm describing it well. Yeah, at the basic level, if someone can bring themselves to the gym three or four times a week and do a fairly steady workout, then they must be acquiring some level of fitness. And, if they can maintain that over a long period of time; like, you know, months rather than a couple of weeks. I don't really know if I'm explaining it that well if you wanted to probe a little bit further.

Ross: So you relate fitness to being able to keep or maintain something? Is that what you mean?

Louise: Yeah. I think so, yeah. I think fitness is a very personal thing. Like, you could take twenty people into a room and you couldn't say...Oh, I don't know what I'm trying to explain. I didn't think describing fitness would be so difficult.

It will be useful to put into abeyance the detail here in order to show how this excerpt provides a useful example of the problems participants encountered in making explicit what they meant by fitness. Not only did Louise have trouble articulating what she meant by “being fit” (though her answer, as will be discussed further in section “4.2.1 Doing Fitness” does offer some reconciliation here), she also seems to have experienced frustration during the process. Her asking to “probe a little bit further” is noteworthy. By this, it appears as though she is assured that the answer is *in there* and that, from a phenomenological perspective, the interviewer should be able to let the phenomena come to the fore to *show itself* as it is *in itself*. Perhaps this would have helped to sublimate this sense of frustration.

While not a source of definitional ambiguity, it was also rather surprising to find that, despite the emphasis in previous research on the fitness industry's re-

appropriation of the body to meet superficial norms of self-presentation (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Bordo, 1993; Duncan, 1994; Featherstone, 1982; Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Lloyd, 1996; Markula, 2001, 2006; Pronger, 2002; Sassatelli, 2006a, 2006b; Smith Maguire, 2002; Vertinsky, 1994; Waring, 2008), participants' accounts of fitness were largely disembodied. That is, descriptions of fitness reflected little evidence of an explicit attempt at grounding in corporeal terms or in terms of those feelings, sensations, movements, postures, gestures, abilities, capacities, etc., that are typically associated with it. Rather, participants' views echoed the traditional, and that is to say dualistic, conception of fitness. For participants, being fit implied having something "in the head" (John, 54, male; Joan, 22, female), while working out involved "getting into that frame of mind," "getting one's head sorted" or "head around" (Kevin, 34, male) the idea of going to work out. For others, it implied the mobilisation of "subconscious" forces so that the "seed" could be "planted in your head" (Louise, 34, female). Liam explained, "it's mental...you know you're fit...it's in your head." One's fitness was something that had to be rationalised or mobilised, a task that participants seemed to link to the process of bridging intention and action. As Louise (34, female) described, "If I go to the gym, then I'm *fulfilling what I had on my mind. I'm aligning my actions with what was on my mind.*"

It might be said in a preliminary sense that findings presented here are similar to those reported in Sassatelli (2006a; see also Sassatelli, 2005) in which participation in fitness activities was found to promote a special form of body-self dualism. This cleavage between the body and self, it must be noted, is one that runs counter to almost all prevailing perspectives on embodied subjectivity. However, a plausible explanation for the prevalence of this "body-self dualism" in participants'

descriptions is Braidotti's (1994a) remark that, in modern society, there is both an under- and over-exposure of the body. Modern work environments, decorporealize and encourage recessive bodies (to use Leder's 1990 phrase) given their increasingly sedentary character, whereas modern leisure environments often encourage (and even demand) a thoroughgoing corporeality. Given this, "body-self dualism" serves as an adaptive response to the increasingly sedentary nature of modern life, so prevalent because it is what has to be overcome. Contrary to this, the experience of fitness – of going to the gym and working out – requires a body-self that is wholly animated. There is a need to acknowledge a cleavage that has occurred between the body and self and a reawakening of the recessive body must be initiated. The alignment of intention and action, therefore, follows as a natural corollary of the alignment of the body and self. This notion of the tension between the under- and over-exposure is taken up again in section "4.3.1 The Lived Experience of Pleasure Through Fitness."

It will suffice to say for now that, for participants involved in this study, participation in fitness activities espoused (or is perhaps dependent on) typically modernist values in which rationality and self-determination were emphasised over spontaneity and impulse. Fitness was not, as Bauman would have it, merely oriented towards an ever-expanding plane of experience but was, from the very beginning, mobilised towards fulfilling some quite specific end (however difficult this was to articulate initially). For most of the participants, this specific end was health and the rationality of working out was based on its consensus relation to fitness. How this manifested in participants' own descriptions is explored in more detail in the following section.

4.1.2 Finding Fitness Through Health

Even though a rather compelling argument was made for retaining a sharp distinction between health and fitness in Chapter Two, for participants it was actually through health that the initial ambiguity with respect to fitness was sublimated (i.e. they “found fitness through health”). That is, health provided a standard of reference from which accounts of fitness tended towards coherence. The following sections explore this connection in more detail.

4.1.2.1 Fitness, Health, and Holism

The conjoined phrase “health and fitness” was used on numerous occasions over the course of the dialogues with participants. In particular Louise (34, female) utilised this expression in order to frame her past experiences as a fitness instructor. She described how she “did a course in health *and* fitness,” how her “qualifications are in health *and* fitness,” and, on a more general level, that she has always “trained to be healthy *and* fit.” This was also the case for Deirdre (42, female) and Bob (22, male). Deirdre, for example, distinguished between someone who is “very fit” and whose “life centres around the gym” as opposed to someone who is “fit for lifestyle reasons” – for “health *and* fitness.” Similarly so, Bob made this distinction between himself (who was “fit for the sport that [he is] in”) and his mother (“who would do her thirty minutes of activity a day” and, therefore, “is fit”). Bob explained that he was “generally healthy and fit” because he does “the required amount of daily activity,” but was also probably “above” this more general level of fitness (fitter than his mother, that is!). Yet, for others, the indispensability of each term was clearly evident. Take, for example, the following sequence of dialogue taken from Kevin’s narrative:

Ross: Would you describe yourself as a fit person?

Kevin: Well, I don't think you can go to the gym and not consider yourself fit. I'm definitely fit yeah (34, male).

Ross: And for you to say...

Kevin: Fit as in going to the gym and...playing football and all that. In terms of eating as well...I suppose that's a different thing, or would that be the same?

Ross: I'm not sure I know what you mean.

Kevin: Health wise.

In spite of the confusion, it seems reasonable to assume here that Kevin was trying to articulate a holistic conception of fitness that takes into consideration what he referred to as the “broader” concerns of health. His responses seem to resonate with Glassner's (1990) assertion that these longer expressions (i.e. health *and* fitness) are primarily invoked in order to draw attention to the non-active or non-exercise aspects of overall health or wellbeing. Importantly then, is the fact that, in trying to locate fitness, participants tended to direct their attention towards health as a first (and perhaps unconditional) standard of reference. At the very least, with health and fitness, each term necessarily tended to solicit the other.

4.1.2.2 Legitimising and Enabling Fitness

Contrary to the position outlined in Chapter Two that health and fitness are now used synonymously (and that this, naturally, is a mistake), participants in this study made no such claim. Rather, where they acknowledged both health *and* fitness within their narrative descriptions, it was suggested that they were separate, though related spheres.

John (54, male), for example, acknowledged that health and fitness, although functionally separated, are closely related. In the context of “regular flare-ups” he

experiences with regard to his arthritis, he told me about a conversation he had with his wife about working out at the gym:

John: [T]he wife does be on to me – “It’s the gym. You shouldn’t be in the gym when you have arthritis” – so I said it to the specialist one day in the hospital. I said “What do you think about exercise? I go to the gym. I go to the gym three times a week and I do a fair bit of exercise. Do you think it’s doing harm or good?” She Said “It’s definitely not doing any harm anyway.” When you think of if, it wouldn’t be doing any harm. You’re keeping yourself loosened up. So, I just said to the wife, “Now, that settles that one. We won’t go into that anymore!” [laughs].

It can be seen here that, where epistemic reasons are largely unavailable or inaccessible, John “trusts” that his specialist can provide the requisite justification for his belief that exercising is not “doing him any harm.” The justification for continued participation in fitness activities involves John (and presumably his wife thereafter) making what Brandom (1994, 2000; see also Giddens, 1990, 1991) referred to as a “reliability inference.” John infers from his consultation with the specialist (whom he deems to be a reliable counsel on such matters) that going to the gym is not contraindicated and that he can continue exercising. Moreover, in doing this, he is also following established practice in the screening process for gyms in that he is ascertaining medical clearance. This is a practice that is routinely employed in the fitness consultation process in order to account for certain at-risk populations. John’s belief that engaging in fitness activities is not doing him any harm – and, thus, the relation he attributes to health and fitness – is, therefore, doubly sedimented.

Take, as another example of this, the following excerpts and sequences of dialogue from Gail (45, female) and Joan’s (22, female) narratives (respectively). In the following, Gail underscored the relation of fitness to health in the context of a general feeling of a loss of “wellbeing:”

Gail: In more recent years – I’d say, the last two years – I’ve focused more on weight training than aerobic training, and that is linked to a health issue because it

turned out that I was anaemic. I was very low on iron and I found it difficult in some of the aerobic classes.

And later in our conversation:

Gail: There have been times when I haven't necessarily felt fit. You don't feel great and you don't have the same amount of energy...When I was anaemic, I felt completely unfit. My children would notice that when I walked up the stairs at home that my breathing was very heavy. Just before that period, in my family both of my parents died in the space of six months and I was looking after them every day going to the hospital. So I wasn't going to the gym as often as I had previously done. In combination with the anaemia then, that made me feel really unfit. And I suppose I didn't feel well in myself because of that...I knew I was tired and I knew I was exhausted...I didn't have the same amount of energy. I'd go to the hospital and I'd come back and...be fit for nothing. I'd just be physically and emotionally exhausted.

In terms of Joan's account of the relation between what she deemed "healthy behaviours" and their effects on any subsequent activity in the gym, the following dialogue ensued:

Joan: I definitely think I've improved my fitness, but I do think that I could be fitter.

***Ross:* What would a fitter *you* be like?**

Joan: Oh, better diet. Eat better foods and try to avoid the crappy foods, while exercising more. I used to be such a bugger for sweet things but it's just not the same anymore. I feel better if I have healthy foods. Even when you're going to the gym, you feel like you can do more than if you have been having crap food. Even if it was hours ago you can still feel "Bleugh." With healthy food, you can push yourself more.

***Ross:* So you don't believe that because you exercise you can eat whatever you want?**

Joan: You *can* go to the gym and you *can* eat what you want, but then you have to pay for it in the gym. You have to go and work it off. You *can* do that, but then you're struggling more to have to work it off. I enjoy being able to eat healthily. That works for me.

For Gail, there is a composite of both physiological and psychological factors impacting on her fitness and, as a result, her felt sense of "wellbeing" (the term she used) has been compromised. For Joan eating "healthy foods" makes her *feel* good, whereas eating "crappy foods" makes her *feel* "Bleugh." For Joan, eating healthy

foods takes on a propaedeutic role with respect to her fitness participation. It allows her to “do more” – to “push [her]self more” – and is, as such, a naturally expansive activity. It orients her to the task of going to the gym and working out in quite a specific way that would not be the case had she done otherwise. Eating crappy foods (elsewhere she referred to “McDonalds” as an example of this), conversely, promotes a feeling that is quite the opposite. It is restrictive and places an affective halt on her. With experiences such as these, her organisation of attention is altered. For Joan, eating “better foods” and avoiding “crappy” ones allows her to feel that her time at the gym is not merely compensatory and that she is not merely engaging in compensatory consumption.

In a most rudimentary sense, it might be said that, for John, Gail, and Joan, the broader health field provides both an enabling and legitimising function with respect to fitness. However, both Gail’s and Joan’s descriptions do not merely relay expert knowledge about an assumed relation between health and fitness (as John’s mostly does). Rather, to borrow from Leder (1990), there is a uniquely qualitative to feel at stake. For both Gail and Joan, the relation between health and fitness implies a general awareness that health – or those behaviours typically considered as being “healthy” – provides an appropriate qualitative threshold from which to improve/increase levels of fitness.³⁸ It is a threshold which Gail seems to have lost and it is something that Joan is conscious to maintain. A difference in age is perhaps noteworthy again. But this is only a difference in extent, and not a difference in kind. That is, regardless of the difference, for both Gail and Joan, health (construed as a sort of qualitative baseline) provides conditions for the possibility of fitness in the first place. It provides what Illich (1976; see also Leder, 1990; Svenaeus, 2001,

³⁸ Perhaps it is health to which Bauman (1998a, p. 23) is referring when he says that ‘[fitness] has perhaps its lower, though rather blurred and murky threshold,’ though he does not say this explicitly.

2009) has referred to as that unique cultural *gestalt* which enables openness to human performance.

4.1.2.3 Fitness and Health; Means and Ends

When reflecting on the position fitness occupies in their life, participants also made clear that health and fitness belonged to the same (or some related) order of causality. Fitness, Kevin (34, male) remarked, is “just about staying healthy.” Similarly, for Liam (45, male), fitness is “all about health issues.” For Patrick (27, male), a fit person is both someone who has a “healthy appearance” in a general sense and, more specifically, “good cardiovascular health.” Indeed, this was something Patrick wanted to “factor into his daily [workout] routine,” explaining that, if he were to “be a lot fitter,” this would imply “better cardiovascular health.” Others, such as Steve (74, male) and Deirdre (42 female), remarked more specifically that their fitness trajectory launched only in the context of overall health concerns. When asked whether he would describe himself as a fit person, Steve replied by saying that he was “not on any tablets or anything like that” and that he “never ha[s] taken any.” Moreover, when asked if there were any specific reasons why he started going to the gym, he said the decision was made in the context of “want[ing] to get a hip [replacement] done.” Fitness was oriented towards health in the sense that “getting the bit of weight down” would likely increase the chances that the operation would be a success.³⁹ This causal relation was most expressly articulated by Deirdre who said and fitness “gives you better health.” She also explained that going to gym had helped to obviate a number of common ailments. “I

³⁹ It is noteworthy to mention as an aside that, for Steve, locating fitness implied the use of health as an ostensive lens. According to Eco (1979, pp. 224-5), ‘ostension occurs when a given object or event [i.e. the taking of tablets] is ‘picked up’ by someone [i.e. Steve] and shown as the expression of the class [fitness] of which it is a member.’ Moreover, this process of ostension – what Eco (ibid) referred to as ‘the most elementary act of...signification’ – not only allowed participants to cope with the expression of tacit/embodied knowledge, but with the problem of signification more generally.

haven't had any doses of the flu or anything like that so far this year," she explained. As such, going to the gym for her has "the extra benefit of being healthy."

For Steve and Deirdre in particular, health *and* fitness were viewed on "means-end" terms. That is, where health = **Y** and fitness = **X**, the following relationship was relayed: one wants to achieve an end, goal or purpose **Y** which is believed to be brought about by a certain means **X**. Fitness and health are to be treated in a discrete manner since fitness contributes to health. The chain of causality expressed in narrative data, thus, configures fitness not as equal to health– and for which Bauman takes it to task – but, rather, as a propaedeutic requirement *for* it. In other words, participation in fitness activities is framed here as being oriented towards health as a higher order construct.⁴⁰

It should be clear that this is not an entirely unproblematic conception of health and fitness. The idea put forth in this section (and the previous one) that fitness leads to health, yet health provides basic conditions for the possibility of fitness, shows that there is a more complex interplay between health and fitness that would seem to eschew the consensus position of simple linear causality. How can health provide an enabling or baseline function for fitness yet, at the same time, function as its higher order goal? While this question is further problematised in the following section, it will have to wait until Chapter Five for an adequate and logically plausible redescription (and avenue for future research). Suffice to say for now that, at the very least, where health and fitness are concerned, participants did not use them as synonyms for one another.

⁴⁰ This, of course, is the position that has formed the consensus in the sports and exercise science literature (see section "2.1 The Consensus Statement with Respect to Fitness") and can be aligned to the hierarchical model outlined in Chapter Two ("Figure 2.2 The Hierarchical Model of Health and Fitness").

4.1.2.4 Fitness, Health, and Desiring Production

Perhaps the most interesting finding with respect to health and fitness was the fact that (despite modern discourse's elevation of fitness to the desired, normative status for individuals in relation to their bodies) this relation does not go unaffected by age profile or perceived life-cycle position. Both Kevin (34, male) and Liam (45, male), for example, made explicit that getting to a "certain age" marked a significant transition point in their developmental trajectories.⁴¹

Kevin: Once you get to a certain age, it doesn't become about physique...It's just about staying healthy...I suppose it's a natural progression from being a twenty year-old to now...[A]s you get towards thirty, you start realising that you need to look after your diet a little bit because your engine is not quite as good. [O]nce you hit thirty-two [or] thirty-three...you've gotten your diet [to where it] should be. You're at a very good point...You're eating good food [and], without realising it, [you're] at a point where you...probably wouldn't put on weight anyway; well, not that much...It's all a natural progression; evolution in seventeen years.

Compare this extract with the following sequence of dialogue from Liam's narrative to which it is akin:

Liam: You have to put your age into it...I'm forty-five now. I'm not going to go in [to the gym] and spend an hour lifting weights and end up pumped up like a gorilla and [get my] heart in a heap. It's no use to me. It's the whole package you want now. You want a certain level of fitness [and] a certain amount of strength.

Ross: So, it's a combination?

Liam: Yeah...that's what it is. That's exactly the way I have it now at the minute...I don't want to get big. I've done all that...It's more the health side of it [now]. Let's face it, up until then you're just poncing around trying to look good. It's the health side of it you're worried about now. Like, my father died at sixty-one of a massive heart-attack. My grandfather died at sixty-one...[and] my father's brother died...of a massive heart-attack...So, there isn't a good track record there now, is there?

Ross: So, you're changing your perspective?

Liam: Yeah, when you get to a certain age you do change it. It's more the health benefits. It's great to be able to run down the road and you're not puffing and panting...[I]here are mates of mine that can't walk across the road.

⁴¹ Gail (42, female) alluded to this point, though it was not laboured at length and did not appear especially significant in the context of her overall narrative.

This point was reiterated later in the dialogue by recourse to a similar metaphor used previously in Kevin's (34, male) extract:

Liam: It's like a car. If you don't look after it, it's going to stop. Do you know what I mean? You're not going to get thirty years out of it if you're not looking after it. You're alright [comment directed at interviewer]; guys in your twenties [and] thirties. But when you get into your forties, it's a different ball game...It's all about health issues...Once you start coming into my age group, you hear of so and so...after having a heart-attack. Down in Celbridge [Liam's home town] last year, in the space of three months, five guys in their forties died of heart-attacks. [They were] [a]ll overweight, all drinkers, all smokers, who have never been in a gym. [These are] guys that I would know from when I was drinking. They're all fucking dead now.

The machinic metaphor appears to take on two principle forms that are relevant here.

In one sense, its use resonates with the prevalence of body-self dualism (that has already been highlighted). That is, for some participants, the self is constituted on Cartesian terms as 'the ghost in the machine,' to use Ryle's (1963, p. 17) phrase.⁴²

Fitness is conceived of as the product of a rational and constitutive subjectivity acting upon the docile body. While this is hardly a novel thought in fitness discourse,⁴³ the machinic metaphor also resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (1983, pp. 1-2; see also Buchanan, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox, 2002) depiction of the body as a 'desiring machine' and as a site of 'desiring production.' For Deleuze and Guattari, this desiring production is not merely negative, repressive or an affirmation of lack, nor is desire merely a means to an end. Rather, it is a productive affirmation. It is fluid, processual, implying movement, creativity and experimentation, and, is the force by which individuals move in the first place. As Buchanan (1997, p. 83) has explained, 'machines are not metaphors.' Since the body

⁴² The notion of a "ghost in the machine" is utilised by Ryle (1963) in his famous *The Concept of Mind* to describe Descartes' epistemological principle of the distinction between the *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, or between mind and body (see also Foucault, 1995, p. 136 account of 'Man-the-Machine').

⁴³ For example, the American College of Sports Medicine's *Fitness Book* (ACSM, 2003, pp. 41-58) goes on at length in the chapter 'Getting Ready to Exercise' about the merits of mobilising one's motivation. 'It is important to...emphasize,' the manual explains, 'that motivation is almost there in most of us' (ibid, p. 55). It continues: 'we have to unleash it within ourselves' and '[o]nly when the connection is made between the thought or feeling and the action is motivation mobilized' (ibid).

is the ‘capacity to form new relations,’ and ‘the desire to do so,’ ‘it too is a machine’ (ibid).

That the fit body corresponds to such “desiring-production” and “flows of desire” was discussed at length in Chapter Two (though not specifically in these terms). What is at stake here, however, is the universality of such claims. For Kevin (since his “engine is not quite as good”) and for Liam (“coming into his age group” means hearing of “so and so after having a heart attack”), keeping fit is valued for meliorating the effects of ageing, and the increasing prevalence of object-centred risks that come along with it. For Kevin and Liam, this emphasis is, in effect, tantamount to saying that, “at your age,” you ought to be more concerned with the normal functioning of the body, than with concerns about its appeal as a consumer object (that is, as an object to be consumed and an object to be consumed for).⁴⁴ It is tantamount to saying that, at a certain point, it should be health and not necessarily fitness that becomes prominent. A number of specific questions and considerations are worth highlighting here.

For one, does the use of this machinic metaphor not point towards a more general observation that getting to a certain age marks a shift in emphasis in bodily orientation? Surely, given the vulnerability and precariousness of human embodiment, individuals are not oriented towards the future in a wholesale manner (as many sociologists of modernity are wont to believe). Rather, just as the body is something to be lived through, it is also, at times, something to be maintained or

⁴⁴ This is a point that has been flagged at a more general level by Moor (2008) who argued, contrary to Smith Maguire’s (see Chapter Two, section “2.2 Fit for Consumption”) assertion that “fitness” and “compulsory self-production” are merely “harnessed as the engine of consumer industries.” Moor (ibid, p. 295) explains: ‘[t]he focus on ‘consumerism’ as an outcome of the growth of private fitness clubs...feels slightly superfluous.’ She concluded: ‘[I do not believe] that people locate ‘meaning, identity and relationships’ *primarily* in acts of consumption, nor [do I believe] that private fitness clubs make this any more likely to occur’ (ibid; original emphasis). The prevalence of factors internal to fitness practices are discussed in greater detail in the following sections “4.2 Motivating Selves: Fitness and Performativity” and “4.3 Rethinking Pleasure: From Tension to Release.”

rationalised, even something to be overcome or salvaged. Kevin and Liam's concerns about the frailty of their embodiment – of their desiring machine – certainly leads one to question to what extent an increase in age profile corresponds to a shift in emphasis away from the fit body to questions of health. In fact, it is worth asking to what extent and under what conditions individuals' orientation towards their bodies change. It is certainly true that modern individuals' experiences of their embodied selves are structured according to being fit for the future (and its possibilities). But it is also the case that the present state of the body at stasis can direct individuals' focus of attention (the body in pain is perhaps the most prominent example). What happens when this machine breaks down? Surely it is reasonable to posit that, at some point and under certain conditions, there is the potential for one's desiring-machine to malfunction.

4.2 Fitness, Motivation, and Performativity

In this section, the findings in respect of Obj. 2 are presented: *to examine the motivational impulses that encourage and nurture development in fitness activities.* A useful context for considering motivation in the context of fitness is Robert Nozick's (1974) thought experiment, the "Experience Machine." In this, Nozick asks his reader to imagine that a machine exists which could give you any experience you desired. Neuroscientists, Nozick emphasises, have the ability to stimulate the brain in ways that enable people to think and feel like they are writing an epic novel, making friends, or reading an interesting book and all the while they would be floating in a tank with electrodes attached to their brains. Taking all of this into consideration, the question then, according to Nozick, is whether or not people should plug into the machine, pre-programming their life on the basis of desirable experiences.

At closer inspection, Nozick's much overlooked work actually prefigures much of the material that was presented in the second half of Chapter Two. Consumer culture and its idealised images are nothing if not playing out Nozick's Experience Machine thought experiment. If one were to take existing perspectives on fitness into account as they were presented in Chapter Two (particularly section "2.3 Fit for Consumption"), one could clearly grant that, with the Experience Machine, neuroscientists could too stimulate the brain in order that people would think and feel like they were the bearers of the fit body. Indeed, the relevance of this thought experiment to fitness cannot be overstated. This is especially the case since one of the primary lessons of the shift in emphasis towards a consumer society is the fact that investments in the body are made in order to re-evaluate it beyond its functional- or use-value. Maximising one's potential for fitness under the modern social configuration, or so it goes, requires nothing less than an instrumental relation to the body and, on this basis, fitness has been constructed as a mere precursor to consumption. The logic of fitness is that of consumption. Or, to put it another way, the consumption of pleasures is made permissible through the discipline of exercise. If it is true that the fit body has value only in an instrumental sense (as yet another commodity to be invested in) and if it represents nothing more than mere 'sign material being exchanged' (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 132),⁴⁵ then one would surely be inclined to plug in to Nozick's "Experience Machine." That is, since the project of fitness – of reorienting the body and the self in the face of the consequences of modernity – has aligned with the project of consumption (as opposed to mere individual) activity, there is little doubting that the answer to Nozick's question here

⁴⁵ In the actual quote, Baudrillard (1998, p. 132) says that '*beauty* is nothing more than sign material being exchanged.' However, since he says also that 'fitness stands next to beauty...[t]heir signs [being] exchanged within the framework of personalization, that anxious, perfectionist manipulation of the sign function of the body' (ibid, p. 139), the replacement of beauty with fitness here seems reasonably apt.

would be “yes.” So why, when Nozick addresses the general question as to whether or not plugging in is desirable, does he emphatically say “no”? In what ways might existing perspectives on fitness have been flawed in assuming that it is only the consumption of external ends that matters to fitness participants?

4.2.1 Doing Fitness

Nozick’s first reason for saying no to plugging into the “Experience Machine” is that people ‘want to *do* certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them’ (1974, p. 43, original emphasis). In the present study, for example, many of the participants exhibited an attitude towards their activity in a manner akin to the old Nike Slogan – “Just do it” – insofar as, for them, going to the gym and working out was something they “just do.” “It’s something to be done and I do it,” Steve (74 male) explained. Similarly, Liam (45, male) explained that going to the gym and working out is “something I know I have to do and I just get on and do it.” In fact, Liam explained how he “wouldn’t be thinking about not going.” It wouldn’t even dawn on me,” he said. Yet, for others, this going to the gym and working out was not an entirely conscious process at all. Rather, it had become such a routine aspect of their daily lives that it was not really a reflexively mobilised activity at all.⁴⁶ They never really thought about it. “I didn’t actually realise it until I was saying it...I didn’t see it like that before,” Louise (34, female) explained. Similarly so, Gail (45, female) added “It’s only talking about it now that I actually realise it. Perhaps it’s because you don’t take the time out to reflect.” And, even if they did have to think about it, this was often only in the context of what Bob (22, male) referred to as “overdoing it.”

⁴⁶ In spite of its routine character, it would be something of a stretch to say that this routine was merely the effect of a prior *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985a, 1990, 2004), or of power relations acting upon the body and embedded in modes of conduct (Foucault, 1995; Giddens, 1984).

Perhaps the most striking example of this “doing fitness,” however, is demonstrated in an expression used by Deirdre (42, female) in order to explain the extent of her activity undertaken outside of the gym over the course of a week. “I don’t just gym,” she explained, as if to say “Sure, I go to the gym. But it is not all I do.” This usage, were it to be accepted into the dictionary would be added (and extended) as follows:

gym n. (Sports) **1** a gymnasium. **2** a course in physical education. **3** a metal frame supporting equipment in outdoor play. ● v. (gym·ming, gyms, gym it) **1** to attend a gymnasium. **2** to engage in physical activity in order to keep fit. **3** to exercise. ■ **gymer** n.

For Deirdre, “gym” is used as a verb in order to designate its doing aspects. One might be asked, for example, “Did you gym it today?”, “Were you gymming it today?”, or, indeed, “Do you fancy gymming it later on?” To gym then is to exercise, though in quite a specific sense. For example, to ask “Do you gym?” might be thought of analogous to asking somebody “Do you tan?” (i.e. referring to the self-care reflexive disposition of tanning or using sun-beds) A better analogy might be made with golfing (“Do you golf?”) which involves not only the undertaking of certain activities, but the accumulation of requisite embodied and cultural capital which is appropriate to the field in question. It is on this basis that one might even go further and say that “to gym” is not only to attend a gym or merely engage in physical activity and exercise, but also implies the accumulation of requisite capital such that one might be referred to as a credible “gymer” (more on this in section “4.2.2.1 Being Oriented Towards One’s Environment”).

4.2.1.1 Look Forward To; Looked Back Upon

In a manner perhaps less abstract, analyses of responses to questioning on the meaning of fitness demonstrated the *significance* working out for participants (the

significance of gymming, as it were). The following responses are arranged according to the extent of enthusiasm attached to the significance of “doing fitness:”

Kevin: *Going to the gym* is fantastic...I'd like to think that I'll never stop exercising (34, male).

John: It's more important than my work. I know you have to go to work every day, but to me you *have to go to the gym your three days*. I never mind going to work. Work never bothered me. I've worked since I was fourteen. But the gym would always be first (54, male).

Louise: I actually really look forward to *going to the gym* because my job is quite monotonous (34, female).

Joan: It's a feel-good factor. It's not like an obsession. *When I go* I feel better (22, female).

Steve: Oh, I do be looking forward to it. *I like going*. And if I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't go (74, male).

Dermot: On the way to the gym I'm always on a high knowing that the workout is just about to happen...Immediately before the workout I'm excited by the prospects of lifting more weight than last time...[and] looking forward to the pump...of the muscles (28, male).

Patrick: I usually look forward to the gym and working out. Some days I could be more tired than others and the enthusiasm could wane a little bit but once I start training and get my heart rate up I'm usually good to go for sixty to ninety minutes or so of training (27, male).

Liam: I still have to be in the gym Monday to Friday. Whether I do an hour or an hour and a half, *it has to be done*... There's always something in your head saying “You have to do it. You have to do it.”...It should just be something that you do, and you enjoy it (45, male).

Deirdre: *I do it* for fitness – health and fitness – and because *I like it*. I wouldn't be looking forward to going to the gym like it was the only thing I had in my life, *but I do enjoy going* because it's an outlet. I'm not jumping through hoops because I'm going to the gym. I mean, I'm not dreading it either. I wouldn't do it if I dreaded it. There's no point. I don't do things I don't like doing (42, female).

It is clear that there is a normative element at play here. Going to the gym and working out is something that can be looked back upon as something done (something that should be done or, rather something that one can be proud to have done). What is also clear here, and this is a point that is often omitted from sociological accounts of gym-going, is that participants want to go to the gym

because they *like* doing it. And, contrary to the overly instrumental perspectives outlined in the second half of Chapter Two, “doing fitness” can be meaningful on the basis that it is something to be *looked forward to* rather than something that is merely to be *looked back upon*. It is not only something to be done and undergone, but something worth doing and undergoing.

While it is clear that participants would not go to the gym if it was something they didn’t like doing (Steve asserted that if he “didn’t enjoy it” he “wouldn’t go” and Deirdre that she “wouldn’t do it if [she] dreaded it”), it is also clear that there is some underlying rationalisation process at work in “doing fitness” which transcends the superficial binary between liking and disliking working out. The following sections illustrate how this rationalisation process comes into play and how it is central to ongoing participation in healthy activities.

4.2.1.2 Pre-Emptive Rationalisation

This notion of a rationalisation process seems hardly novel or surprising when you take into consideration the fact that guidelines for physical activity and exercise often speak of the merits of assessment, planning, and goal setting in order to mobilise motivation (see e.g. ACSM, 2003, pp. 41-58). This was reflected in participants’ descriptions of the importance of their workout “routines” or “programmes,” particularly Katie (26, male), Dermot (28, male), and Patrick (27, male). Katie, for example, explained the importance of “start[ing] with the treadmill for twenty or thirty minutes” because if she “do[es] it after doing weights” she will “feel too...tired to run.” She also explained the importance of sequencing: “After cardio I...do weights for my legs (squats, lunges, and hamstrings), arms (shoulders, biceps, and triceps) and, at the end of all that, if I still have [enough] energy,

I...spend ten minutes or so on abs.” This was also the case for Dermot who explained that he has typically followed either one of two very specific routines. The first is a “whole body workout” in which he “pick[s] three or four exercises...and train[s]...three to four days per week.” The second, alternatively, is a “split system” where one body-part is trained per day over four to five days.”⁴⁷ The extent of the importance of keeping to the routine is best expressed in Dermot’s admission that, over his fifteen years of training, he has been “affected too much by information [in] books, magazines, and the internet” and has focused too much on “different training routines which meant a lack of focus on a[ny] specific one at a [give] time.”

In spite of the clearly sophisticated nature of participants’ workout routines, it also became clear that other factors beyond mere planning were important in terms of providing conditions for the possibility of working out. In the following sequence of dialogue, for example, Joan (22, female) outlined some of the additional factors to be taken into consideration prior to a workout if she is to bridge intention (“I’m definitely going to the gym tonight”) and action (“I was zonked and I still went. And I was glad to have broken through it”):

Joan: Well, if I know I’m definitely going, I wouldn’t be eating a lot of crap food beforehand...I would be more conscious of what I’m eating compared to a day when I’m not going...I usually come home and say to my mom “I’m going to the gym” and tell her to stop pestering me with a big dinner...[because] I won’t be able to move if I eat that. I rarely sit down at home beforehand because I’m afraid that I’ll get too comfortable.

***Ross:* It’s interesting that you don’t let yourself get too comfortable. Does that mean you wouldn’t turn on the television or anything like that?**

Joan: No, I might turn it on but I will usually hover... because I know that if I sit down I will...probably be like, “This is way too nice; too comfy”...Usually, it’s if I’m

⁴⁷ Patrick (27, male) also explained that he followed a split system routine: “Back and Lats on Monday, Chest and Biceps on Tuesday, Rest [on] Wednesday, Shoulders, Traps, [and] Triceps [on] Thursday, [and] Legs on Friday.”

really tired when these feelings kick in. On Friday, I have a late lecture so I'm always geared up and ready for the gym.

Ross: You don't even get the time...

Joan: ...to think about it or process it. But on Tuesdays, because it has been a long day, and because I'm wrecked after a long day on Monday, it's the tiredness factor that gets you. I'm just like "Don't let it hit you yet."

For Joan, this emplotted sequence of events is all about getting geared up and ready for the gym. She is, to borrow from Crossley (2006c, p. 40), sedimenting an appropriate 'frame' so as to render more probable the chances that she will go to the gym. This frame allows her to avoid getting too comfortable. It literally suspends the nature of how she feels in the situation, whilst opening her up to the possibilities of working out.

This was also the case for Katie (26, female) and Gail (45, female) who both explained that they preferred to go to the gym immediately after work and/or before dinner. When asked whether there was any specific reason for this, Katie explained that she goes straight to the gym from work and avoids eating prior to working out because it makes her "feel sluggish" or "less able." Because of this, she "immediately change[s] into gym clothes" once getting home from work and "find[s] it best not to sit down or make dinner" because the longer she "put[s] it off, the harder it will be to go."⁴⁸ Gail also explained how she feels like she has "more energy" when she doesn't have "a full stomach" and how she is more often than not "less likely to go [to the gym] if I'd had my dinner." For Joan, Katie, and Gail, there appears to be something of a rational management of the sequence of events preceding a workout. Their pre-workout frame serves the function of orienting them

⁴⁸ In broader terms, Katie also explained that this helps her "avoid any disruptions to [the] weekly workout plan." She mentioned that she "generally do[es] not make midweek evening plans" because if she "miss[es] a workout" she "feels a certain level of guilt and disappointment" in herself.

towards the task of going to the gym *and* to the possibilities of what might arise therefrom (feeling good, having more energy, etc.). To borrow from Crossley (2006c) again, they manage to reframe pre-workout feelings so as to perceive them as markers of a need to exercise. For Joan, it “comes down to getting there [the gym] in the first place.” For Katie, “once you get warmed up and into what you are doing the workout will go according to plan.” For Gail, “you have to keep on the go.” It is as if when they do get to the gym, the activity environment will elicit the appropriate responses out of them.

This rationalisation does not only take place immediately before a workout (as is the case for both Joan and Gail). Rather, one might implement a more generally structured plan with respect to going to the gym, as was the case for Deirdre (42, female). She explained this in the following sequence of dialogue:

Deirdre: I would go [to the gym] on the days that I don't have to work late nights. I usually do two afternoons/evenings in the gym and I'll do one morning... And that's over seven days. It's not over the five weekdays. I usually end up with one morning midweek and then I go to the gym one evening early in the week and, then again, one later in the week.

Ross: So, you wouldn't be sitting at home saying “Sure maybe I'll head up to the gym now?”

Deirdre: No, it's planned. It's either that or it's not going to happen.

This emphasis on structure was also discussed by Patrick (27, male) and Dermot (28, male) who talked about the importance of both a specific “workout routine” and a more general “daily routine.” In fact, for both Patrick and Dermot in particular, much of their day is spent preparing for the gym. Like Joan and Gail, both emphasised the importance of nutrition in the framing of their daily routine. For Patrick, this meant “having eaten enough and taken in enough water for my workout.” For Dermot, this meant “getting the food intake consistent” in order to keep “the energy levels high.” And like Deirdre, the relation between the workout routine and the daily routine was

also quite clear. “[U]sually my daily routine goes to plan,” Patrick explained, though “if not, I might...suffer a little bit in the gym energy-wise.” Failure to plan adequately results in Patrick “feeling lethargic,” like he “couldn’t lift as much,” and having to work harder because he gets “tired a little earlier [in the workout] than usual.” Similarly, Dermot explained that, because sometimes he “trains...in the morning before work,” “strength levels would be slightly decreased compared to training in the evening when there is more fuel...in the body.” The routine allows for the elimination of guess work since a failure to do so “can mean being unsure as to how the workout will go.”

In light of the foregoing, it might be said that these participants implement something of a pre-emptive rationalisation (in that it comes into effect before the fact). It is also noteworthy to mention that all five found it more difficult to attend the gym on different days (and at different times of the day)⁴⁹ but acknowledged that this difficulty could be meliorated once it was adequately planned for. In the context of this pre-emptive rationalisation, Deirdre’s words best sum up what going to the gym and working out is like for all four: “You have to do it. You just make time for it and you plan in advance.” How this rationalisation might be thought of as sedimenting over time (and at the level of practice) is discussed in the concluding Chapter Five (section “5.5 Talking About the Fit Body: New Horizons of Experience”).

⁴⁹ Gail even mentioned in passing that getting to the gym can be affected by the seasons. “I do think that in the winter time it’s much easier to light the fire and curl up and say “Ah no, I won’t go to the gym” [laughs].” She continued, “midweek in the winter, going to the gym would be a challenge for me...It’s the dark and the wet and the wind and the thoughts of going out again into that.”

4.2.1.3 Rationalisation Across the Participation Cycle

The importance of this rationalising process is also evident across the participation cycle. Take Louise (34, female) who, in the following excerpt, describes the aftermath of a workout that did not go as planned. Reflecting on her failure to complete a run due to getting shin-splints, she explained how she would:

Louise: ...be disappointed initially that I can't do the run, but I wouldn't allow it to ruin the fact that I'm happy I've done a workout...I should be proud of myself that I've gone to the gym so I tend not to harp on about it or beat myself up that I haven't done the run. I'm like "No. You know what? I've gotten up and done the workout."

Louise's "failed experience"⁵⁰ provides a useful counter to the argument that participation in fitness activities is evaluated solely on an instrumental basis. There is a sense here that there is something internal in relation to the activity of significance, something worth salvaging or feeling good about. When asked whether or not it is important to remind herself of such things, she replied:

Louise: Yeah I think so...I try not to entertain negative thoughts anyway so if the initial reaction is "Ah God, I'm really disappointed," it's important for me to go "Louise. Cop on. This is something really silly. Don't let that annoy you." But it's something I'd consciously do; talk to myself and say "Don't get annoyed over something like this."

For Louise it is important that she has done the workout and its significance is largely pragmatic, attributable to the *performance of means* rather than the *fulfilment of ends*. This fact was also alluded to by Patrick (27, male) who explained that, while sometimes he can "feel a little defeated" after a workout, the fact that he has "gone to the gym and done something" makes him "feel good." In the context of an ongoing trajectory of participation, it might be said that one's *capacity to commit* can, at times, outweigh an *(in)ability to achieve* as a measure of significance and

⁵⁰ For van Alphen (1999, p. 25), the notion 'failed experience' designates those instances of trauma in which linguistic, reflexive, and conceptual mediation are resisted. This was also mentioned briefly in Joan's (22, female) narrative. She explained that working out "can be a bit frustrating sometimes because you want to have done more." However, reflecting on workouts such as these, she explains "I feel better that I actually came."

value (presumably with a thought to those who can do neither). And, what is most important here (for Louise at least), is the need to remind oneself of this fact.

Take as another useful example of this type of rationalisation, Steve's (74, male) description of how he gets through a "monotonous" workout:

Steve: When you get on the treadmill and you switch it on, the first thing you look at is the minutes and you're waiting for the next minute to go and the next minute to go, you know?

Ross: Can you remember any particular time when you were there and the time went particularly slowly?

Steve: No. The trouble with me is that I was always competitive and I'd never mind what position or stress I put my body through. I wouldn't mind. *It's a thing to be done and I do it.*

Steve's is not a peculiar dilemma. Since modern experiences of fitness are so dependent on technology for simulation, their temporal organisation is quite often oriented towards the present as a series of *nows* yet to be fulfilled (anyone who has spent longer than a half an hour on a treadmill will likely testify to this claim). He continued:

Steve: They have televisions on the equipment and you can plug in and put earphones on and work away and the time flies; if there's anything interesting on that is.

Ross: So when you're on the treadmill...

Steve: ...I plug into the television.

Ross: Does it matter that the time flies? Is that a good thing?

Steve: No, but when you're doing something against the clock you're looking at it all the time and it feels longer. Some fellas over there [in the gym] cover the timer with a towel. They don't look at the clock at all. Now I noticed one day when I was down there and David Heffernan [friend] was beside me on the treadmill and the fifteen minutes went by quickly because I was talking to him. You don't feel it.

Ross: Because of the interaction?

Steve: Yeah, the interaction. That's what it is. Now, a lot of people would say "I wouldn't go on that treadmill" because it's too monotonous for them. But, if you had someone that you knew beside you, the time flies because you're not looking at the clock.

Ross: And would you often have somebody there that you know?

Steve: No, not often now. But I got a pair of earphones and I have them on me now and I just plug into the television and sure you don't feel it [the time].

For Steve, the monotonous nature of his workout is a function of its boundedness to time and how time takes on a noticeably antagonistic character. Heidegger (1995) is useful here. For Steve, what is at issue here is the desire to overcome the vacillation of time which he experiences as having impressed upon him. As Heidegger would explain it, the monotony of Steve's working out is a product of being affected by time as it drags and by the enigmatic essence of time in general. For Steve, getting through the workout means overcoming this by diverting his attention. Strategies that Steve noted include plugging earphones into the television or being lucky enough on occasion to have a friend to talk to to facilitate this process. For others, he explained, this might mean putting a towel over the clock so as to obscure the temporal organisation of the experience. Regardless of how this is done, it is only on the basis of this reorganisation of awareness that "time flies." In fact, it is not necessarily the case that "time flies" (though this is certainly a useful metaphor). Rather, what is at stake in all cases here is an attunement to something other than time. 'Time,' Heidegger (ibid, p. 100) explains, 'goes more quickly because its dragging is no longer there...we forget time altogether.' It exists only in abeyance, suspended temporarily at least until it runs out. 'It is now impossible for time to tarry...for too long because it cannot tarry at all' (ibid).

Unlike Louise, Steve is not necessarily competing against himself (or even others for that matter), but against the unreasonable silence of this technological environment. He is competing against the slowness of time and the hold it has upon him. Other differences are noteworthy. For Louise, the process of rationalisation is

certainly more explicit than it is for Steve. Steve's behaviour appears more normalised. This is a point that might be attributed to the 40 year age difference. In spite of the differing circumstances, however, there is a performative trait that marks a similarity between the two. However consciously or unconsciously, both manage to refocus their attention to what is important – “doing fitness” – and towards a rational management of their behaviour. For Louise and Steve, not only have they used strategies or skills from other areas of their lives to rationalise *doing* (in Steve's case) or *having done* (in Louise's) a workout, but, in doing so, they have come up with normatively appropriate responses to the issues normally encountered in the context of working out.

4.2.1.4 Rationalisation and Vicarious Doing

It is not only getting over “failed experiences” (as in Louise's case) or getting through potential ones (in Steve's) which highlights the importance of “doing fitness.” Consider as a final example the following excerpts from my discussion with John (54, male), a regular fitness enthusiast who, after many years working-out within the gym environment, was forced to sever the trajectory of his activity in the face of greater responsibilities in other spheres of his life:

John: Last year I missed ten weeks at the gym because the wife wasn't well from November till after Christmas. I said to myself “Ten weeks out of a gym is a long time.” Ten weeks doing nothing is a long time. The wife said to me “Go back” and I said “I don't know. I don't know if I'd be able for it. Ten weeks is a long time.” At my age, ten weeks is a long time.

Ross: How did you feel when you had to stop?

John: Oh, that was bad. It was serious. It was a big decision to have to make but it had to be done. I was heartbroken after it, you know. On the nights, say Monday night, you're looking at your watch saying: “Seven o'clock, spinning class is starting now”; “Eight o'clock, the boys are coming out of the class now”; “They're probably going in next door to the gym now...” And then I couldn't let on that was affecting me. The wife said to me “Do you miss the gym?” and I'd say “No, no, I don't miss it at all. Sure I had to give it up sooner or later anyway.” Tuesday night

would be alright, Wednesday night the same as Monday. And that lasted. It didn't get any easier after three or four weeks. I was saying to myself "Ah, after a few weeks it'll be alright. I'll get used to it." But it never got easier for the ten weeks. The tenth week was the very same as the first week. *I still wanted to be there, you know.*

In one important sense, John's account illustrates how it is not only from the perspective of presence that significance is established. Rather, significance is also disclosed in instances of absence (perhaps increasingly so in this case). John recalls how missing "ten weeks" was "bad," it was "serious." Moreover, the decision to sever the trajectory of his participation was "a big decision to have to make," nonetheless "it had to be done." Later in our dialogue, John would go on to say that:

John: The gym is really part of my life. Your family is first, but the gym is next. There's nothing else. The family is here. Well, the gym is next; there next to it you know. The family comes first, but to me the gym is second.

How does John cope with losing out on what is second in his list of life priorities? Heidegger (1995) is useful here again insofar as he makes a distinction between 'being-there [*Da-sein*]' and 'not-being-there [*Nicht-Da-sein*]' (original emphases). How often it happens, Heidegger explains, that our experiences are characterised by both presence and absence? John's is certainly a case in which there is a peculiar interplay of presence and absence. He is both *present to* and *absent from* the gym environment. And, it might be said on this basis that John is not, in fact, missing out entirely. He "still wants[s] to be there" and, in a sense, he is. To be sure, his distress is veiled so as not to "let on" that missing the gym was affecting him. However, by recounting the normal sequence of events on particular workout days, he seems to be able to cling on to his former (if only fractured) self by experiencing, vicariously, the events through others. For John, what "the boys" are doing ("coming out of the class," "going in next door to the gym") appears tantamount to what he feels (though he is too respectful of the situation at home to say so) he *should be doing*. It is, in

fact, what he *would be doing* if the were situation otherwise. John's fractured self coheres somewhat by replaying or narrating an emplotted sequence of events and, it is this plot (to borrow from Ricoeur, 1980) that serves a connecting function between his *being-there* and *not-being-there*. This period in John's life is thus reorganised and reconfigured as narrative coherence because even "vicariously doing fitness" can save him from "losing the plot" entirely.

4.2.2 (Not) Being Someone Through Fitness

'In the case of certain experiences,' Nozick (1974, p. 43) explained, 'it is because first we want to do the actions that we want the experiences of doing them or thinking we've done them.' At a certain level of abstraction, this certainly seems to have been the case for participants. However, what is more compelling is the evidence for rationalisation processes that appear to be at work, and which serve to contribute to the ongoing negotiation of fitness trajectories. However consciously or unconsciously, participants manage to refocus their attention in a manner that requires the rational management of their behaviour. Whether this meant a pre-emptive stance (Joan, Gail, and Deirdre) or the use of strategies or skills from other areas of their life (Steve and Louise), it is clear that participants had the ability to come up with normatively appropriate responses to those issues encountered in the context of working out. Their actions, to borrow from Austin (1975), Searle (1969), and Ricoeur (1973), exhibit "perlocutionary force" and compel them to conjure up the necessary inductive resources to either orient themselves towards action or help them cope with potentially disruptive series of events.⁵¹ "Doing fitness" implied the ability to establish, implement, and maintain a set of inductive resources so that one

⁵¹ Borrowed from speech act theory, the notion of "perlocutionary force" implies that, in doing *p* or saying *q*, one intends to elicit a quite specific response *s*. That is, performing certain acts or utterances is done so with the intention of affecting future behaviour in a specific direction.

might deal with normal as well as potentially disruptive sequences of events. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that participants' prior knowledge of the performative significance of working out contributed to the maintenance of a steady trajectory of participation. This rational management, it seems, goes some way towards explaining how people find themselves in situations in which they feel obliged to exercise.

Whether anybody can “do fitness” is a more complex question. As the saying goes, sometimes reason does not go all the way down.⁵² The second component of Nozick's thought experiment offers a useful lens for framing our understanding of agency as it relates to fitness. The question to be asked is: what capacity/capacities of the individual needs to be actualised so that one might account for how intention relates to action?

4.2.2.1 Being Oriented Towards One's Environment

What else matters to us in addition to our experiences, Nozick (1974, p. 43) explains, is that ‘we want to be a certain way.’ Should it be surprising, Nozick asks, that what we are is important to us? For Nozick, the “Experience Machine” does not allow for genuine, meaningful action to occur, rather, only the appearance of it. Saying “no” to plugging in is tantamount to acknowledging that action has structure, content, and that individuals are meaning-imputing agents. From the perspective of the participants involved in this study, going to the gym and engaging in fitness activities was also a meaningful endeavour. The following excerpts from Bob's (22,

⁵² For example, it would hardly be remiss to say that there are many people who “should” be incorporating healthy activities into their lifestyles who (in spite of this normativity) do not. In fact, a number of studies suggest that a greater emphasis directed towards the promotion of beneficial outcomes can act, somehow paradoxically, as a barrier to the uptake of such behaviour (Crossley, 2006c; Mintel, 2007; Sassatelli, 1999b; Tsai, 2005).

male) and Joan's (22, female) narratives provide some useful examples of how this is the case.

Discussing the difference between his gym training now and when he was younger, Bob explained that:

Bob: When I was younger, I was just lifting weights with no concept behind it and no real technique. Now, with the football team, we have a strength and conditioning coach that looks over us. So, if you're lifting weights...you're being watched and, if you're doing it wrong, you're corrected...There would also be some guys...who would be poor at lifting and wouldn't have good technique so they wouldn't be able to advance to some of the stuff other guys are doing...They can't progress like others...but she [the strength and conditioning coach] works around this to do things that can help them. I find it really good. Like, I might think I'm doing the right thing or feel I'm lifting right. But when someone else sees you doing it, there might be something small that you're doing wrong that you might not notice...I find it really good because you learn a lot from it...Being able to get feedback is really important...Some other people might not like it but I learn a lot from it – from the practical side of it.

For Joan, who was discussing gym going in a more general (that is, not sport specific) sense, she explained that she tries “not to stay there [in the gym] too long.” When asked what was significant about this, she explained how she tries to “get in and get what I have to get done in a time frame that is useful” as opposed to “staying there for two hours and not actually benefitting.” Later in our dialogue, Joan expanded on this pragmatic attitude towards working out:

Joan: It's a mental thing. You need to be in the right mind-frame to do it. If you're not, you're wasting your time. If you think “I don't want to be here” then you might as well not be there. You're not going to push yourself. You're not even going to sweat. You're just going to walk on the treadmill and not really burn anything [fat or calories, presumably]. You might get your heart-rate going a little bit, but afterwards you will be like “That was pointless.”

Expanding on this point again, Joan makes a distinction between her own attitude towards working out, and that of her friends:

Joan: I mean, I have friends who go [to the gym] and have a takeaway afterwards. It's pointless. They're like, “It's grand. I just went to the gym.” They're just going for the sake of it. They're not going to benefit in the long term, I don't think. It's just like “the thing to do.”

***Ross:* So, what's the difference between them and you?**

Joan: [Laughs] It's so obvious; some people just go to the gym for the social element. You can spot it a mile off. You're like "What are you doing you posers?" Personally, my own opinion is that you have to be there for yourself. I mean, you can tell a mile off when people are just there to be there.

***Ross:* And do you have friends like that?**

Joan: [Laughs] Oh yeah, I have friends who definitely do that.

***Ross:* Do you ever work out with them?**

Joan: No. Hardly ever. It'd be too much of a distraction. They would kill me if they heard me [Laughs].

In these excerpts, both Bob and Joan provide a useful distinction between merely going through the motions and the involved application of oneself that is necessary in order to become more meaningfully oriented to the fitness training environment. Like Bob, Joan also reflects on the fact that, as a novice, she often "wasted time" and did not often "get the most out of it." And again, like Bob she reflects on how there was a change in "focus" and "intensity" that has helped her to more meaningfully orient herself to this activity environment. In fact, both Bob's and Joan's accounts are particularly revelatory of what Dewey (2009, p. 153) meant when he said that 'mere activity does not constitute experience,' meaning that, an experience is 'loaded with significance' only insofar as it is linked to some form of 'cumulative growth.' According to Dewey, when one is meaningfully oriented towards one's environment, *doing* must become a form of *trying* – 'an experiment with the world to find out what it is like,' to use Dewey's (ibid, p. 154) own words – and it is only in this shift that there is growth which makes it an experience in the vital sense of the word. For Joan, since her friends are merely going through the motions – since they are "just going for the sake of it" – their action cannot be elevated to the level of what Dewey (2005, p. 36) referred to as 'an experience.' For Bob, since his teammates are poor at lifting and have poor technique, they look elsewhere for this shift (presumably

towards things that they are good at that Bob is not so good at). In Joan's case, the *Other* in question are not credibly engaging in meaningful action. For Bob, the *Other* in question are unable to do so. Perhaps the only difference between Joan and Bob is that Joan appears to consciously avoid working out with them; the *Other* for her is something of a barrier to engaging in meaningful action. What is noteworthy, and evident in both, is the notion that, when it comes to fitness, being a certain way requires not only a cognitive commitment to its normatively articulated qualities as a social practice, but also a practical commitment to its demands as an embodied, and meaningfully skilful activity (cf. Collins, 2002; Crossley, 2004a, 2006c; Sassatelli, 1999a; Shusterman, 1999, 2008).

4.2.2.2 Being Someone Through Fitness

Building on Nozick's more general work, in this study being a certain way also implied being a certain type of person. "A fit person," Patrick (27, male) explained, "is somebody with good cardiovascular health." This emphasis was also important for Dermot (28, male) who explained that "[fitness] has the association with cardio[vascular fitness/exercise] and being able to run, jog, cycle, or swim for a length of time...with the heart rate...being lower than for an average person doing the same activity." Similarly, Katie (26, female) explained how she would "probably associate someone who is very fit" with "someone who runs marathons, does triathlons, cycles, does cross-country, or plays a sport." Building on this, it was Deirdre (42, female) who quite explicitly made a distinction between "being reasonably fit" and "being very fit," and the type of person that might be associated with each:

Deirdre: Someone that's very fit continuously works out and all of their life centres around the gym. I would say people who are very very fit are totally focused on some club team or they're into team sports or whatever. They're doing a lot of

activity. Like, my fitness level is not for playing football three times a week. I think that someone would have to be very fit for that.

In order to further explain what it meant to be a very fit person, Deirdre employed a further, corresponding distinction between her and her brother:

Deirdre: I could compare myself to brother who would be very fit and would train a lot. Like, everything in his life centres around his training schedules. He's very fit. My life centres around all the other things I have to do as well. For me, it's not a focal point.

The distinction made here by Deirdre appears to have a correlate in the figure/ground relations of Gestalt psychology (e.g. Gurwitsch, 1979; Köhler, 1992). In this example, a “very fit person” is one who has constructed their world in such a way that the gym and working out stand out as being figural and act as a locus of control around which other daily activities are organised. It might even be said that, when this person is at the gym all of these other activities (necessarily) recede into the background (this is obviously the other way round for Deirdre). Being someone through fitness is not merely an effect of doing fitness (it is not about “just getting in and doing it,” as Deirdre bluntly also put it). Rather, as Katie and Deirdre have explained, there seems to be something of a broader horizon of significance at play which gives rise to and reinforces fitness in the first instance.

Take as another example, the prevalence of sport as an horizon of significance in the establishment of a fitness trajectory the following excerpts from Louise's (34, female) narrative.

Louise: Because I'm a *naturally sporty person*, I have always been involved in health and fitness, and have always been surrounded by people that are involved in fitness, when I'm not working out I feel like I'm not being *true to myself*. So, I feel slightly, without getting into the all the health, mind and body stuff, *out of alignment*.

For Louise, being a “naturally sporty person” has played a formative role in the establishment and maintenance of her fitness trajectory. Although she is not involved in sport in any direct way anymore (acknowledged elsewhere in our dialogue) the

performance of this fitness identity now represents both a localisation and an extension of her previous sporting narrative. In fact, when she is not involved in this type of activity she feels out of sync with this “natural” self. In the absence of context, Louise experiences a reduced sense of equilibrium that results in her describing experiences of *herself* as being “out of alignment.” She continued:

Louise: I’ve often heard people say it to me that I’m happier when I’m actually involved in sport or I’m involved in health and fitness. It’s like *something I’m meant to be doing*. It’s just *part of who I am*. So that’s probably the biggest thing for me, rather than the physical side of things or the confidence side of things. It’s that feeling that *everything is as it should be, everything is right*.

Ross: It fits?

Louise: Yeah, *it’s part of me*. So, if I’m not doing it, I’m missing something.

Louise’s experience of going to the gym and working out is characterised by a general feeling that “everything is as it should be...everything is right.” It is constructed as a means of bringing her body and mind into equilibrium (or “alignment”), as an expression of virtue (“being true to myself”) and character (“it’s part of who I am”), and can be linked to the possibility of authentic selfhood (“it’s something I’m meant to be doing”). What is perhaps less clear is the extent to which the importance of fitness for Louise is marked by the possible threat of being not only untrue to herself, but also being untrue to others (“I’ve often hear people say it to me...”).

The clearest example of the importance attributed to some horizon of significance was to be found in Bob (22, male) and Dermot’s (28, male) narratives. Taking Bob first, while he (like Katie, Deirdre, and Louise) emphasised sport as an important horizon of significance for framing fitness, more importantly, he gave an insight into the need for the development and sedimenting of such a frame of reference:

Bob: Ever since I was young...I was playing sports and never really focused on the gym...My local [football] manager suggested that I start doing...weights... I was more into aerobic fitness and he thought that, since I was really good at football, I should start trying to get a bit of size on me.

It seems to have been this event that launched an entire trajectory for Bob, one that would have him go to college to do a degree in Sports Rehab and one that would also have him taking up sport at an elite level:

Bob: I did my undergrad in Sports Rehab and in the first year or two of that we focused a lot on how to design your own [fitness] programme...So I was gradually getting an idea of how to train...Gradually, I got into knowing more about it...[and] planning how I would go...Now that I'm at such a level with a team, everything is specific...Everything is in phases and periodised...At the start, it wasn't like that...I was young and naïve in listening to my manager who was telling me to get more size so I used to do it just to bulk up. But I was doing it the wrong way...I wasn't translating it.

This view would go on to help Bob articulate what he now understood by fitness:

***Ross:* Would you describe yourself as a fit person?**

Bob: Yeah. It's mad how you would describe fitness though. I would class myself as fit. I would be able to go for seventy minutes...[so] I'd say I was fit for that. Whereas, if you asked me to run a marathon. Would I be fit for that? I don't know, because of the specifics of our training...Fitness is a hard one to describe. Like, I would personally say I'm fit. I'm in good shape and have a good level of fitness. But it is only really for the sport that I'm in. If that makes any sense!

Finally, and importantly, this view was taken to its extreme in the following passage from Dermot's narrative:

Dermot: I do not actually believe in the term fit. It is...based not only on the performance of a person in a [specific] activity at a specific time, but is also linked to the appearance of an individual...I think the term fit should refer to "fit for purpose." My training is designed to increase muscular size and strength...and I would classify myself as fit for [that] purpose. A marathon runner trains for long distance...but not for an hour of high intensity weight training.

In a similar manner in which health functioned in the previous section, the lesson to be learned here is that fitness is meaningless without some context of comprehension. Health and sport are notable, though not exclusive in their purchase of the term (as Dermot asked quite provocatively, "Is a sedentary individual with a quick metabolism fit for purpose given that his body had no additional requirements

[for exercising] beyond what he does each day? Is that person not fit for purpose?"). Rather, the lesson to be learned is that there is no sense of fitness-in-itself (or even -for-itself). Fitness comes to the fore as a matter of concern, develops, and becomes sedimented in the context of some broader horizon of significance. Borrowing from Latour (2005, p. 16) and taking into consideration participants narrative descriptions, when it comes to understanding and achieving fitness, it pays to be a 'good relativist.'⁵³

4.2.2.3 Oneself *as* An Other

Though it appears to be the most personal of things, the previous section opens up the case for the assumption that these identities often presuppose an *Other*. Louise's narrative, outlined in the previous section, opens up the possibility that being a certain way might imply being a certain way *to*, or being a certain person *for*, others. That individuals can find in an *Other* an aspirational counterpoint is a well developed theme in fitness discourse (Smith Maguire, 2002, 2008a, 2008b; Mansfield, 2011; Markula, 2001). However, for some participants involved in this study, there was a tendency to define themselves (their current, fit selves) in juxtaposition with *their* Other (or former) self. Former selves functioned as indexical markers which meaningfully frame their present experiences of fitness. In John's (54, male) case, for example, it would have been remiss to discuss what fitness meant to him without recourse to the fact that he was "always inclined to be heavy" and given the fact that he "put[s] on weight very easily." Such is the significance of

⁵³ Contrary to the common claim that relativism implies an "anything goes" attitude, what I mean to imply here is the importance of a relational approach to fitness. As Latour (2005, p. 96) explained (following Deleuze, [1993] 2006, p. 21), relativism does not imply the 'relativity of truth' but, rather, a 'truth of relation[s].'

this picture of his former self, John reasons that going to the gym and keeping fit is “probably [just] a routine that [he] got into.”

With Steve (74, male), however, we can get an example of how fitness comes to the fore in the context of two former selves, both of which (though related) differ in their level of complexity. The first, and of the least complexity, is his former self prior to having an operation. Going to the gym was his idea to “get a bit of weight down,” since he “was up to about twelve stone, eight [pounds] at the time.” At the time of the interview, Steve explained how he was “back [down] now to eleven [stone], ten [pounds].” For Steve, this seems especially to be the case since his former self at “eleven [stone], seven [pounds]” functions as a reference point with which to focus his attention in the gym. At a broader level of abstraction, Steve’s commitment to keeping fit is linked to a very significant narrative event – his retirement. “I finished up work which I was at...nearly night and day.” He reflected on how, given the physically intensive labour requirements of the post-WW2 period, even if there even was a gym back then “you wouldn’t have time to go to it!” Steve (74, male) recalls how:

Steve: At that time, things weren’t good because of the war. We went on ration books for clothes and food and everything like that. And every small farm, whether it was small or big, had so much to till – what they called compulsory tillage – and that had to be done. That had to be ploughed and tilled with the horses and everyone had to do that. That was from 1946 on. I was born in 1934 so we’ll say that from the time I was ten or twelve I was doing a bit of work all the time. You had to.

He also recalled how this work had to be done “before [he] went to school” and, moreover, how you had to “walk to school, a mile and a half down and a mile and a half back.” “Everyone walked everywhere and they were working nearly up until the time you died.” It is “a completely different way of life now.” For Steve, keeping fit not only takes on a compensatory role, rather, it requires a hybridisation of values.

Those virtues (of control, productivity, efficiency and discipline) inculcated in him help in negotiating the somewhat ambivalent conditions of this late modern mode of sociality. At his age (74), Steve's is a good example of how those who grew up in the society of producers have had to re-evaluate the trajectory of their selves and have had to learn to cope not only with a new mode of sociality, but a new sense of self. On this basis, it might be said of the argument that the society of consumers does not need those previous values (associated with the society of producers) is misplaced. They are merely in scarce supply.

The trajectory of this break away from one's former self need not be as considered, calculated, and compensatory as it was for John and Steve. Rather, Liam's (45, male) encounter with his former self was more abrupt. Reflecting on how he had to give up training due to a flare up of gout (something, Liam explained, that was an "affliction"), Liam described the day he realised that he had really let himself go:

Liam: I was putting the barbeque out the back with a pair of shorts on and, whatever way I spotted myself in the double-doors, I thought to myself "You fat fucking fool. You'd want to sort yourself out."

This represented a significant narrative event for Liam. Since he has been working out in one way or another for all of his adult life,⁵⁴ this marked a point of departure for re-establishing his fitness trajectory. In contrast to John and Steve, for Liam "there was no build up to it." He explained: "There was no gradual "Ah yeah, I'll have to go to the gym." Rather, his mind "was made up...on the Saturday" and he "joined the gym on the next Tuesday." What is even more interesting here, of course, are the conditions under which this realisation (finally) came to prominence. The double-doors expose Liam to his visual demonstration of lack. "You're just looking

⁵⁴ To the question "How long have you been a member of a gym?" he replied "Forever. Since I was 18 anyway."

at yourself,” Liam explains, and he reacts in the following manner: “Fuck me man, I didn’t realise I got that bad.” When asked how this had eluded him for so long, Liam explained that:

Liam: ...over the course of time you just go out and get bigger clothes, don’t you? You’re in jeans and they’re a size forty inch waist, and it doesn’t dawn on you. They’re just a pair of jeans. It’s only when you’re standing there in a pair of shorts with your gut hanging down.

By getting clear on what was reflected in this image, Liam realised that his body and his self had somehow been dislocated. Up to this point, however consciously or unconsciously, he had developed strategies of body-image avoidance (i.e. his affinity for baggy/bigger clothes) which reflect a broader affinity to a body-self dualism. But it is in this encounter that he discovers a discrepancy which existed in his experience of self as both a body-subject and body-object. To use Louise’s phrasing from earlier on, it was in this encounter that Liam experienced his body and self as being “out of alignment.” It was this cleavage of the body and self that oriented Liam towards the task of working out.

Two points are worth highlighting here. Firstly, these findings resonate closely with ethnographic work undertaken by Crossley (2006c), who found that many gym-goers are not, in the main, setting out to construct a particular body. Rather, in line with Crossley’s (ibid, p. 31) work they were ‘seeking to recover something they had lost, [or] return to former glory.’ Building on this work, it might be said that this former self (whether it be construed as a single historical fixation or as an entire narrative event) functioned not only as an indexical marker of a prior embodied self, but as a fixation of energy which directs one’s organisation of attention towards working out. That is, it serves an organising function as well as acting as a motivating force. Secondly, the findings presented here have significant implications for the notion of the phenomenological body. On the basis of findings outlined in

this section, it is worth asking to what extent the maintenance of a body-self dualism enables individuals avoid the problems associated with body image (to be, in effect, absent from one's body) and to negate the demands put on their bodies in the context of broader physical culture.

4.2.2.4 *Not* Being Someone Through Fitness

Finally, and in contrast to the strategies outlined in the previous sections, both Kevin (34, male) and Liam's (45, male) narratives offer examples of how an apophatic stance towards identity construction enabled participants to organise their experiences of self. That is, how "being a certain way" can also imply "not being" a certain way (i.e. how "being a certain type of person" can also imply "not being" someone else). The following excerpt from Kevin's shows his tendency to frame his identity in terms of the Other:

Kevin: It takes a lot for a fat person to go to the gym in the first place. Apart from anything else, people will be going "fucking hell, look at the size of him." And that's unfair. I do see these lads coming in and you feel great. I personally feel great because you're going "fair play to you mate." It's not easy coming down here wearing a pair of shorts and a t-shirt when you can practically see his stomach underneath. And he's still willing to do that. But then it's not just that simple, going down to the gym, especially for those people. They have to really really push themselves a lot harder than you or I because *we have already got that in ourselves to do it*. You know, the gene or whatever. Or the aptitude to go. There's a lot of ignorance out there in terms of exercising. You know, I'd be reasonably well up on exercising. As I said, people think that if they go to the gym for an hour, or two hours, then they can go home and scoff.

Kevin's description highlights the importance of the Other as a constitutive feature of the identity formation process. In the first instance he appears to empathise with the Other. However, this empathy is interestingly tempered by his description of the Other as "those people" who "really really have to push themselves," who "go home and scoff," those people, presumably, radically different from "you or I." Being a certain way for Kevin is, thus, clearly constituted by the fact that he is none of these

things. It implies not being this Other (not being fat, not being ignorant and, therefore, not going to go home after the gym and “scoff”).

This view of the Other was also prevalent in Liam’s (45, male) narrative. Upon encounters with the Other, Liam described how the first thing that would come into his head was “Are you for fucking real?”” When asked what he meant by this, the following dialogue ensued:

Liam: I often look at people and say to myself, “How did you get yourself into that state? Have you no self-pride to go around looking like that?” You’d be looking at guys jogging on the treadmill and they’re doing a few bits and pieces but they’re not doing what they should be doing...You’re not going to get rid of them man boobs by just running around like a clown. You need to lift weights to tone yourself up. But a lot of guys don’t know that.

Both Kevin and Liam’s descriptions clearly resemble Featherstone’s (2007, pp. 77-8) distinction between ‘classical’ and ‘carnavalesque’ bodies. Their descriptions, like Featherstone’s carnivalesque, emphasise bodies with “protruding stomachs,” of “walking heart-attacks,” “big lazy slobs,” “panting clowns,” and “fat fools” who “have man boobs and the lot.” But they are not only characterised by sloth and intemperance. Worse yet, they are associated with a perpetual sense of lack (lacking “knowledge,” “aptitude,” the right “gene,” etc.); lacking all of those things that characterise modern, fit selves. For Kevin and Liam being a certain way implies (apophatically) not being this carnivalesque Other because it is something that they do not seem to hold out much hope for: “We already have it in ourselves to do it,” (Kevin, 34, male); “It’s either something you are or you aren’t” (Liam, 45, male).

This “not me” attitude towards identity formation is an important finding. However, it is clear that it is not just about being different from the Other. Rather, there is an irony in the general distinction of classical and carnivalesque bodies. As Featherstone (ibid, p. 78) explains, although the carnivalesque body represents ‘the otherness which is excluded from the process of form[ing] [a]...middle-class

identity,' this 'other which is excluded...[often] becomes the object of desire.' Here, the Other in question is desirable in so far that it plays a formative role in the self-making process (however unwilling they are to acknowledge this or, indeed, however blind they are to this process in the first instance). For Kevin and Liam, "being someone through fitness" makes sense only in the in the presence of something or someone that they do not want to be, an *Other* that is to be legislated against. They are perhaps unaware of the fact that identities are not merely singled out or differentiated from the other, but are, from the very beginning, constituted in a dialectical relation with a multiplicity of Others.⁵⁵ However, as Simpson (1994, p. 146) has usefully explained, 'identity by negation is better than no identity at all[!]

4.3 Rethinking Pleasure Pertaining to Fitness

In this section, the findings in respect of Obj. 3 are presented: *to examine the types of pleasures that accrue to participants through the engagement in fitness activities*. Pleasure pertaining to fitness is perhaps the most problematic aspect of the tripartite system (of meaning, motivation, and pleasure) outlined at the outset of this chapter. There are a number of reasons why this seems to be the case.

In one sense, the problem of offering an account of pleasure is related to the fact that so much has been said about it already. For example, it is difficult to conceive of individuals being meaningfully and interpersonally oriented towards any activity were it not pleasurable in some sense of the term. The level of investment of resources that goes into managing the trajectory of one's fitness participation must be a testament to its pleasure producing effects. To this, of course, there are a number of conflicting perspectives about how pleasure is connected to fitness. The

⁵⁵ This is exemplified in the now famed Deleuzian epithet that, 'difference is behind everything' but 'behind difference there is nothing' (Deleuze, 2004, p. 69).

knocker position was illustrated in Chapter Two and need not be rehearsed entirely here. However, it will suffice to say that, for the knockers, it is the consumption of other pleasures that are made permissible through exercise that is of most importance. They accept that certain pleasures are to be located in the embodied or kinaesthetic experience of working out. However, these are framed as very much an exception to the instrumental rule. The boosters, in contradistinction, hold no such reservations about these pleasures. Although a number of competing hypotheses exist, it is generally accepted by the boosters that pleasure is a biological phenomenon (see e.g. Acevedo & Ekkekakis, 2006; Bird, Smith & James, 1998; Brown, 2001; Morgan, 1985⁵⁶; Morgan, 1997; Morgan & O'Connor, 1988; Sharkey & Gaskill, 2006). Fitness activities affect a physical-chemical change in brain/central nervous system states due to the release of β -endorphins and increased levels of monoamines (serotonin, dopamine, and/or nonrepinephrine) in the brain. On this basis, pleasure is conceived as an internal (mentalist-materialistic) phenomenon which results in response to the stressor effects of exercise (or to an increase in brain temperature). In effect, pleasure states are deemed to be coeval with brain states.

In trying to bring these accounts together, it might be said that they are almost so disparate as to defy easy comparison. In spite of this, there is a quite distinct trait that both perspectives share. For both the boosters *and* the knockers, one exercises for rewards external to it as a practice and, as such, pleasure is thought of only in an instrumental sense. It is to be taken *from the activity* as an aside or an afterthought rather than being found *in the activity*. By exploring how pleasure pertaining to

⁵⁶ Since Morgan (1985; Morgan & O'Connor, 1988), it has been generally accepted within this biological realist approach to sports/exercise science that there are four credible hypotheses with respect to exercise's mood-altering effects. These are (i) the distraction hypothesis, (ii) the endorphin hypothesis, (iii) the monoamine hypothesis, and (iv) the thermogenic hypothesis. Albert Bandura's (see Bandura, 1997) work on self-efficacy might be added here as a useful supplementary (or fifth) hypothesis.

fitness might be understood phenomenologically through participants' descriptions, the following sections go some way towards rectifying this shortcoming.

4.3.1 The Lived Experience of Pleasure Through Fitness

At a most rudimentary level, one should recall that participants made clear that going to the gym and working out (broadly conceived of as “doing fitness”) was something that they liked to do. Moreover, it was clear for some (Steve 54, male, Gail, 45, female, and Deirdre, 42, female) that, were this not the case, they would likely not do it at all. In terms of the participants' own descriptions, the topic of pleasure was most explicitly discussed in the context of completing a workout. In discussing what it feels like in this post-workout period, most participants described this as a space within which they experienced “feeling good” (Patrick, 27, male, and Deirdre, 42, female), “feeling happy” (Joan, 22, female), or a more general “feel-good factor” (Deirdre and Joan). Others spoke about how working out usually leaves them “feeling great” (Katie, 26, female, Gail, 45, female, and Steve, 74, male), how working out gives them the feeling of being in “great form” (Kevin, 34, male), and how the intensity required in getting through a workout often results in a “great buzz” (John, 54, male) or in an “energy buzz going through you” (Bob, 22, male). Louise (34, female) was more explicit about the “obvious...biological side of it.” She explained how she “rarely feel[s] bad after a workout” and how “those little endorphins flying around your body are quite nice[!]” Similarly, Gail (45, female) emphasised how going to the gym can “set me up for the day...in terms of energy and mood...because [of the] release of serotonin.” Finally, for Dermot (28, male), “the elevation of mood and endorphins running through you” after a workout “is a major motivating factor for going back [to the gym] the next day.”

4.3.1.1 Pleasure as Gratification

For most participants, the pleasure that accompanied completing a workout was related to that very fact – that the workout had been completed and something of significance had been achieved. The following excerpts are reflective of this:

Joan: It's like a happy feeling; a feeling of accomplishment. It's always a good feeling (22, female).

Gail: Certainly after the gym you feel great and full of energy and, I suppose, a sense of achievement (45, female).

Patrick: I usually feel good after working out as I feel I've done what I set out to do. I feel good if I've done better than previous sessions as I feel as though I've made some progress...Most days I feel good about working out. It feels as if I have done something good for myself (27, male).

Kevin: Sometimes you don't be in a great mood [before going to the gym] but when you come out you do be in great form. You know? You feel great. You feel great in terms of doing a good workout (34, male).

Deirdre: Coming out of the gym you do feel good. You've put the effort in and you feel like you've achieved something. A good workout would be that I enjoyed it. I felt "the burn." You feel that you've achieved something by pushing yourself (42, female).

Dermot: The immediate thirty minutes after a workout [is] great if you have had a successful workout...The feeling of the pump in the muscles...immediately following a workout is fantastic. Nine times out of ten, I would have this feeling. The sense...of accomplish[ing] something is a driver (28, male).

Katie: Once the workout is complete, I feel great that I have done it...I always feel great after a workout...I feel that I've achieved something...It's at the end of the day when I'm in bed that I feel the best about what I've done in the gym that evening – there's nothing better than the sleep I get after working out (26, female).

John: Well, it's a great achievement. If you think coming back down [the stairs from the gym] what you're after been thinking about going up and you think of what you're after doing. To come back after cooling down and everything, and knowing that you're after going through what you did...It's a great feeling (54, male).

In one sense at least, the notion of pleasure pertaining to fitness was clearly reflected in the fact that having gone to the gym and worked out meant that something had been overcome. In fact, for John (54, male), his "t-shirt drowned in sweat" even functioned as an indexical marker of this critical overcoming. Also characteristic of

this pleasure was an acknowledgement that *the experience* was genuinely worth *the undertaking*. Even though it was something that had to be rationalised, fought for, and earned, the pleasure experienced was worth the doing and undergoing the consequences (to use a Deweyan turn of phrase). Moreover, the achievement of which participants spoke was not only of an instrumental kind, but was characterised by a sort of gratification. That is, in their experiencing pleasure, there was a gratification that something significant in itself had occurred. It was not merely a gratification about what might likely accrue *from the activity* but was related *to the activity*. There was pleasure *in the activity*. As Ryle (1963, pp.103-6; see also Crossley, 2001, 2006a; Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 2002; Szasz, 1988) would explain it, the pleasure was not some separate ingredient added to working out. It was characterised by an openness and receptivity to the environment to the extent that *the pleasure was the experience*.⁵⁷ The nature of this openness and receptivity to *the doing* aspects of fitness, and how the resulting pleasure relates to a sort of empathic reconciliation, is explored in more detail in the following sections.

4.3.1.2 Pleasure as Tension Relief

While it is clear that there is pleasure to be accrued in having done a workout, it is also important to understand how pleasure relates to *the doing* itself. For Crossley's (2006c), gym-going conforms to a tension-release model in that it enables agents to experience a temporary relief from frustrations that are triggered in their everyday (presumably) working lives. Gym-going, Crossley explains, often requires layers of overcoming in order for its rewards to be accrued. In terms of fulfilling a mimetic function, Crossley explains further that:

⁵⁷ Even for Liam (45, male) who explained that, although he doesn't necessarily "get a buzz out of it" ("It's not like I'm all excited about going to the gym"), he is "always glad" to have done it. For him, too, it is about the experience: "When *I'm there* I enjoy it."

...[gym going] allows for the release of tensions, frustrations and impulses that are triggered in everyday life but cannot be acted upon satisfactorily...[I]t invokes in a euphemized form the structure of situations that are prohibited in everyday life but that the agent might be disposed towards, such as combat, and allows playful enactment (Crossley, 2006c, p. 41).

For Crossley, gym going enables participants to experience the type of excitement and pleasure that is more traditionally associated with pugilistic encounters and activities. The release of tensions, frustrations, and impulses is associated with the departure from the structure of everyday life thus enabling individuals' expressive qualities to be foregrounded (see also Dunning & Rojek, 1992; Elias, 2000; Elias & Dunning, 2008; Rojek, 1995).

Kevin (34, male) and Louise's (34, female) experiences of pleasure-as-tension-reduction are worth noting here. Kevin emphasised "boxing" as a "good way of ventilat[ing] a bit of anger" when his regular routine in the gym "didn't do the normal trick." It provided an opportunity to "do something that you normally wouldn't do," a means of relieving tensions by literally "pounding away at something." In spite of the similarities here, a number of additions to Crossley's tension-release model might be considered in the context of the present study. For example, for Kevin, the reduction of tension was only one aspect of working out that was deemed pleasurable. For Kevin, this alternative approach to working out involved the recruitment of "particular muscles," a "completely different movement of the body" so that "you are using a lot more muscles than you...would use in everyday life." Similarly, Louise "really look[s] forward to going to the gym" because her "job is quite monotonous and boring." "I sit at a desk for nine hours of the day," she explained. For Louise, there is an acknowledgement that, with work, a cleavage between *the body* and *the self* has occurred (recall that Louise spoke earlier about the importance of getting into "alignment"). The sedentary nature of her

vocation engenders a decoporealizing effect such that her body at work aligns to what Leder (1990, p. 36) referred to as ‘the recessive body.’ In fact, it might be said that Louise merely brings her body to work. As Dewey (2009, p. 155; see also Wolkowitz, 2006) has explained, the sedentary nature of these environments puts a premium on ‘physical quietude...silence [and] rigid uniformity of posture and movement’ such that ‘a machine-like simulation of the attitudes of intelligent interest’ can be ascertained.⁵⁸ It is likely because of this that Louise explains, “I’d nearly be thinking about the gym all during the day, just thinking “I can’t wait to get to the gym and just go for it.”” “Because I’m quite an energetic person...it’s my time when I can use some energy.” Contrary to the analyses of fitness as self-work portrayed in Sassatelli (2007), Smith Maguire (2008b; Smith Maguire & Stanway, 2008), Waring (2008; see also Rojek’s 2010a, 2010b account of “the labour of leisure”), going to the gym for Louise is completely different than work. “It’s the exact opposite,” she explains. It offers means of overcoming the body’s recessive aspects, of countering its quiescent nature by initiating a sensory intensification (one might even say that the “alignment” of which she previously spoke follows as a natural corollary of the alignment of her body and self). The body, Dewey explained, is, of necessity, a wellspring of energy. It has to do something and, if neglected, is likely to break forth. This appears to be what is at stake for not only Kevin and Louise, but for most of the participants involved. Within the gym they experience a heightened sensitivity to an embodied self. But this is not “a given.”⁵⁹ Working out

⁵⁸ For example, when a person talks about having to “drag” themselves to work on a Monday morning, it is likely that it is the body to which they are referring (and which is being “dragged”). As Dewey (2009, p. 155) explained, “[h]aving nothing, so it is thought, to do with mental activity [which is a premium in the work context], it [the body] becomes a distraction, an evil to be contended with.”

⁵⁹ That this process is not “a given” was well articulated by Dermot (28, male) and Patrick (27, male). Dermot explained that, “if the stresses of work or home are on his mind,” he can “lose focus and...end up leaving [the gym] without the same sense of accomplishment [as usual].” Talking about pleasure pertaining to working out, Dermot explained that “if external pressures...distract...[you] during the workout, then this feeling can be blunted.” Similarly, Patrick explained that “[o]n days or weeks when

affords the *opportunity* of experiencing pleasure. The heightened kinaesthetic awareness that is experienced through working out has conditions of possibility and requires quite a specific shift in bodily orientation. A previously backgrounded *embodied self* has to be summoned, one that, in the gym, must direct one's focus and organisation of attention.⁶⁰ This notion, of an interplay between tension and release, is discussed in more detail in the next section.

4.3.1.3 Pleasure as Tension-Release

An important caveat to Crossley's position is imminent here. It is unclear as to whether Crossley has adequately distinguished between the experience of tension-*relief* and tension-*release* since he seems to have used these terms interchangeably. The former, it might be said, aligns closely to what has been referred to elsewhere as "the distraction hypothesis" (Morgan, 1985). That is, when engaging in physical activities, individuals experience a respite from the constraints and tensions impressed upon them in the "outside world" (however broadly conceived). One is distracted in the sense that there is an immediacy to, and immersion in, the activity. One is present to something else, as it were. The question to be asked, however, is whether being relieved of tension is the same as experiencing a release from it.

If we take Kevin and Louise's descriptions, it is clear that, with the release from tension, there is an experience of the body which presupposes being in an embodied relation to some activity environment. Being distracted in the sense of being relieved of tension need not be of this kind. In fact, one might even posit that shutting oneself off from the world might as easily be conceived as being primarily cognitive. With

I...haven't made much progress I don't feel as good." And, because of this, "[I]t's not always the same [feeling] when finishing a session in the gym."

⁶⁰ These points are scarcely emphasised in the affective beneficence literature regarding exercising or in its application in public policy research (i.e. research after Morgan, 1985).

mere distraction, one need not open up to a new world at all. One merely seeks to disregard a prior world of affect. This was certainly not the case for both Kevin and Louise. Rather, for them, going to the gym was not only an opportunity to facilitate a departure from the structure, stability, and sedentary nature of normal working life, but an opportunity to reawaken a previously dormant body-self. In fact, the latter presupposes the former as its necessary condition. That is, there is both a “that-from-which-we-are-coming” *and* a “that-towards-which-we-are-heading” taking on a complementary relation. For both Kevin and Louise, gym going is not merely a means of being relieved of tension. Rather it is an opportunity for the body to be *released* from the dualistic context in which it is merely latent. The following excerpts from Joan (22, female), Bob (22, male), and John (54, male) offer additional material for exploring what the distinction between the relieved body and the released body might imply (John’s description, notably, offers a more nuanced example of how this might be the case, but their similarities are worth noting nonetheless).

The notion of getting away or being distracted was clearly the case for Joan who was, at the time of being interviewed, undertaking her final exams in college. When I asked her why she finds working out so useful at a period when she is under so much pressure – and when her time might rightly be directed away from activity – she explained initially how it provided “stress *relief*.” She explained further:

Joan: It [working out] stops you thinking about it [studying]. But then when you’ve done the workout and you go on to do something else your head is so much clearer. It’s a means of refocusing. I think that with the gym, or any physical activity that you’re doing, it’s nice to get away from other things that you have going on. You can just take yourself out of it and focus on something else. And, with exercising, it gives you the feeling that you can be more logical about it [her study]. It’s another advantage or positive way of looking at it.

Despite the prevalence of, and importance attributed to, working out as a means of facilitating a distraction – doing something else seemingly unrelated – it is clear that

there is bi-directionality at stake here. The experience of working out enables her to bracket the stresses of study, only to be directed back to them in a more “logical” manner. If the notion of *relief* is perhaps too narrow, the notion of *distraction* certainly is. In finishing the workout, there is not merely a ceding to the reality that her break is over and that she must encounter those previously held stresses. There is not merely a distraction or relief from the world. Rather, there is also the facilitation of a turn back toward it.

A more detailed account of this phenomenon of tension-release was provided by Bob who described how his especially challenging workouts (“strongman sessions!”) tend to exhibit (or demand) something of a shifting landscape of affect:

Bob: Some days you come down to the gym and you’re buzzing. But some other days you might be going “Ah, this is a bit of effort.” It’s really hard to pinpoint, but generally when I go to the gym the mentality is “I’m going in to do this and I’m going to have to get in the right frame of mind.” I’m of the mentality that its best to leave everything outside of the gym. But you don’t just go in and *do it*. *You do it right*. You have to get something out of. When I was younger...I would have just gone in and done it for the sake of doing it, whereas now I have more purpose in doing it.

Ross: Can you think of the last time when you felt “This is going to be a really tough one”?

Bob: Yeah. We do strongman sessions and they’re tough. They’re mentally challenging. It’s probably one of the only sessions I have ever gotten sick at. They’re a different level...

Ross: How do you get through it?

Bob: I think mentally you stop thinking about it because you’re focusing on what you’re doing. It’s before you start that you are kind of battling, going “How am I going to do this?” But once you start and you get into it...I think you can take a lot from the other lads that are doing it with you...If I have other guys around me that are pushing me, I just buzz off that...You have to go into it with the frame of mind that it’s going to be tough but it’s only going to last for a certain amount of time. The pain is only temporary. It’s not going to last forever...After it, you think “That was a hell of a workout,” but you feel really good from it...You get a rush from it.

Bob’s was a shifting landscape of affect because, even over the course of one hour, he had to negotiate the demands of an entire geography of emotions. Like Kevin and

Louise previously, he had to facilitate a departure from prior structure (e.g. “hard day at work”). He also had to rally all of his energies in order to do so since the “rush” is a possibility (not a given) and certain conditions have to be met in order to experience it. In addition, he had to facilitate a shift in orientation, reawaken a previously dormant body-self, and, in the face of evidently torturous workouts, become but an empty head turned towards the world (Dreyfus, 2005; Leder, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). In fact, given his emphasis on the support of significant others around him, this rush not only inaugurates a heightened corporeality, but a thoroughgoing intercorporeality.

Finally, the most well developed account of this notion of tension-release, bi-directionality, and of a landscape of affect was articulated by John through the use of a metaphor. Pre-workout tensions were reflected in him having to negotiate the stairs that lead up to the gym. When I asked him to explain what it is like when he is getting ready to go up to the gym, he replied in a true Sisyphean fashion:

John: Sometimes it feels great. Sometimes you’re in great form. But then you would get the odd day when you wouldn’t be but you say “Okay, I’ll go.” “It’s such and such a day. I’ll go.” You could feel the same when you get down there [to the gym]. It could be the same when you’re changing. It could even be the same when you’re going up the stairs. I often went up those stairs saying, “For feck sake. I’m not even able to get up these stairs.” You know? You feel drained and tired. I remember meeting a lad at the top of the stairs one time and he was coming down. I said, “I think I feel as bad as you do.” “I doubt that,” he says. But I was serious. I was at the top of the stairs and I looked into the gym. The doors were open and it was in the summer. I looked in and said to myself, “What the hell am I going to do when I go in here?” But I went in and I got going, and it was as good as any other workout.

As was previously the case for Bob, John rallies to take this task head on. He rallies to get up those stairs to “get in there, get warmed up, loosened up [and to] get involved.” His effort is surely a noble one and there is no doubting that it would have been easier not to have gone to the gym at all. But he is neither naïve nor wholly

ambivalent about his condition on this particular day. And, in explaining what it feels like after the workout, he shows us why:

John: Aw, it's a great feeling. Once you come down those stairs, go into the locker room and strip off, then you go into the shower. I feel as good in the shower at eight o'clock at night after the gym as I feel in the shower at home at half-six in the morning. You feel so clear. Your mind would be so clear. Your body would be so relaxed. It feels so good; as good as if you were after having five or six, even eight hours sleep. And it's actually after two or three hours after going home from the gym that you'd be going to bed. Sometimes you'd go home and you'd be just so bright and full of life. It's a great feeling. Whereas, the night that you wouldn't go – we'll say a Tuesday night – you wouldn't be going to the gym and you'd be lagging around the place. You'd be after having a shower. But even after having a shower of a Tuesday night, you still never feel as good as you would after having your shower of a Wednesday night after the gym.

To the recognition of “achievement” he and others spoke of previously, John acknowledges a clarity here that accompanies the experience of completing a workout (one that appears quite specific to it). In fact, the shower, too, seems somewhat metaphorical. His “cleaning,” in effect, opens up a “clearing,” to use a Heideggerian turn of phrase. In this space he feels invigorated, “full of life,” and in the thralls of what Leder (1990) referred to as pleasure’s naturally expansive character. The following excerpt from John’s narrative expands on his metaphor of getting up and coming down the stairs to/from the gym. In adding a more rooted context he describes how, in addition to this aforementioned clarity, there is a sense of a reorientation to the world being at stake:

***Ross:* What sort of feeling is it? Could you describe it?**

John: Yeah, even in your head; your head feels so clear. You don't seem to have any problems or any worries. When you come out of the gym and get into the shower, everything seems to be gone. Your whole body feels completely clear and fresh and full of life. You don't seem to have any worries whatsoever; whereas everybody has them, you know. Everyone has worries and everyone has problems. I could be driving down from my house to the gym and I could be saying to myself, “Fck it. I don't know what I'm going to do about this and I don't know what I'm going to do about that.” Someone is in bad form, or my daughter is unwell. “What am I going to do?” “I'll have to do something about that.” “I have to get her to the doctor tomorrow.” If I go down to the gym and I'm thinking this on the way down, the gym will change it. If you're not talking to someone when you get to the gym, then you might still be thinking about it when you go up to the gym and start

exercising. But when I come out of the gym and have my shower, everything seems to be like, “That’s no problem. I’ll do that tomorrow.” Everything seems to be a completely different way now. Everything seems to be so straightforward and it doesn’t seem like a problem anymore. It seems like something that is going to be done. Everything seems to fit. There it is: that fits there, that fits there, and that fits here.

John’s earlier vacillation between mind and body is noteworthy. At that moment, the clarity that he attributes to this experience extends to – or, perhaps, extends through – his body. It is not just in his head. Rather, his “whole body feels completely clear and fresh and full of life.” Leder (1990) is useful here again. A parallel to the embodied feeling which John refers to is usefully described in his phenomenology of absorption. The length of the excerpt will hopefully be excused on the basis of its relevance to the current context:

[A]esthetic absorption is a mode of one-body relation. I open feelingly such that the world can penetrate my senses, my muscles, my consciousness. The temporality of the landscape transforms my temporality. The slow crescendo and decrescendo of the wind, the stately glide of clouds awaken a resonance within my body-mind such that my hurried stride begins to slow, my thoughts to glide effortlessly, no longer rushing toward a goal. The spaciousness of the outdoors becomes my space. I somehow begin having bigger ideas than the cramped concerns that preoccupied me. From my broader perspective, I can see the smallness of my previous worries. New thoughts from within me that I have never had in my windowless office. They feel *in-spired*, “breathed in” as if from the wind and the trees. Where before there were words and more words, now there are only bird calls and the whispering of leaves. The boundaries between inner and outer thus become porous. As I close my eyes I feel the sun and hear the bird songs both within-me-without-me. They are not sense data internal to consciousness, but neither are they “out there” somewhere. They are part of a rich body-world chiasm that eludes dualistic characterizations. My relaxation *is* the smell of pine needles and the warmth of the breeze; self and Other can only be artificially disentangled...This is an experience of bidirectional incorporation; the world comes alive empathically within my body, even as I experience myself as part of the body of the world (Leder, 1990, pp. 165-6; original emphasis).

It might be said that John wavers between clarity of mind and body because his experience, too, eludes dualistic characterisation. Everything is framed in “a completely different way now.” It is worth noting the relevance of “the distraction hypothesis” here. To a certain extent, it clearly resonates with John’s description of his experience. He takes time out, finds a space in which he can refocus his

organisation of attention, and experiences an increased emotional profile. But he does not merely forget about his worries. Working out does not merely enable John to put his worries into abeyance until such time that he is burdened with them again. Going to the gym, rather, facilitates a reorientation to the outside world, enabling him to reconfigure it on new terms. He does not just use the gym to escape or to shirk his responsibilities outside of it. On the contrary, his experience is characterised by an openness and receptivity to this change in environment and it is one that is rewarded with a reconciliation of affective relations. Instead of being distracted from the world, for John, the world is now disclosed to him in a new way. The worries of which he speaks are, in a sense, out in front, rather than pressing in, on him. They do not disappear. Rather, their centripetal character seems to give way to a modified temporality. Like Leder, John's experience facilitates a broadening of horizons, his worries now "breathed" with new life and significance. It is in moments such as these that John experiences the release from tension and an openness up onto the world. He experiences what Leder (1990, p. 166) referred to as the 'ecstatic quality' of his 'one-body,' that 'expansive being...leaping beyond constriction.'

In the context of the foregoing, and to the question of whether being relieved of tension is the same as being released from it, it might be said that the latter exhibits a dialectical structure which the former lacks. In fact, the pleasure that is attributed to the latter might usefully be thought of as being analogous to those types of emotional responses typically associated with the arts, and music in particular (see Bharucha, Curtis & Paroo, 2006; Holbrook, 1995, 2007). Going to the gym and working out also exhibits emotional responses. Its stressor effects facilitate a departure from points of stability in which the body is likely deemed to be an impediment. At the

gym, there is a disturbance to the body at stasis, an opening up of the possibilities for individuals to experience the expressive qualities of their bodies through improvised embodied performances. In this, there is an opening up of the possibility for an improvisation (antithesis) of prior structure, its tensions and constraints (thesis), and, as such, going to the gym and working can offer the potential for a reconciliation of prior affective relations (synthesis). With this improvisation, there is an experience of the ordered, controlled, sedentary, and recessive body being breached, there is an interaction with and altering of prior structure, and a pleasure that is one of rhythmic and creative resolution.

4.4 Summing Up: Fitness, From Consumption to Virtuous Production

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a phenomenological response to a number of hermeneutical problems that have been associated with fitness under the conditions of late modern consumer society. Its impetus was rooted in the acknowledgement that (important and all though they have been to building a body of research which illuminates fitness from a sociological perspective) the tendency for fitness research to be overly (and overtly) critical has strayed too far from the natural attitude and was beginning to run out of steam. In order to facilitate a reorganisation of attention and construct a positive appropriation of fitness, this chapter presented it as a negotiated endeavour of practical activity (as opposed to merely an ambivalent one of representation). In order to examine the structure of this process of negotiation, this chapter discussed fitness in the context of (i) meaning, (ii) motivation, and (iii) pleasure (the three thematic areas outlined under objectives in Chapter Three).

In the first section, it was shown that, for participants, health provided an important standard of reference for fitness. It was argued that dislocating them tended to overlook the importance of health in meliorating problems of embodiment (of the interaction between the body-subject and body-object) and failed to account sufficiently for how experiences of fitness tend towards coherence through health as a broader narrative frame. In order to counter the over-emphasis on instrumental accounts of fitness and account more fully for how participants become meaningfully oriented towards fitness practices, the second section of this chapter utilised Nozick's "Experience Machine" thought experiment in order to underscore the importance of both "doing fitness" and the possibilities of "being someone through fitness." It was observed that, by "doing fitness," participants become administrators of inductive resources, which they learned to manage in a rational way. It was shown that this rationalisation process acted as a central element in the participants' network of tools for negotiating the demands of fitness practices (both reinforcing the trajectory of their participation and explaining how they find themselves in situations in which they feel obliged to exercise). To this, it was added that "being a certain way/being someone through fitness" plays an important contributing factor in providing participants with a privileged context in which they are solicited by the situation to get in line with it. It was argued that this "being a certain way/being someone through fitness" provides a horizon of significance which orients them towards the fitness environment in a meaningful way. The final section of this chapter examined the types of pleasures that accrue to participants while engaging in fitness practices. On the basis of participants' own descriptions, it was observed that, in addition to the types of instrumental goods typically associated with fitness, there was a type of pleasure that could only be accrued "in action." It was

argued that, in order to understand the full extent of its significance, one had to understand how participants depart from prior structures and open up to the expressive qualities of their bodies through a structure of tension-release.

More generally, the findings presented in this chapter provide evidence of a tendency towards authentic, practical activity over the consumption of mere pleasurable, illusory, or unattainable representations. They resonate particularly well with MacIntyre's (2007, pp. 188-189; see also McNamee, 1994; Morgan, 1994) claim that there are two types of goods which can be attached to, and gained from, engaging in practices – “external goods” and “internal goods.” On this basis, it might be said that the value of fitness need not be thought solely as some separate external ingredient added to the experience of working out. Rather, to use MacIntyre's phrasing, being oriented towards this practice in an internally significant way is an affirmation of the importance to personhood of the exercise of virtues.

Since there has been a tendency in previous research to paint in broad strokes – which reflects a general tendency in the critical literature towards structural explanations more generally (for a critique, see Latour, 2004a, 2005) – it might be said that many existing accounts of fitness participation have not been privy to these internal goods. The doing or practical aspects are largely discounted because, at best, this action is oriented towards some external end or, at worst, this action is merely seen as an expression of projects and representations determined over and above individuals in objective structures. In this, such perspectives appear to move scarcely beyond the level of what MacIntyre referred to as external goods. To borrow a phrasing from Chapter Two and from Bourdieu (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), they are only able to account for how players are taken in by the game of fitness, not for how and why they continue to invest in the game over time. They are insensitive

to the local organisation of the fitness experience and to the way fitness participation can change over time and acquire new meanings for participants (see Crossley, 2006a; Sassatelli, 1999b). They are insensitive to the way these activities can be simply performed for the somaesthetic pleasures (of engaging in them) and for their internal significance (Shusterman, 1999, 2008). As McNamee (1994, p. 297) explained, ‘for the many activities where there are a multiple of aims and sub-aims, it is inadvisable to proceed to locate single ends and colorless means...[as] this is to rob them of the web of interconnectedness which is characteristic of...their significant value.’ Existing perspectives on fitness have tended to focus on “what is valued” at the expense of the process of “valuing.” They have tended to focus on what sort of value can be accrued from being fit (the valued “I am”) as opposed to the pleasure that can be accrued from the practical and somatic experience of participating in fitness activities (the valuing “I can”).

In order to understand the substantive contribution of this chapter, we would do well to acknowledge two important factors. Firstly, what is valued in an instrumental sense is but one aspect of the fitness experience, not the sum of it. And on this basis, that there are two types of values (or “goods,” to use MacIntyre’s phrasing) to be accrued therein. There is value to be accrued *from the activity* and *in the activity*. Or, alternatively, fitness participation is both *pleasure-producing* and *pleasure-inducing*. To say that value is only to be accrued from fitness activities is to consign it to mere consumption activity. This not only overlooks the repertoire of resources which orient participants towards fitness practices and their internal significance, but renders fitness activities meaningless except as a means of acquiring values external to them. Consigning fitness to mere consumption activity overlooks the dual force of “doing fitness” and “being someone through fitness.” It overlooks its negotiated

character, and how it opens up the possibilities of a *virtuous production through fitness*. It overlooks the fact that, if “doing fitness” enables one to become acquainted with the goods internal to it as a practice, then perhaps “being someone through fitness” can operate as an indexical marker of virtue.

CHAPTER 5

**CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A COMPLEMENTAL MODEL OF
HEALTH AND FITNESS**

‘I propose...that we should name a series of this kind a ‘complemental series,’ and I forewarn you that we shall have occasion to construct others of the same kind.’

Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

One might recall that, in Chapter Three, a thoroughly pragmatic approach to the problem of fitness was emphasised and, despite the self-referential difficulties posed to generalisation by the broader disembedding landscape of reflexive modernity, there was still scope for assessing this thesis’ significant contributions. Emphasising fitness as a matter of concern implies a turning away from traditional ontological and epistemological assumptions and a shift in emphasis from the *representation* of phenomena (for the purposes of generalisation) towards their *re-presentation*. It means that the contribution of this thesis must be assessed in terms of its usefulness as a means of facilitating a reweaving of beliefs about (health and) fitness and its potential for engendering new purposes (i.e. new ways of talking about the fit body). Taking this into consideration, this concluding chapter will examine the significant contributions of this thesis in the context of its usefulness in urging new ways of speaking about fitness. This will be done under the following headings: (i) fitness, from semantics to pragmatics, (ii) fitness and the futurity of modernity, (iii)

reconsidering the relation between health and fitness, (iv) towards a complementary model of health and fitness, and (v) talking about the fit body. In concluding this thesis, some notable limitations and possible avenues for future research are underscored. The chapter concludes by revisiting Sisyphus and by reflecting on the meaning of fitness in respect of this thesis' re-description.

5.1 Fitness, from Semantics to Pragmatics

The contributions of this thesis cannot be fully explored without first acknowledging the methodological departure that was taken from previous analysis of fitness under the conditions of modernity. The contributions of this thesis are largely parasitical upon the phenomenological-pragmatic lens through which fitness has been recast and it has been both phenomenologically and pragmatically framed from the very beginning. It has been phenomenological in the sense that the primary object of analysis has been a *description* of fitness. And it has been pragmatic in the sense that this description has been *framed* on quite specific terms. Bracketing the natural, commonsense attitude with respect to fitness – and framing the preliminary description in terms of the question of fitness' cultural embeddedness – was certainly a pragmatic strategy. However, it was in the departure from overly (and overtly) critical accounts of fitness (in order to follow through on the positive proposition that it is a negotiated endeavour) that the true phenomenological and pragmatic character of this thesis was evinced.

In emphasising participants' lived descriptions in the second part of the thesis, and how meaning relates to use and practice, a particular strategic move was made. This afforded a certain ontological weight to the local organisation of the fitness experience and the experiences of individual fitness participants, which had been

largely unacknowledged (Collins, 2002; Crossley, 2004a, 2006c, 2008; Sassatelli, 1999a, 1999b are notable exceptions). To borrow from Latour (2004a) and Csordas (1993, 1994) respectively, it was argued that overly deterministic and critical structural analyses of fitness have run out of steam and that there has been an over-emphasis on how people *attend to* their bodies as vehicles with semantic properties at the expense of how they *attend with* them as vehicles of practical activity. In fulfilling its methodological departure, this thesis has made a significant contribution by reformulating the problem of fitness (on new terms) as one of negotiation and practice, and not merely representation and ambivalence. One thing that was clear from this thesis is that the meaning of fitness and its place in modern society cannot be reduced to the exchange of mere representational or sign material. The re-description sought here implied *seeing* fitness *as* a pragmatic matter to be negotiated through individual bodies rather than as merely a sign to be inscribed upon them. This seeing-as, as Wittgenstein (1963, p. 93) would have explained, has provided the conditions for a change in aspect and, in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, ‘see[ing] that it has not changed...yet...see[ing] it differently.’ The value of this change in aspect is discussed in the upcoming sections and considered in light of future research.

5.2 Fitness and the Futurity of Modernity

Perhaps the broadest contribution is to be found in the challenge it poses to one of the generalised characteristics of modernity – futurity and ambivalence. In Chapter Two, it was established that our present stage in the history of modernity – and consequently the body, the self, and its fitness – is characterised by an unyielding future-oriented temporality. The liquid character of our present stage has

wreaked havoc on traditional normative assumptions about the body's health status, leaving an ambivalent body that must be fit for mere consumption purposes.

In the context of the findings of this study, it should be clear that such a monolithic conception of the trajectory of the self is insufficient. For one, it might be said that such a view overlooks (or, at the very least treats as secondary) the fact that modern individuals both attend *to their bodies* and *through their bodies* in a reflexive manner. The implication of this dual force is that the body is not merely an end to be consumed for indefinitely. Rather, its amenability to practice and practical activity is the very condition for the possibility of consumption in the first place. It should also be noted that a monolithic conception of the trajectory of the self is insensitive to the way in which participants ordered their experiences of fitness and working out. This ordering was multilayered. It involved the establishment of horizons of significance in which fitness was situated (or the recognition of those already present). It was something to be worked at, though at times unlike work. It required of participants a network of tools, that they become effective administrators of these as inductive resources, and that they manage them in a rational way. It was something that had to be persisted at, something that could not be done second-hand, and would only become sedimented over time. The monolithic conception of modernity as relentlessly future-oriented is insensitive to this type of ordering. It treats fitness practices transparently, as just another consumer activity oriented towards some external end. It overlooks the primacy of practical activity and how meaning relates to this practice itself. It is also not equipped to acknowledge internally significant aspects of engaging in fitness practices and how ambivalence can be sublimated in the production of a virtuous self.

In this study, it became clear that engaging in fitness practices is not merely structured in a manner that promotes the passive endurance and acceptance of events or their succession towards external ends. Indeed, such capricious activity was anathema to the type of meaningful orientation to one's activity environment that characterises "doing fitness" and that "being someone through fitness" demands. Contrary to those perspectives outlined in Chapter Two that consign fitness to one temporal plane of experience, it is clear that there are conditions under which fitness can take on a more dynamic temporality. That is, with "doing fitness" and "being someone through fitness," there is not merely an arbitrary beginning, middle, and ending. Rather, there is initiation, immersion, and consummation. There is a structure to the experience in which each stage is tied to a quite specific temporal orientation. There is a *making* of experience that is infused with meaning. This made experience requires not only a cognitive commitment to going to the gym and working out. Rather, it requires a practical commitment to the embodied and skilful aspects of working out, and an openness and receptivity to one's activity environment such that, in *the doing*, something *is done* to individuals in return. It requires, as Dewey (2009) explained, that activity be continued into *the doing* and *undergoing* of consequences such that the mere flux can be loaded with significance. Modernity's wholesale futurity blinds us to this type of "experience" and to the type of normativity that, over time, brings cumulative growth of the sort that contributes to "being someone through fitness."

5.3 Reconsidering the Relation of Health and fitness

One might recall from Chapter Two the argument that, given its awkward relation to the epidemics of our time and its general obsolescence in the context of

our modern logic of consumption, Health (upper case, vertical, epistemological) could be considered to have become dislocated from fitness (lower case, horizontal, ontological). In terms of the foregoing (Chapter Four especially), the question to be asked in conclusion is whether or not there are grounds for eschewing as hasty and untimely this dislocation (which, in the context of arguments put forward in Chapter Two in relation to existing literatures, seems imminent), and whether or not there are any grounds for reconsidering the relation of Health and fitness.

One thing that is clear from the findings presented in this thesis is that the relation between Health and fitness is a complex one. This is particularly evidenced by the fact that, while some of the participants held steadfastly to notion that one has to be healthy prior to being fit, others claimed that it is fitness that contributes to Health. What's more, both camps seemed equally correct in having asserted these conflicting positions. But how can fitness contribute to Health if one has to be sufficiently healthy to engage in fitness activities in the first instance? How can we account for this interplay without invoking an unhelpful (and tautologous) loop?

One tendency that has prevailed in previous literature has been to say that participants are simply mistaken in having made these assertions (theirs is a phony metaphysics as it were). They might believe that they are accepting well-confirmed, evidence-based scientific research whereas, in reality, the pursuit of fitness (idealised images of the healthy body notwithstanding) merely reflects an imposed meaning that serves to reproduce and legitimate the violently productive inner-workings of the capitalist machine (see e.g. Frew and McGillivray, 2005; Holmes *et al.*, 2006; Pronger, 2002). This sort of zero-sum game, *I would like to argue*, is rather impoverished. And I would refuse to translate participants' descriptions into the vocabulary of symbolic power.

Going forward, the maintenance of a relation between fitness and Health *is* desirable. In fact, on the basis of the ontological weight participants attributed to the relation between Health and fitness, it seems almost absurd to argue for their dislocation as it does for the resignation of Health to the conceptual wastebasket. It was clear, for example, that, for participants, fitness was oriented towards Health as an important standard of reference and tended towards coherence (by way of Health) as a broader, temporally-configured frame. Most striking among the findings presented was the fact that participants seemed unable to account for instances in which the projective unity of their body-subject was compromised without recourse to some sort of detached, mechanistic, or machinic metaphor for their body-object (which might as well be called “Health”). As such, it is not only the case that the dislocation of Health and fitness negates a broader meaning holism that exists (and would have to be dispensed with). Rather, both of these would result in a failure to acknowledge Health’s function (that is, its institutions, discourses, and practices) as a means of dealing with hermeneutical problems associated with the often experienced indeterminacy, frailty, and peculiar duality that characterises human embodiment.

In terms of the relation between Health and fitness, one might go so far as to say that, for participants involved in this study, Health functioned as a sort of ostensive lens that enabled them to cope with the logic of flows and futurity in a manner that promotes what Ricoeur (1984, p. 66) referred to as a ‘concordant discordance.’ Health’s vertical character cuts through the temporally ambivalent character of fitness in such a way that the succession of episodic sequences can be thought of, not merely as ‘one thing after another,’ but rather, as ‘one thing because of another’ (ibid, p. 52). Its epistemological orthodox helps to synthesise the heterogeneous, make the intelligible spring from the accidental, and convert chaos

into causality. Far from resolving the paradoxes of becoming, the narrative function of Health helps to make it more palpable (or more cathartic). It opens the body-self up to movement under the guidance of expectations and, hence, potentialities that would otherwise go unnoticed. It allows for the consummation of movement, summoning precedents and likenesses, and meaning in what would have otherwise disconcerted us. The key opposition is whether one wants to think of this relation as merely symbolic, and thus conforming to the dictates of power, or as pragmatic, and therefore rendered formal so as to produce effects. On the pragmatic view I am advocating, Health can be said to provide an anchoring for fitness by functioning as a ‘narrative mode of comprehension’ (ibid, p. 159).

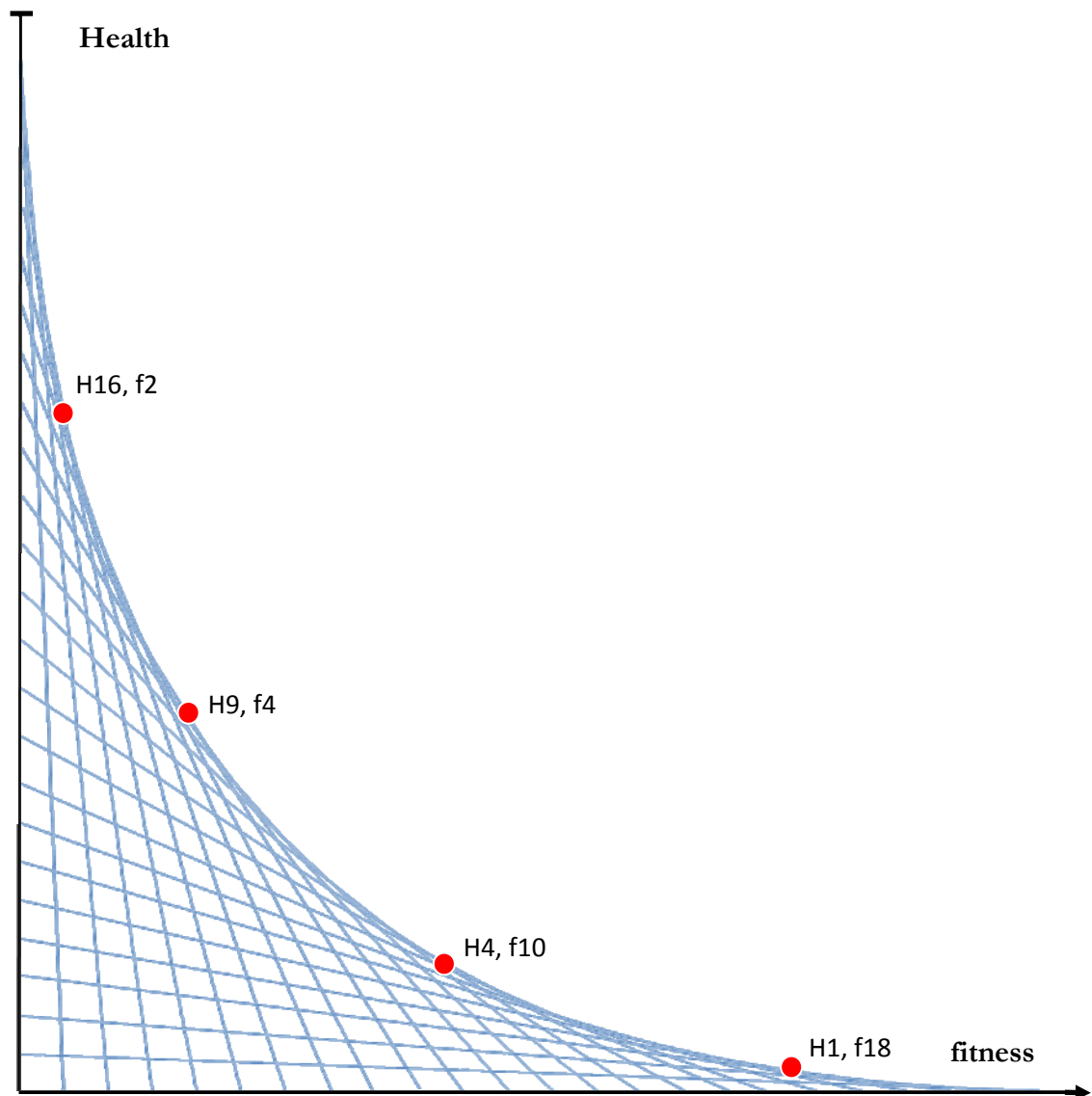
5.4 Towards a Complementary Model of Health and fitness

The relation between Health and fitness is a complex one because it is either conceived as a simple causal relation (as the boosters or consensus position supporters are wont to believe) or as merely illusory and nonexistent (as critics of fitness argue). But as we have seen from Chapter Four and the previous section in particular, it need not be a zero-sum proposition. Some participants did relay the consensus position with respect to fitness’ relation to Health. Others clearly undermined it. However, the enigmatic character of the relation between fitness and Health is evidenced most clearly by the fact that both of these perspectives seem correct. That is, participants seemed to be correct in saying, on the one hand, that fitness contributes to Health yet, on the other hand, saying that one has to be sufficiently healthy to engage in fitness activities in the first instance. Neither the consensus position nor its critical treatment in much sociological literature seems to adequately account for this interplay. Nor does it sufficiently account for the

interplay of presence and absence that is at stake between “bodies-as-objects” and “bodies-as-subjects.”

In order to account for the interplay between Health and fitness, it will be instructive to say that, rather being causally related (and, thus, ontologically alien), Health and fitness exist in a complementary relation (and, therefore, are ontologically relational). Following the work of Freud (1991, 2000), Leder (1990), and Throop (2003, 2005, 2010), this relation can be illustrated in the following manner in terms of what might be referred to as “The Complementary Curve” (see “Figure 5.1 The Complementary Model of Health and fitness” on the next page). In line with the illustration of the relation of Health and fitness presented in Chapter Two (“Figure 2.4 Planes of Health and fitness”), where Health (upper case) corresponds to a bounded vertical (or epistemological) plane of experience, fitness (lower case) represents its boundless horizontal (or ontological) corollary. As regards their relation, it is to be observed of the phenomena involved that an increase in the one factor is necessarily correlative of a decrease in the other. On the basis of this, the complementary model provides a heuristic whereupon a graduated series of phenomena, experiences, or cases can be plotted between these two seemingly intractable planes of experience.

Figure 5.1 The Complementary Model of Health and fitness⁶¹



Rather than exhibiting a causal structure then, which precludes understanding of that peculiarly phenomenological tension which exists between the body as both an object *and* subject, the complementary model exhibits a figure-ground structure whereupon Health and fitness interact at various levels. By joining H^{22} to f^1 , H^{21} to f^2 , H^{20} to f^3 , H^{19} to f^4 , etc., in an inverse manner, the model depicts a complementary curve whereupon varying degrees of prominence can be attributed to both Health and

⁶¹ This Complementary Model of Health and fitness is presented as the principle contribution in my own article: Neville, R.D. (2012b) Considering a complementary model of health and fitness, *Sociology of Health & Illness*. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2012.01494.x

fitness at the same time. Rather than exhibiting a causal structure, which would imply that Health and fitness are equivalent in terms of their relations to the body (which they are not), the complemental model provides a means of accounting for both the body's objective and subjective dimensions. To borrow from Throop (2009, p. 536), it allows for the mapping of a whole host of 'intermediary varieties of experience' in between. By plotting points of intersection along the curve – red dots highlighted on the curve at (H^{16}, f^2) , (H^9, f^4) , (H^4, f^{10}) , and (H^1, f^{18}) which might usefully be referred to as fixational junctures – the model suggests that an increase in fitness along the horizontal axis does not imply an increase in Health on the vertical one (as would be the case on the hierarchical consensus position). Rather, engaging the lived "body-subject" through fitness renders at varying levels of backgrounded awareness Health and the objective or mechanistic experience of the body it presupposes (cf. Gadamer, 1996; Leder, 1990 van Hooft, 1996). For example, if one was to take into consideration age profile and the potential for the body-as-desiring-machine, it would be likely that, of the participants engaged in the latter chapters of this thesis, Steve (74, male) would be best placed at H^{16}, f^2 , John (54, male) at H^9, f^4 , Liam (45, male) at H^4, f^{10} , and Kevin (34, male) at H^1, f^{18} . Alternatively, and at the level of the individual, the model might also be interpreted to show how Gail (45, female) has improved her fitness by moderating her activity in relation to being diagnosed with anaemia; how Deirdre (45, female) obviates previously regular ailments and has become increasingly resistant to things like annual flu; how John (54, male) has occupied various positions along the curve in line with participation setbacks and bouts of arthritis; and how Bob (22, male) continues to push the boundaries with respect to his fitness along the horizontal axis in line with his continued elite level coaching and sports participation.

The implications and interpretive possibilities of this model will not be exhausted in what remains of this thesis. This is a task to be left to my own future research in this area and to the model's uptake after being exposed to its relevant research communities (see note 59 previously on page 186). In spite of this, three points are worth noting. Firstly, rather than treating Health and fitness on hierarchical terms as has traditionally been the case, the complementary model acknowledges our fundamental embodiment, as well as the fact that there exists a whole host of intermediary varieties of experience in which we can (or are forced to) reflect back upon, and become mindful of, our bodies. Secondly, in contributing to a re-description of the relation of Health to fitness, it takes into account the fact that the body is both object and subject, a site of representation and practice, both over-exposed and under-exposed, attuned to multiple temporal orientations, and a functional *gestalt* that is characterised by series' of absent-present relations (Csordas, 1990, 1993, 1994; Crossley, 1996, 2006a, 2006b; Illich, 1976; Leder, 1990, 1992a; Marcel, 1977; Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 2002; Shilling, 2003; Svenaeus, 2001, 2009; Throop, 2010; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). The complementary model takes into account what Eagleton (1993, p. 7) meant when he said that '[i]t is not quite true that I have a body, and not quite true that I am one either.' Finally, it is worth noting that it is perhaps only through an immersion in fitness practices (at the level of those almost aesthetic encounters discussed in Chapter Four) that the vertical character of Health can become entirely effaced. Only then can a space be opened up for the free play of "the fit body-subject" without reservation or arrest.

5.5 Talking About the Fit Body: New Horizons of Experience

The primary implication of this Complementary Model of Health and fitness is the need for a re-evaluation of what we understand by the fit body. We have not yet come to terms with the task of talking about the fit body and it is clear from the findings of this research that we have been largely content to talk about fitness in a derivative way and as a predicate applied to Health in a relative manner. To this shortcoming, I believe that The Complementary Model of Health and fitness can contribute to a more dynamic structural understanding of the body as both an object of representation and a subject of practice. Reflecting on the distinctions proposed in Chapter Two (“Table 2.1 Configuring the Role of Fitness in the Modern Experience”), there is much scope to explore the interplay of the body’s dual structure on the basis of epistemological and ontological considerations, the body’s inner and outer dimensions, its baseline requirements and its potential, and, hence, what a body is and what it can do. I believe that the complementary model will be of particular use in exploring the relation and interplay of object- and subject-centred risk, especially since this distinction has not been explicitly posited in the existing literature (save for my own work in Neville, 2012a, 2012b). It also provides a useful language of comparison for discussing the body’s dual structure. Since we have largely been content to talk about fitness in terms of imposing *effects* upon the (prior) healthy body, of particular importance to the uptake of this complementary orientation will be the task of coming to terms with the fit body’s playful and somaesthetic potential to *affect* and *be affected*.⁶² In the context of a shift in emphasis in the body

⁶² For example, I think that this is the main problem with Smith Maguire’s (2008a) work on fitness. While consumption certainly plays an important role in the configuration of the modern fitness industries, I think that it would have been more instructive for her to frame fitness in terms of this potential to *affect* and to *be affected* (rather than a mere potential to *consume* and *be consumed* by others). The consumption emphasis, however, clearly suited the critical bent of her research approach.

studies literature towards the affectivity of embodiment (see e.g. Blackman & Featherstone, 2010; Blackman & Venn, 2010; Buchanan, 1997; Clough, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987; Featherstone, 2010; Fox, 2002; Fox & Ward, 2008a, 2008b; Latour, 2004b; Papoulias & Callard, 2010), this task has not been adequately explored. Since the fitness field has largely positioned itself as a prescriptive, meliorative, and therapeutic one, the task of coming to terms with the free play of the fit body and its creative-aesthetic potential is of great pragmatic value.

This association with play brings us neatly back to the point made in Chapter Two (section “2.2.2 Fitness, Official Discourses, and the Hegemony of Vision”) that investments in fitness can be likened to investing in a game. To this, in Chapter Four, it was established that existing perspectives have largely failed to account for how individuals continue to invest, over time, in the game of fitness. Given the intensification of subject-centred risks (notably, cancer, stroke, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity) and widespread inactivity in key problem demographics, this question of investment is more timely than ever. It is also a question that the ongoing policy position on promoting individual (consumption) behaviour remains ill-equipped to answer. A plausible work of retrieval can be established here once we encourage and come to terms with new ways of talking about the fit body. It is a task, I believe, that can be achieved through a refinement of what is meant by “doing fitness” and “being someone through fitness.”

A number of important findings from Chapter Four will be helpful in laying some new groundwork. Firstly, it was established that, in order for individuals to be meaningfully attuned to activity-environments – that is, in order for individuals to

“do fitness” – a certain capacity had to be actualised. It was argued that individuals had to have at their disposal a pool of inductive resources that they could draw on so that intention could be bridged into action. It became clear in Chapter Four that this process required being a certain way or a certain sort of person – what I designated as “being someone through fitness.” At the outset of Chapter Four, and in the previous section in particular, this mode of being was designated as Health. However, in addition to this, it also meant being “sporty,” “committed,” “competitive,” “energetic,” “in alignment,” “authentic,” being a “gym bunny,” and even “not being.” It meant being recognised as these things and, hence, subject to norms of identification, association, and behaviour. Notably, “being someone through fitness” not only indicated a constitutive “I am,” but indicated a sort of practical turn towards the world akin to what Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 159) meant by the ‘I can’.⁶³ As Merleau-Ponty explained, this “I can” designates an experience of a sense of harmony between what we aim at and what is given. It designates a tending towards equilibrium of the sort outlined in Chapter Four when I said that participants implement strategies and provide normatively appropriate responses in the face of problems encountered when working out. It designates a tendency of the sort I meant when I said that participants were able to draw upon a network of tools that reinforces the trajectory of their participation and puts them in situations in which they feel obliged to exercise. This “I can” designates an experience of skilful coping in which bodily tension gives way to what Dreyfus (1996, 2002; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1999) referred to as an optimum body-environment relationship. As

⁶³ This distinction between a constitutive “I am” and a performative “I can” was also well developed in Nietzsche (1996). Nietzsche (ibid, p. 29) explained that, while ‘popular morality distinguishes strength from expressions of strength, as if behind the strong individual there were an indifferent substratum which was at liberty to express or not express strength,’ ‘no such substratum exists.’ Nietzsche (ibid.) explains, ‘there is no ‘being’ [or “I am] behind doing [“I can]. Rather, ‘the doing [the “I can”] itself is everything’ (ibid).

individuals become efficient administrators of their own resources through skilful coping, they experience a sense of this optimum body-environment relation and are, thus, solicited by the situation to get into alignment with it. It is this repeated solicitation to get into alignment with an activity-environment that I wish to invoke when referring to “being someone through fitness.” And this is a performatively sedimented body-environment relation that adds character, meaning, and style to the practice of “doing fitness.”

In order to build on this reorganisation of attention, there is a need to seriously consider a cultural shift in emphasis from mere activity to experience (to use Dewey’s distinction). An analogous shift is evident in Rojek’s (2010a, 2010b) recent contributions to leisure theory where he states that meaningful leisure is not merely free time, but an ongoing application of emotional intelligence and emotional labour of the sort that contributes to competent citizenship.⁶⁴ However, whereas Rojek sees the task of renewing leisure studies as a process of naturalising metaphors traditionally associated with work, I believe that a similar task here can be achieved by establishing a renewed interest in experience. This shift from activity to experience implies thinking about the problem of fitness and the “I can” not merely as something that can be improved by increasing levels of activity alone, but as a *made* experience (i.e. something that requires involvement, learning, skill development, and an appreciation of value). More importantly perhaps, it requires a focus on those who experience an ‘inhibited intentionality’ or an ‘I cannot’ in relation to such practices (to use Young’s, 1980, p. 146 extension of Merleau-Ponty). To put it in terms utilised in Chapter Four, it requires a shift in emphasis from mere consumption to virtuous production. Moreover, it requires recognition of the fact that

⁶⁴ For a critical discussion of the relationship between leisure and emotional intelligence, see *World Leisure Journal* Volume 52 Issue 4 2010 (see also Parrinello, 2011; Smith Maguire, 2008b; Spracklen, 2011; Waring, 2008).

not all activity is created equal (a trap that Freund and Martin's 2004 account of relational fitness appears to fall into).⁶⁵ As Dewey famously remarked, it is only when activity is continued into the doing and undergoing of consequences, and when a change made in action is reflected back into a change made in the individual, that there is growth of the sort that makes experience in the vital sense of the term. Only out of courtesy should we refer to mere activity as experience.

In addition to this focus, there is a broader need for a refocusing of attention away from the narrow goal of improving fitness through individual activity to the broader goal of improving the relations of fit individuals experience between their bodies and their social-material activity-environments. If we can agree that the major factors impacting upon the body are made up of genetic makeup, the environment, and individual behaviour, then the uptake of this relational orientation means extending the policy position to encompass (at the very least) one of the latter two. At the policy level, it means viewing fitness not merely as a problem of individual activity, but rather, as an infrastructural problem. It means taking seriously at the policy level the notion that individual fitness is best assured through the proper design of our urban, working, and educational environments (and not necessarily by sequestering it off from the daily life-world into external systems for physical activity).⁶⁶ ⁶⁷ To reiterate a point made on a number of occasions in Chapter Four, it means taking seriously at policy level the fact that what is valued in late modernity

⁶⁵ In their article, Freund and Martin (2004) explain that what contributes to fitness is activity. I think it would have been more instructive for them to say that, while activity stimulates adaptive responses, not all of these responses are desirable (not to mention intended). A recent article entitled "Women: Running into trouble" reinforces my views on this point (see Kiefer, 2011).

⁶⁶ See Freund and Martin (2004) for a discussion of this. On this matter in relation to education, see Dewey (2009).

⁶⁷ While external systems of leisure and consumption certainly have their place, I would reiterate my own point from Chapter Four that these practices can also take on internal significances. It is by focusing on their physical activity potential *alone* that renders them meaningless except as means of acquiring external values. This is one of the primary lessons to be taken from Chapter Four of this thesis. Notably, it is also point developed in McNamee's (1994) scarcely applied model of leisure and relational valuing.

(intellect, information, the virtual) severs life from the organs of embodied activity and that what is needed is a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of the social organisation of movement.⁶⁸ This relational orientation to talking about the fit body is one that will clearly have to extend far beyond the confines of the commercial fitness industries and individual activity. For example, this means acknowledging at the policy level the fact that, if “Food is Medicine” and “Exercise is Medicine,” then, so too, “Planning is Medicine.” The framing of the problem of fitness on individual terms, and in relation to consumption, is not working. It fails to account sufficiently for the fact that, as I have mentioned previously, all activity is not created equally and that, without a supportive background and environmental conditions of meaning, mere activity never constitutes experience. It fails to account sufficiently for the fact that almost no one would agree with the current policy position were it called by its real name – “Consumption is Medicine.”

The problem of fitness requires an ecological orientation (to borrow from and extend Freund and Martin’s 2004 work). That is, the problem of fitness can only be solved by coming to terms with individual fitness as a *made* experience in the context of an ecology of objects, artefacts, ideas, practices, techniques, technologies, discourses, institutions, infrastructures, events, and associations that contribute to its progressive articulation – that enable and disable it – and make it possible for individuals to inhabit the world in new ways.

⁶⁸ This is a point that Dewey made in his *Democracy and Education*, published almost a century ago (1916). He stated: ‘It would be impossible to state adequately the evil results which have flowed from this dualism of mind and body, much less exaggerate them’ (Dewey, 2009, p. 154). Today, more than ever, these evils are readily apparent, duly acknowledged, and there for all to see.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

Highlighting the limitations of any study is a task akin to those acts of contrition outlined in Chapter Two. It is, for all intensive purposes, a confessional practice in which one pleads one's case and promises to do x, y, and z next time around. It merely serves to exonerate the researcher, unburden him/her of wrongs committed, and liberate in varying degrees corresponding to his/her willingness to play epistemological apologist. In spite of this, it will be instructive to outline a number of plausible limitations of this research. It will not be a ritualistic statement of limitations (to use Thompson *et al's* 1997, p. 173 phrase). Rather, the following paragraphs highlight a number of reflexive considerations that extend beyond the strictly formal dimensions of this thesis' structure in order to examine some future possibilities for the narrative field of Health and fitness. These limitations are coupled with and reconciled by a number of possible lines of inquiry that are suitable for future work in this area. It is noteworthy to mention that all of these lines of inquiry either have a natural affinity with, or follow on from, the Complementary Model of Health and fitness or encourage new ways of talking about the fit body.

One specific limitation worth considering is the extent to which this thesis is guilty of overlooking larger and more established bodies of research with respect to fitness. Medical research, in particular the growing emphasis on sports medicine as a legitimate area of scientific inquiry, is worth underscoring here. Similarly so, is the level of depth and sophistication with which the psychological community have contributed to our current understanding of exercise and affective beneficence. One might ask why this research has largely been overlooked, especially since sociology and phenomenology are new on the scene when it comes to matters of reflexive embodiment. One of the main reasons for this is an over-emphasis on the merits of

such research would have been at odds with the phenomenological task at hand. Phenomenology is concerned with the disclosure of entities and not merely their application as theoretical constructs. To clarify, where medico-scientific research in this area presupposes consensus, and proceeds to inquire into its various applications, the nature of phenomenological inquiry takes as its primary task the clarification of the conditions under which consensus is produced. This difference was reflected in Chapter Two's account of fitness as an official discourse. In addition, the difference is also reflected in an internal critique of medico-scientific approaches in the following excerpt from McNamee's (2005) *Philosophy and the Sciences of Exercise, Health and Sport*:

That we need science to understand matters of disease, exercise, fitness, health, illness and so on is undisputed. [However] whether any empirical or scientific enterprise could properly proceed without philosophical reflection is not universally agreed...What is [also] less obvious...is the array of questions that are assumed in the very nature of the methods, reasonings or theories that underlie the activities of scientists. For researchers...the[se] kinds of reflections seem a mere annoyance [despite the fact that] the cultivation of broader concerns to inform their knowledge and understanding of scientific research is critical to their becoming reflexive practitioners as opposed to mere scientific technicians...To show how [a] problem may or may not have been conducted otherwise, and to show how observation is theory-laden, is crucial and all too often ignored. Even where it is not overlooked it not taken seriously (McNamee, 2005, pp. 1-2).

The point McNamee is making here is that the problems of disease, exercise, fitness, Health, and illness are scarcely thought of as more than merely empirical, and that this orientation is largely unreflexive with respect to a narrative field as a whole. Where problems are addressed, they are largely deemed to be intraparadigmatic and reconcilable in a teleological manner. That is, problems are reconcilable over time, in the context of new information, varied sample sizes and types, and with greater methodological refinement. In the context of this thesis, medico-scientific research has been largely overlooked because of its general disregard for the types of social, cultural, and historical conditions of meaning which underpin fitness. It has been

overlooked because it treats fitness as a natural category, whereas the phenomenological account sought here has treated fitness as the effect of naturalising processes. This is a point that has been laboured at from the very beginning of this thesis. Fitness is a slippery concept, and this is a fact that is cloaked by the very sciences that are said to be most vested in its understanding.

In terms of future research, it would be instructive to engage collaborative research programmes which take insights from the now wide variety of disciplines investigating matters pertaining to the body. A caveat to this, however, is that, since research in the area of Health and fitness is now undertaken in functionally separated parts of the academy, the feasibility of a project would have to be questioned. For example, it is likely that, since socio-phenomenological work now critically examines the specific hierarchies, operations, and internal dynamics of scientific research communities, a conflict of interest would result. It is likely, for example, that such work would be seen as a threat to, and an undermining of, epistemological commitments that have been long since established in the medico-scientific community (see Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Building on my own observations outlined in the previous section, a proffered solution would be to encourage a broader spectrum of debate with respect to the relations of fit individuals experience between themselves and their material-social activity environment. Since this focus would explicitly traverse the personal, inter-personal, community, social, economic, and political realms, it is likely that it would also attract collaborative work on the basis of a confluence of interest (and would be less likely to descend into polemic over conflicting epistemological positions).

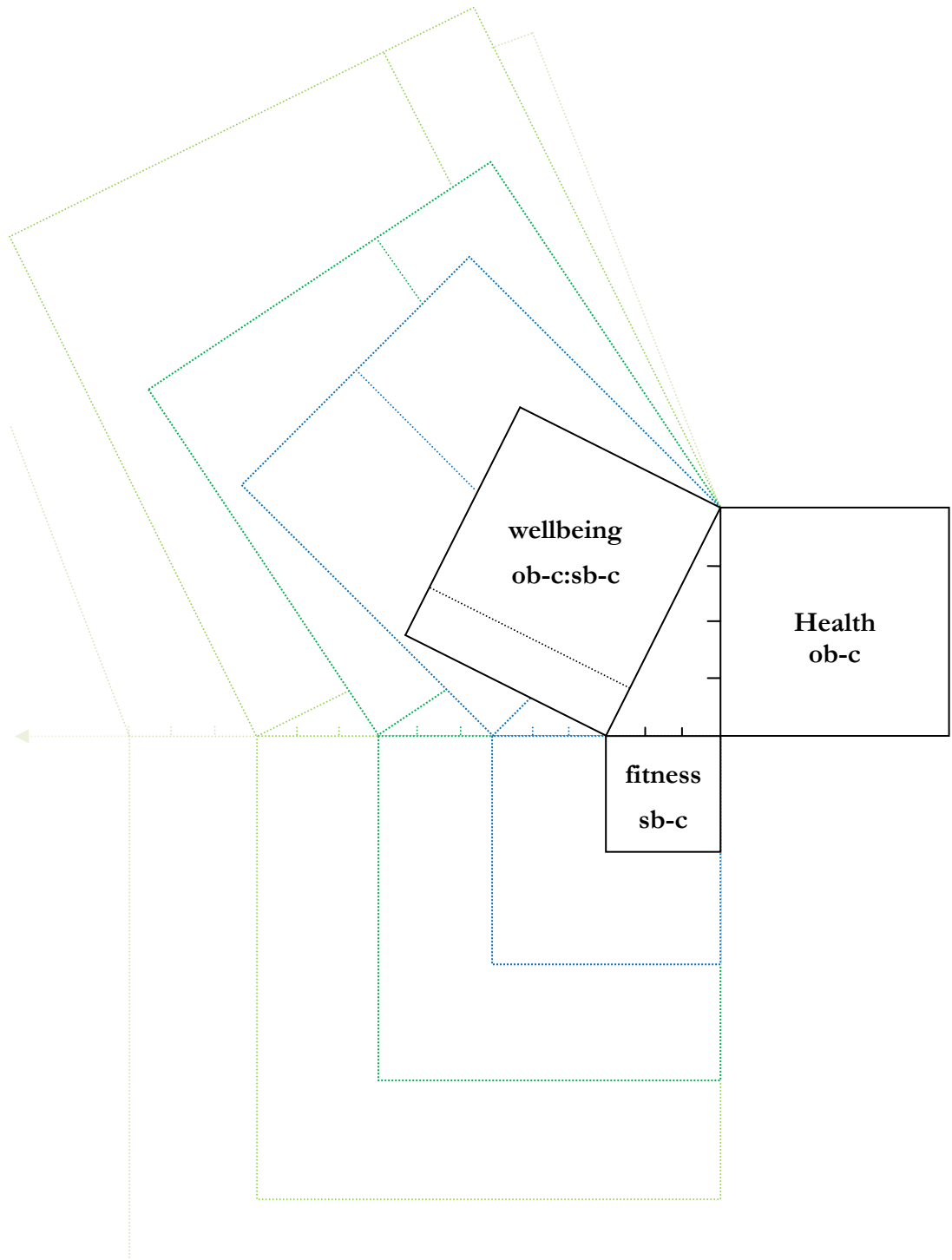
A related observation on the theoretical shortcomings of this thesis concerns the concept of “wellbeing.” Since the problem of Health and fitness has been presented

as one of commensurability – that is, since the body presupposed by health is not the same as the body presupposed by fitness – this thesis might rightly be accused of overlooking the potential for the concept of “wellbeing” to provide a natural language of comparison. In terms of the current risk context, even recent work in the sociology of health and illness has emphasised the need for a refocusing of attention towards wellbeing and towards the World Health Organization’s original formulation of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing (WHO, 1946; see e.g. Bunton, Nettleton & Burrows, 1995; O’Brien, 1995; Petersen & Lupton, 1996; Tones & Green, 2005). So why, it might be asked, has this concept been overlooked here? The primary reason for this is related to criticisms discussed in previous paragraphs. For one, such an oversight is merely terminological and it is unlikely that adding wellbeing into the problematic equation of Health and fitness proposes anything more than an arbitrary solution. Indeed, given the generally unreflexive nature of much research in this area, one could even go as far as to say that the Health-as-wellbeing perspective merely dodges hard epistemological questions with respect to Health by redefining the terms in which the problem has been raised. What is worse, perhaps, is the thought that this position merely allows for a continuation of the ideology of *Healthism* by espousing the imperative of Health without having to deal with any of its conceptual baggage. While such perspectives are justified in seeking a broader context (within which to discuss individuals and their relations of fit to their activity-environments), the force of theories of health-as-wellbeing has been blunted by logically deficient and unpersuasive redefinitions (for a review, see Bloodworth & McNamee, 2007).

A possible avenue for future research – and one that has been strengthened by this thesis’ conclusions – would be to explore the possibilities for wellbeing in terms

of the Complementary model of Health and fitness. For example, an elaborated model, like the one outlined on the next page (“Figure 5.2 The Complementary Model of Health, fitness, and wellbeing”), might be instructive for future research (or merely teaching) purposes. Reflecting on “Figure 5.2 The Complementary Model of Health, fitness and wellbeing,” it could fruitfully be argued that “wellbeing” is an interesting additional element to the Health-fitness relation *only* insofar as it is defined in terms of an individual’s relation to risk. That is, where Health corresponds to object-centred risk (ob-c) and fitness to subject-centred risk (sb-c) – and where Health, fitness, and wellbeing (lower case) are depicted as the two opposite sides and the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle respectively – the complementary model might well cater for “wellbeing” as a ratio of object-centred to subject-centred risk (ob-c:sb-c). On the basis of such a model, an increase in general “wellbeing” would not correspond to an increase in either Health or fitness alone, but to a relation which is subject to variation in degrees of intensity.

Figure 5.2 The Complementary Model of Health, fitness, and wellbeing



On the whole, I would tend to stick with my original position outlined in Chapter Two (“2.2.2.2 Diagnosing Bodies”) that much research in the area of Health, fitness, and wellbeing merely allows for an account of modern bodies on both materialistic *and* idealistic terms. This research is perhaps one of the only occasions

to have explicitly detected the problematic mismatch between these conflicting repertoires. Future research, along the lines developed in Neville (2012a, 2012b), would certainly help in reconciling the problem of conflicting ontologies. For now, however, it will suffice to say that the majority of appeals to wellbeing merely posit a new name for some very old ways of thinking.

Finally, that much of the socio-phenomenological literature pertaining to fitness has analysed it through the lens of social class or gender (or both) is also a potential limitation of this research. In one sense this emphasis has been particularly desirable since, in treating social class and gender as explanatory variables, fitness participation is treated as an effect of goals, projects, and desires produced over and above individuals in objective structures. However, an over-emphasis of these as explanatory variables in this thesis would have rehearsed the overly deterministic picture that has already clouded much research into fitness participation. Moreover, it would have negated the importance of the negotiated character of fitness and the ontological weight attributed to the *made* experience of fitness participants in the second half of this thesis. In terms of social class, much existing research associates fitness with a distinctly middle-, service-, managerial-, or executive-class body consciousness. However, given the relentless individualising of our modern experiences of selfhood, it is unlikely that any variation of the classed identity has the explanatory powers it once had.⁶⁹ Moreover, since much of this previous research involves the theoretical assumption that class identities are inscribed on the body (and can be read off those cultural scripts which are deemed reflective of that particular class taste) the proverbial tail is often left wagging the dog (a point

⁶⁹ In fact, there is much work being undertaken in sociology on this very matter and on the extent to which social class (like so many other standards of reference) has lost its explanatory powers. Beck's (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck & Willms, 2004; see also Bauman, 2000, 2001, 2007) notion of the zombie category is the most advanced articulation of this view.

laboured at length in Chapter Three section “3.1.1 From Critique to Matters of Concern”).

The case is less clear with respect to gender. It might be said that this thesis is guilty of overlooking the gendered dimensions of fitness participation and how patterns of negotiation might be seen to differ between sexes. Though it is hardly the place to go into such matters in detail, it might be useful for the purposes of defending this thesis’ approach to highlight two meanings of the term “gender.” On the one hand “gender” implies sex, sexual identity or, perhaps more precisely, the cultural organisation and elaboration of sexed roles. On this account of “gender,” this study is certainly guilty of not explicitly offering accounts of the female experience of fitness. That is, this thesis has not sought to *represent* the female voice. However, there is a broader definition of “gender” which takes into account its more general sense in terms of *engendering* (i.e. to make, give rise to, create, etc.). The notion of a negotiated character of fitness outlined in the previous sections and in Chapter Four is entirely commensurate with (and in fact takes as its formative influence) feminist accounts that emphasise the gendered nature of identity in this broader sense of the term (see e.g. Bell, 1999; Butler, 1990, 1993, 1994; de Lauretis, 1984; Scott, 1991). The notion that fitness is a process (doing fitness) through which identities are constructed (being someone through fitness), rather than an inherent feature tied to individual bodies, resonates particularly well with recent developments in the study of gendered identities.

The task for future research, it seems, would be to reconsider previous research that takes social class and gender as explanatory variables. Since it is itself a gendering process, future research might do well to investigate how fitness, its practices, discourses, and institutions are contributing to the changing nature of the

classed and gendered dimensions of identity. Rather than treating social class and gender as causative of the engagement in fitness practices and as reflective of previously established norms, future research would likely benefit from analyses into whether the creative, playful, and somaesthetic potential of fitness can contribute to the establishment of new norms of identification, association, and behaviour.

5.7 Concluding Thoughts: Fitness, Sisyphus, and the Absurd Hero

It is fitting perhaps that we should encounter Sisyphus in the concluding passages of this thesis. For one, previous researches (however insufficient I have found their interpretations to be) have led us here. It is fitting that we should encounter Sisyphus in conclusion because he is, as Camus (2003) explained, “the absurd hero.” Previous researches have taught us nothing with regards to fitness if not the fact that exercising is an absurd pastime. This is a lesson that legendary Olympic track and field coach Bill Bowerman learned during his tenure at Oregon and through his pioneering work on jogging in America during the late 1960s. Bowerman explained: ‘Running is basically an absurd pastime on which to be exhausting ourselves.’ But unlike previous researches, Bowerman knew Sisyphus only too well and continued: ‘But, if you can find meaning in the kind of running you have to do to stay on this team [then] chances are you’ll be able find meaning in another absurd pastime – life.’⁷⁰ It is fitting that we should encounter Sisyphus in conclusion because this thesis has also been a story of finding meaning in the previously established “absurd.” It has been a story of practical commitment, of *made* experience, of negotiating multiple temporal planes of experience, and of a kind of pleasure and significance that comes only from openness and receptivity to

⁷⁰ These quotations are taken from Bowerman’s portrayal in the feature film *Without Limits*, 1998. [Feature Film] Directed by Robert Towne. USA: Warner Bros.

one's activity-environment. Moreover, it is fitting that we have ended up here because, for Camus, Sisyphus' noble heroism is also defined by a complementary relation. The absurd, Camus writes, is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the compared elements, but is born of their confrontation. To say that Sisyphus is the "absurd" hero, is to say that he *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. Camus concludes:

All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing...I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy (Camus, 1983, p. 123).

Despite the ephemerality of mastery over nature and a world that is indifferent to his/her purposes, the Sisyphian is neither naïve nor wholly ambivalent about this condition. Rather, the story reframed in this positive manner, is one of value to be negotiated in the shadow of this torment. It is a value that puts paid to this condition and expresses a silent joy that is to be found therein. I hope to have shown in this thesis that the story of fitness can, too, be reframed as a story of negotiation. I hope to have shown that this story of negotiation is akin to the story of Sisyphus – one of a higher fidelity, and confronting shadowy torment with silent joy. This thesis will have warranted a mere half of its energies if it has shown that the value of fitness can be thought of, in even the narrowest of cases, as being of a similar kind.

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Appendix A

The Research: What's it all about?

First off I would like to thank you for your expressed interest in this research. This research is being undertaken at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Cathal Brugha St., Dublin 1. The research reflects an ongoing interest and commitment in this Institution to the development and facilitation of learning about leisure studies in Ireland. The background for this research is one with which you will be familiar.

At a broad level, we live in a society in which there is increasing encouragement for us to be responsible for our own health. Our standards of health have changed and, by and large, we live in a society in which our quality of life can be managed by if we assume a proactive approach. Because of the wealth of information about the positive benefits of engaging in physical activity, exercising for health and fitness has taken a position at the heart of this. In fact, your membership at your local health and fitness club is a testament to this claim. In spite of this encouragement to engage in healthy free-time leisure activities, we also live busier lives. Not only do we assume our normal, working and family roles, but there are a greater variety of social and non-active leisure opportunities within which we can choose to be involved, or not. So the question arises: where does physical activity and exercise fit in? How do I balance the requirements for family, work, and socialising with the increasing demands for healthy activity? These questions are at the core of this project.

The basic idea of this research is to try to understand how people negotiate fitness participation; that is, how they learn about, organise, and manage their fitness participation within their daily life, and around their everyday activities. This is where you come in! What is required of you as a participant in this project, and someone who acknowledges the value of exercising for fitness, is a number of important things. First of all, the purpose of this document is to ascertain your informed consent to be involved in this research (or not), and to find out some of your personal details. Secondly, this research requires you to participate in an audio-taped recorded interview where we can talk about your fitness activity.

Regards, Ross Neville

Expression of Interest and Informed Consent

The purpose of this form is to ascertain your informed consent to contribute to this study (as required by the Dublin Institute of Technology Research Ethics Committee). If you would like to participate in this research, please complete the following.

Participation in this research involves being interviewed by a researcher, Ross Neville, from the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The interview will last approximately one hour, notes will be taken during the interview process, and the interview will be audio-taped for later transcription. Participants can withdraw their involvement at any time during the research process.

The information that you contribute to this research will only ever be used for this research project which seeks to investigate how fitness activities are negotiated in the context of everyday life and its responsibilities. At all times, interview-related information will be kept confidential as it is not the purpose of the study to focus on any given individual, but on the experience of “going to the gym” and “working out.” To that end, you will only ever be referred to under a pseudonym and your name will not be connected with any of the study’s results or any material published using the results of this study thereafter.

I hope that this information helps to clarify the broad aims of the research, the methods involved, and your place in the research process. If you have any questions at any time during the research process, please contact Ross Neville on 087 2945640. If you would like to participate in this study, please indicate and sign below.

Informed Consent

(Please circle the response below that is appropriate for you)

I have been fully briefed on the aims of this research, the method involved, and what is required of me as a participant and I would LIKE to be involved in this research project.

I have been fully briefed and would prefer NOT to be involved in the research.

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

Personal Information

Name: _____ Sex: Male/Female D.O.B: ___/___/___

Address:

Phone Number: (Home) _____ (Work) _____ (Mobile) _____

Email: _____

Marital status: *(Please circle the response below that is appropriate for you)*

Never married Married Separated Divorced Widowed Other

If "Other," please specify

Education: *(Please circle the response below that is appropriate for you)*

Primary Secondary College Undergraduate Postgraduate

Current employment:

Professional/employment background:

Appendix B

Interview Themes and Questions

Fitness History

How long have you been a member of a gym?

Has it been the same gym throughout this period?

If Yes: What are the reasons for staying?

If No: What prompted you to change?

Have you been a frequent user/attendee over this period?

On average, how many times per week?

What days of the week?

What are the sorts of activities you do at the gym?

Has this changed over the course of your membership?

Framing Fitness

Would you describe yourself as a fit person?

How would you describe yourself (or somebody else) as “being fit”?

What distinguishes a person as “being fit” rather than “not being fit”?

What sort of person would that be like?

Negotiating Fitness Activities

What is a typical day like when you go (or have planned to go) to the gym?

Could you describe it to me?

Do you go in the morning/afternoon/evening? ...before or after work?

...during the week or at the weekend? ...with anyone or on your own?

Is there any reason for going at this time? ...why this might change?

Do you prefer going to the gym on different days/at different times?

Do you do anything to prepare for your workout?

How do you generally feel about going to the gym before/after work?

What does it feel like before/after a workout? Is this different on different days? Does it always feel like that? Is this feeling different on different days/at different times? Could you describe it to me?

List of Publications

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