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Gender, Body Image, and Working Out in Tostrud Center

**Sociology & Anthropology 373a
Spring 2009
Nellie Adams
Lizzie Phillips**

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Executive Summary

Title: Gender, Body Image, and Working Out in Tostrud Center

Abstract:

Our research investigated gender patterns and how they affected people's workouts in St. Olaf College's recreation facility, Tostrud Center. The study consisted of observational hours in the facility as well as fourteen one-on-one interviews with faculty members and a mix of male and female athlete and non-athlete students. We found the students we interviewed tended to work out in the afternoon (or reported it as the busiest time of the day to work out), but that their definitions of "working out" varied: athletes tended to say that they "train", as opposed to non-athletes who reported more generalized workout activities (cardio, weight training, etc.). Females primarily noticed the gendered areas in Tostrud (the very masculine weight room versus the feminine cardio room), but males did indicate some awareness of them as well. The ideal body type of St. Olaf males, according to our interviewees, is tall and toned, while the ideal female body was most commonly described with the simple term "skinny". Our research revealed that there is much more to working out than the eye can see—it is laden with underlying, sometimes negative social structures that drive students to act in certain ways.

Summary:

- Athletes and non-athletes define and do workouts for different reasons. Athletes

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tend to work out in order to “train” for a specific event, for team commitment, or during the off-season. They do this to keep themselves happy and in shape rather than for fulfilling social expectations of other people. Many non-athletes, especially females, work out in order to relieve a sense of guilt from eating and also to uphold a certain body image that has been created by media images and other people.

- The gender breakdown in Tostrud Center is rather apparent through observation hours as well as interviews. The weight room is the masculine arena of Tostrud, while the upstairs work out facility is typically female-dominated. Both athletes and non-athletes noticed this separation, but females seemed to notice or discuss the issue more than males, who were often oblivious to the discomfort females feel while in the weight room.
- Self-comparison was an issue for many of our interviewees. Both males and females acknowledged that they compared themselves to others; in some cases, it is extensive to the point of being problematic. Interviewees said that males, to fit into the ideal St. Olaf body type, should be “tall and toned”, while females should be, simply put, “skinny”.
- The pressure exerted on St. Olaf students to be “perfect” is a method of social control; the pressure is exerted from above but is internalized in a way that students become self-disciplined and thus ideal students in the eyes of the institutional heads. Students force themselves to exercise, eat healthfully, and stay thin; this is a supposedly “internal” force that is a result of an external expectation. Therefore, the college controls its students by instigating norms of

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perfectionism and subsequently benefits from this control by producing “perfect” students that make the college look like a better place. This is not true for everybody; certain students are more susceptible to this social control. Perfectionists and non-athletes in particular seemed to fall into this category.

Abstract

Our research investigates gender patterns and how they affected people's workouts in St. Olaf College's recreation facility, Tostrud Center. The study involved observational hours in the facility as well as fourteen one-on-one interviews with faculty members and a mix of male and female and athlete and non-athlete students. We found the students we interviewed tended to work out in the afternoon (or reported it as the busiest time of the day to work out), but that their definition of "working out" varied. Athletes tended to say that they "train" opposed to non-athletes who reported more generalized workout activities (cardio, weight training, etc.). Tostrud Center consists of distinctly gendered areas (the weight room is masculine while the cardio room is primarily feminine), but females tended to notice this gender separation more so than males. The ideal body type of St. Olaf males, according to our interviewees, is tall and toned, while the ideal female body was most commonly described with the simple term "skinny". Our research revealed that there is much more to working out than the eye can see—it is laden with underlying, sometimes negative social structures that drive students to act in certain ways.

Setting/Community:

The setting for our research was St. Olaf College, located in Northfield, Minnesota. The city, located in southeastern Minnesota, has approximately 19,331 residents according to a 2007 survey. Northfield is home to two nationally accredited colleges: Carleton College and the institution of our research, St. Olaf College. The two largest employers are Malt-O-Meal and St. Olaf College who combine to employ 1,691

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people.

St. Olaf College was founded in 1874 by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants and prides itself on its rigorous academics and involvement in international and domestic off-campus studies. Currently, the college is ranked among the top 20 small colleges and universities and has approximately 76% of students in a specific class year participate in domestic or international off-campus programs.

The school is situated on a hilltop near the western edge of Northfield. The college campus has a total of 300 acres of land with an additional 700 acres located near the campus, 17 academic and administrative buildings, 29 buildings dedicated to student housing, and 10 athletic facilities. This land and these buildings allow for the fostering and development of students who attend the institution.

The on-campus residential population equals approximately 96% of the student body and they are housed in traditional dormitories, as well as on-campus “honor houses.” The relative proximity of the dormitories, academic buildings, and athletic facilities creates a rather tight knit community that is very involved in the on-campus activities.

At St. Olaf College there are 3,073 students, 55% percent of whom are female and 45% of whom are male. The student body represents all fifty states as well as thirty countries. The largest minority racial group represented is Asian/Pacific Islanders (157 people; 5%) while non-resident international students are the second largest group (62 people or 2% of the population). The majority of the campus demographic is White non-Hispanic (2,634 people; 86%).

Our research took place in Tostrud Center, which is located near the bottom of the

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hill in the southwest corner of campus. The facility offers two indoor tracks, one a NCAA regulation facility in the downstairs area and another upper track that overlooks the lower track. Next to the upstairs track is also the upstairs workout facility that looks out onto the upper track and also down to the lower track as well. This upstairs workout facility houses all of the treadmills, elliptical machines, stationary bikes, and strength machines (as well as a few dumbbells) for the building. The entire facility is open and people can observe others working out while at the same time being observed by others.

The lower track leads into Tostrud’s weight room. This is a smaller room enclosed with glass walls on three sides of the room and a fourth wall of mirrors. This room allows for people inside the facility to look out onto people on the track and also creates a “fishbowl” for people inside; they cannot escape being watched.

The purpose of Tostrud Center is to promote healthy lifestyles among faculty, staff, and students alike. The following quote from the Tostrud Center for Recreation webpage show’s St. Olaf’s perceived attitude towards health:

“At St. Olaf College, we emphasize mind, body and spirit — and the importance of remaining strong in each realm. The Recreation, Exercise Science and Athletics (RSEA) facilities (Tostrud Center, Skoglund Center and Manitou Fieldhouse) aim to help students, faculty and staff build their muscles with exercise and lift their spirits with play. From the novice exerciser who wants to get in shape to the seasoned athlete who aims to stay that way, everyone on the St. Olaf campus – as well as members of their immediate family – are welcome to work out here. Enjoy!”

This shows the college’s commitment to creating healthy, happy individuals through cultivation of every aspect of a person’s body. ***Ironically, the statement does not capture the attitude of most students who are working out in Tostrud at any given time: people***

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are generally methodical, work-oriented, and serious about their workout routines. The above blurb, however, indicates an almost spiritual experience—the word “play” is even used! Perhaps this meshing of spirituality and exercise is the college’s subtle way of promoting its religiosity. It seems to brag that its students are well rounded: not only do they work out, but they think of God while doing it and all the while have fun.

Methodology

The data used in our investigation came from two sources: observation and one-on-one interviews. By observing trends in Tostrud Center prior to writing our interview questions, we were able to direct questions to our observed areas of interest. Observations were useful in finding trends but did not explain *why* people were acting in the ways they did; therefore, one-on-one interviews were necessary.

We decided that walking up to random students seen working out at Tostrud and asking for an interview would not work for several reasons. We guessed that obtaining subjects in this way would make students feel solicited. Furthermore, we needed specific age groups and sports teams without repetition. Therefore, it was necessary to use the word-of-mouth method: we obtained our subjects through acquaintances who knew a freshman female athlete, for example, and then said subject was e-mailed. Since we did include a few sensitive body-image questions, we were not comfortable (nor would our subjects be) asking these to a complete stranger. Our method provided a comfort zone for our respondents. Our sample, then, was not random, as that would have proved to be far too complicated.

Our interviews were broken down by class year, gender, and sport participation:

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we wanted to represent a male and female athlete and non-athlete from each grade. We also interviewed two Tostrud faculty members, a male and a female. We ended up interviewing three freshmen, two sophomores, four juniors, and three seniors; of these, we included two freshmen athletes, one sophomore athletes, two junior athletes, and one senior athlete~~s~~. No two sports teams were repeated twice, with the exception of track (although the two subjects were from men's track and women's track, which are different teams). We felt that saturation was achieved in interview content.

Immediately upon commencing the interviews, we realized that males and females required slightly different interview questions. Males, for example, seemed to respond with one-word answers to questions about personal body satisfaction. Included with "Are you happy with your body/weight?" were questions inquiring whether they wished they were stronger or taller. Furthermore, our literature review revealed that certain trends only affected one gender or the other; perfectionism was found to be associated with females who worked out but not males. Therefore, more questions were asked to females regarding the need to be perfect, while more questions about issues like muscularity and lifting were directed at males.

Because of our non-random, convenience sampling method, we cannot necessarily generalize our results to the entire population. Since each age group, gender, and athletic status was represented, however, we can more legitimately make assumptions about the student body.

Problem

Our initial research purpose was to describe the culture of Tostrud Center along

the lines of gender and examine how it fits ~~into~~ to St. Olaf culture. Research on the topic of young men and young women's exercise habits indicates that working out itself is the tip of the iceberg; most sociological patterns in our study come from personal motivations for exercise, including comparison to others, body perceptions, health, and happiness. Our interview questions, then, focused not only on exercise behavior but also behavior outside of life in the gym such as body consciousness and comparison to others.

~~Resources-Research~~ reveal that working out is a different experience for both men and women. Women's positive self-concept hinges on perceived physical attractiveness, whereas for men, it is historically linked with physical effectiveness (John and Ebbeck 2008). These two distinct mentalities, then, carry over into the types and intensities of exercise that each respective gender carries out. To check for this phenomenon at St. Olaf, we asked interviewees which machines or activities they used while working out, and then further prompted them to explain exactly why they picked the specific machine or workout that they did.

There are many social phenomenon at work in a gym, perhaps the most prominent being peer comparison. Much research has focused on the exercise behaviors of college-aged men and women; it is therefore applicable to our study of St. Olaf students.

Wasilenko, Kulik, and Wanic found that incidental comparisons with fit versus unfit peers can affect women's body satisfaction and fitness-related behavior in a naturalistic setting; women tended to work out for shorter periods when in view of a more-fit peer (2007). Halliwell, Ditmarr, and Orsborn discovered that men who worked out reported a greater degree of self-enhancement after exposure to ~~photos of muscular men with "ideal" bodies the muscular ideals~~, while men who did not work out reported negative

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body-focused thoughts after exposure to ~~photos of muscular men~~ the same photos (2007). Working out, then, seems to be correlated with peer comparison in both men and women. There has long been evidence that exposure to unrealistic models via media is a cause of body angst and unhappiness in females. Only recently has there been increased objectification of the male body. Halliwell, Dirmar, and Orsborn conducted ~~an the~~ aforementioned experiment in which men were exposed to photos of muscular ,"ideal" males. ~~s-t~~ Their study was only the second of its kind. ~~L~~ Lack of previous research on the topic indicates that the objectification of the male body is only recently becoming an issue. Action ~~models-figures~~ between the years 1964 and 1998 became increasingly more muscular; now, they represent a body type that is beyond the limits of human attainment (Halliwell, Ditmarr, and Orsborn 2007). Consequently, body dissatisfaction among young men is increasing. Stanford & McCabe found that the current ideal male body type presented in the media is tall, well-toned, with a V-shaped, muscular upper body and a narrow waist and hips (2002). Our interview questions, then, gave equal importance to the body type ideals and issues of males as they did to those of females.

Theoretical Framework

Foucault

Michel Foucault focused much of his work on the body and different power structures that preside over the body. Specifically, he wrote about bio-power and how governmental regimes of health are a display-manifestation of power and discipline. Foucault believed that medicine is a form of modern control over groups of bodies; it is a litany of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and

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the control of populations (Foucault 1998). Power techniques are developed to make the body docile so that it can be subjected, used, transformed, and improved.

Foucault examined other ways in which the individual becomes docile to those in power. *Discipline and Punish* examines the power structures involved with surveillance and how they affect human activity: "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection"

(Foucault 1975; Foucault, as quoted in Calhoun 2007: 176). Power from surveillance can take three forms. Hierarchical observation is the ability of one powerful person to observe many subjugated bodies at one time; a single central prison guard can observe each prisoner in one fell swoop. If this is not possible, there is a need for normalizing judgments: these are observers, hierarchically ordered, through whom observed data passes from lower to higher levels. Third is examination, which is combination of the two: it is the ability to observe and at the same time make normalizing judgments.

Berger and Luckmann

Berger and Luckmann argue that institutions, which are created from the collaboration of habitual actions, are social creations that are always bound up with social control. Institutions may grow to produce a reality of their own, at which point social actors experience them as subjective realities (Calhoun 2007). Society is an objective reality produced by humans, but at the same time humans are products of these social realities.

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Giddens

Human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure. This means that there is a social structure - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things. Structures are the rules and resources that act as common interpretive schemes (Giddens 1976). People make society, but are also constrained by it (Calhoun 2007). We act in routine practices and are not guided by a conscious motive but by practical consciousness (Giddens 1976). Although we experience structures as forces external to us, they have only a “virtual” existence; they cannot be directly observed except through their effects on practices.

We will be using each of these theories to help us analyze actions and observations about working out in Tostrud Center. Foucault’s bio-power theory demonstrates the control students are subjecting themselves to while working out, while his surveillance theory could help explain why students work out differently when they feel they are being watched.

Both Giddens and Berger and Luckmann’s analyses of social structures will help to explain *why* students work out at St. Olaf; we will be able to examine the pressure to work out as part of St. Olaf’s unique subjective reality.

Findings:

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Time spent in Tostrud

On average, the subjects we interviewed worked out in Tostrud Center on “most days,” which we determined was about four days per week. Women worked out at all times of day but virtually all of the athletes who did work out in the early morning were found to be female (90%, according to a faculty member).²² Due to her office location, this faculty member is able to see many people pass her office daily. With this location she recognizes people and reported in an interview that the people who work out more than once per day were typically women. These women would come down for cardio sessions lasting for around 30 to 45 minutes each.

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Defining a work out

The definition of a workout varies from individual to individual, but a general consensus is that it is a physical activity that increases heart rate and causes a person to perspire. The physical activity associated with this definition is running, elliptical, or other cardio-based equipment for women and more associated with weight lifting for men. Both a senior female non-athlete and athlete reported using cardio equipment and did not mention lifting weights. The senior female non-athlete reported “running, biking, elliptical, or the skating machine” as her work out material. According to a senior male athlete,

I train, not work out. Working out connotes physical activity for basic fitness and weight management. Training is specific exercises and exercise modes that help you reach an end goal of improving performance in a sporting discipline. My training stresses the physiological systems stressed by skiing, running, and biking.

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This quote shows the different perceptions of “working out” between athletes and non-athletes: it may be training for something specific or just achieving an overall well being

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and health. Whether a person defines working out as an “increase in heart rate and sweating,” reaching an “internal level,” or as “training” each activity brings most interviewees (student or faculty member) down to Tostrud Center at least three times a week.

Why work out

The question, “Why do you work out?” prompted many different responses that divided between athlete and non-athlete as well as male and female lines.

Males versus Females

Non-athlete females tended to report that they work out in order to stay thin or to “make up for eating” (senior female non-athlete). A junior female non-athlete reported, “I feel incredible pressure to stay thin and look good... I feel very guilty when I don’t work out.” This female obviously feels this pressure from somewhere and one of the common forms of ~~this~~ anxiety-producing pressure takes is ~~through~~ a socially constructed ideal. According to John and Ebbeck, this “Body shame, feeling negatively about the self when cultural body standards are not achieved, explains the internalized effect of cultural body ideals.” (2008: 631). This “cultural body ideal” was coined the “Barbie syndrome” by one interviewee. She believes people ideally want to be something else and this ideal is driven by current media images of females. So in a sense, women compare themselves to a “Barbie” media image. This is “particularly problematical for girls and women in that the ideal body is unattainable...resulting in the empirical evidence that many girls and women feel particularly inadequate in terms of their body attractiveness.” (John and Ebbeck: 2008: 625). Clearly the societal ideal of what a female’s body should look like

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has a negative consequence on some St. Olaf women.

The above statement from the junior female non-athlete can be contrasted with a male counterpart (non-athlete) that shows a significant difference between males and females: "I run because I love it and I want to." Perhaps this is driven by a lower level of internalization of media ideals for males; therefore, they "don't compare their bodies with these ideals to the same extent" (Knauss et al., 2008: 641). It has also been found that men tend to compare the functionality or "physical effectiveness" of their bodies rather than the outward appearance (John and Ebbeck: 2008). The difference between males and females for reasons for working out appears to be rooted in societal expectations of what a female should look like and what a male should be able to do.

Non-athletes versus Athletes:

The differences between athletes and non-athletes tend to be more sports-oriented, about keeping the athlete organized, and less about an outward appearance. Freshman, junior and senior male athletes all stated similarly that their days were more ordered with their sport as represented by the following three quotations:

"Sports give structure to my day...without them, I wouldn't be organized"

- Freshman male athlete

"[Football] keeps my energy level up, I sleep better, I feel healthier, and I have less stress."

- Junior male athlete

"I love training. It gets me outdoors. It disrupts the daily routine. It's time I can think."

- Senior male athlete

Within the athlete realm, the idea of team commitment reigns. Many athletes feel a compulsion to perform better in their workouts because of team membership: "The guys

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keep me going” (junior male athlete). It can also be a combination of health and team commitment; one female said that she works out both for the team and “in pursuit of reaching a certain level of physical fitness” (senior female athlete) for the desired sport.

The different reasons for athletes’ workouts seem to be less varied, yet were still individual. A senior female athlete brought up this idea when she said, “I have never worked out for someone else, worked out to achieve a certain body image, or worked out to maintain a certain weight...[my workouts] are a drive I personally have.”

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Non-athletes workouts, as exemplified by the female junior non-athlete and senior non-athlete, are about an outward appearance they have to uphold from pressures put on by media images. Athletes seem to avoid this media image somehow and according to John and Ebbeck “score[d] lower on an Objectified Body Consciousness body surveillance scale than either exercisers or non-active women” (2008: 625).¹ Athletes and non-athletes have different reasons for working out and give the impression of being heavily influenced by teammates or media images, respectively.

Theory: Social Structures and Institutions

It seems that while athletes have their own, personal motivations for working out, ~~(it keeps them happy and healthy; it adds order and structure to their day),~~ non-athletes do ~~fall victim~~ seem more at risk of falling under ~~to~~ Berger and Luckmann’s theory of institutional social structures. St. Olaf was created by a grouping of similar habitual actions and emerged with a social structure based on those actions. That structure can

¹ Objectified Body Consciousness is viewing oneself from an outside perspective

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change based on ritualized human action; if people start to ~~exercize~~ exercise regularly it becomes a norm. This social structure or collaboration of moral codes and established way of doing things become an external force. Over the years, then, people began working out and thus emerged today's norm that one must work out to fit in. The norm is only solidified by the fact that some people who do not really believe in it play into it anyway because it is the right or accepted thing to do. A system of norms emerges; this is called a

social structure. In this case, St. Olaf's culture of perfectionism, health, hard work, betterment, and good looks forces itself upon students. ~~who then make it a habitual action to follow these codes~~ Some students are more susceptible to this pressure than others; oftentimes perfectionists who feel the need to excel at everything in life fall into this category (Wasilenko, Wanic, and Kulik 2007; 743) . In our interviews, we also found that —nNon-athletes, then, tended to work out because the structure expects it of them, not because they love to exercise: "I feel really guilty if I don't work out regularly; it seems like other people do" (female junior non-athlete). By working out, then, students add right back into the perfectionism structure; a structure maintains itself through action of agents. Therefore, certain students both make and are restrained by the St. Olaf society by playing in to it and following it. Other students, however, do not seem at risk of falling under the control of St. Olaf's expectations; we found that more often than not, these people are athletes who work out for personal enjoyment rather than for the fulfillment of a norm.-

Theory: Power through Control

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Most students think working out is “good” and that laziness is “bad.” They do not, however, think beyond this; *why* do people associate working out with positive behavior? From a young age, school curriculum requires the teaching of health education. Health education, Foucault argues, is a form of modern control over groups of bodies. Humans are seen as commodities, and by implementing health regimes institutions ensure their commodities will remain in working order. To have a healthy body has become the mark of distinction that separates those who deserve to succeed from those who will fail (Peterson 1997). St. Olaf, then, has won in subjugating its bodies; by installing a huge, multi-million dollar workout center, the school is implying that its students *should* be working out. Without a gym, people would not feel as much pressure to stay active. Both athletes and non-athletes say that working out keeps them “healthy and happy” and that it helps them to sleep and eat better. St. Olaf knows this; Tostrud is a way of controlling its student body in that it will keep them in working order and keep the school looking good.

Power is exercised and social control is enforced through students’ strong preoccupation with body image, exercise, comparison and (over) achievement in physical fitness, just as in other realms of St. Olaf life. Along with control of students, the college reaps other benefits: the perfection achieved by individual students makes the college as a whole look good; it is a place of over-achievement.

Etiquette/Gender Stereotypes

Knowledge of etiquette regarding behaviors in Tostrud center seems to be pretty solidified among all class years and even amongst faculty members. There are a few people who break the typical gender stereotypes, but there is definitely a standard that is

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followed while working out.

General etiquette/stereotypes

It is noted that the downstairs free-weight room is predominantly male and some even went as far to call it a “testosterone-ridden environment” (female faculty member). This idealization of the weight room being mostly male was noted more by females than by males either athlete or non-athlete. One male when asked if there is specific etiquette in the weight room described more of the unspoken lifting “rules” rather than an etiquette for who enters and lifts in the weight room. Despite not noting the gender of the people who enter the weight room, this male also stated, “there is a clear difference in guy/girl workouts.” He said that and that males tend to use more “heavy weights” while females do more “movement specific workouts and tend to use lighter weights” (junior male athlete). A gender-neutral activity that does take place in the weight room and the upstairs work out area is abdominal routines. Males and females both partake in this activity and did not indicate a difference in abdominal workouts. The information provided to us in our interviews showed that females tended to notice the gendering of the weight room more than males. The gendered nature of the weight room is shown through the following statement from a female faculty member:

“There are few women in the [downstairs] weight room, most are upstairs with the machines. This isn’t uncommon because of the different atmospheres between the two and the nature of the equipment [dumbbells, free-weights, etc.]. If there are females in the weight room they tend to belong to a team and a handful of [non-athlete] females.”

Since the weight room is the male ~~arena~~ of Tostrud Center, ~~where do the females work out?~~ Females must stake their domain elsewhere. The complement to the male weight room is the upstairs area with cardio machines, weight machines, and a few dumbbells. Even within the upstairs area of Tostrud, males and females are commonly

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seen working out. So, in the upstairs area, the machines become gendered by stereotypes of who uses them. The weight machines are generally more feminine, as well as the cardio equipment. The elliptical machine is perhaps the most femininely connotated machine. Both males and females felt this way. When prompted about gender stereotypes

on equipment, a male junior non-athlete said, “

“I would feel kind of stupid on the elliptical...it seems like something girls do. I would feel comfortable on a stationary bike, though.” A female junior athlete reinforced this

And a idea when she said,

“I think males stay away from the cardiovascular machines like ellipticals since they are perceived to be less of a workout. In order to preserve their macho identity, males have to make sure that people know they are working hard; that’s why they run on the track.”

Despite this gender ideal for ellipticals, treadmills and the stair-steppers seem to be more gender-neutral activities and stationary bikes are neutral or slightly gendered: according to a faculty member the stationary bikes are more frequented by males and recumbent bikes are differentiated by age rather than gender. Perhaps this discrepancy comes from the relatively “short” amount of observation time the athletes and non-athletes have in the upstairs weight room versus a faculty member who works out and works in Tostrud Center ~~for total of~~ eight hours a day.

Theory: Gendered Social Construction

Perhaps the more obvious power scheme we observed was the dominance of one or the other gender in certain areas of Tostrud. All but one female interviewed said that

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they did not use the weight room; all indicated that the weight room was “intimidating” in some way:

- ▲ “It’s very full of testosterone”
 - Female junior
- ▲ “I wouldn’t know what to do when I was in there...I would look stupid”
 - Female junior non-athlete
- ▲ “The weight room is very masculine”
 - Female freshman non-athlete

Men, however, seemed oblivious to gender domination in the weight room. When asked if the atmosphere changes when a female is in the weight room, ~~males said:~~males responded:

- ▲ “I don’t think anything changes”
 - Male senior athlete
- ▲ “Nothing is different when girls are in the weight room...I don’t know why they would feel unwelcome.”
 - Male junior athlete

Foucault says that knowledge is power. In this case, males have power in the weight room because of their “knowledge”: they know how to use machines and lift weights, and also display knowledge as an ability to lift weights, whereas weaker females do not possess this knowledge. Males are the sole holders of power in the weight room. Because of this, they are seemingly blind to gender because of their dominance in this space. More evidence of masculine power dominance in Tostrud comes from observations in workout times; according to faculty, virtually all early-morning exercisers are female. A female junior athlete thinks that this is because women do not want to be seen working out; they are intimidated by more powerful masculine presences. Since virtually all people who work out in the morning seem to be female, females are not afraid of being seen by other females. It could be speculated, then, that these females feel more comfortable working out when the space is their own; they do not have to worry about being judged by men.

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Females, too, possess power in certain areas: the upstairs workout area, which houses cardiovascular workout machines, was estimated by interviewees to be anywhere from 75-90% female-dominated at any time. A male junior non-athlete said that he would feel stupid on an elliptical (stair) machine, as did most other male respondents. They did not, however, seem to know why they would feel stupid beyond the notion that “the ellipticals are usually for girls.” A female junior athlete explained her theory about males and ellipticals when she stated that males seem to want to preserve their macho identities by doing “macho” that is, harder, activities. Since the elliptical is *perceived* to be an easy workout (many females read magazines or do homework while on a low speed; this does indicate ~~a~~ relaxed activity), men avoid it and tend towards activities that are thought to be “difficult” (you cannot read a magazine while running on the upstairs track) because of their desire/need to “preserve their macho identity-identity.”

Self-consciousness while working out

Self-consciousness seemed to be a trend in our group of interviewees. For the males, it tended to, not surprisingly, relate to the weight room. Our senior male athlete said,

“When the wrestling team comes in they take over everything. I feel like I’m intruding when in fact they have no more right over the equipment than anyone else.”

~~Also, we~~ We also had a junior male athlete report that he felt more in “awe” of other people’s workouts or lifting ability rather than self-conscious about his workout capability. This was similar to the senior female athlete’s response that she felt “more ‘awe’ than scared of people [while working out].” This student also responded that the

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time she felt self-conscious is in the winter when the boys and girls track teams are warming up on the upper track. Other than that she reported a sense of self-confidence and a hope that since she does not judge people, they would not judge her. This plays into the above discussion of social control through self-discipline ~~through and~~ surveillance; her workout behavior seems to change when she is being watched. People were perhaps hesitant to report self-consciousness when working out, but the following section discusses self-comparison, which is a part of self-consciousness that people were more willing to talk about.

Self-comparison:

As was stated earlier, the concept of self-comparison was more readily discussed in our interviews. Across all interviews we got responses of self-comparison and to varying degrees. A junior female non-athlete was gave the most adamant response in about comparison and she stressed through the following quote, one can see that it was something she knew was taking up too much of her time. Her statement is as follows:

▲ “Last semester, I couldn’t stop comparing myself to other girls. I would see who was skinnier, smarter, and better dressed. It was kind of taking over my life. I’m better this semester, but I do it a lot.”

Again, we see social control through self-discipline: expected social norms keep this respondent feeling extreme pressure to work out and stay healthy. This self-comparison is

clearly something negative in her life. Another female, a senior non-athlete, stated d

▲ “I don’t see myself as I truly am so it’s hard [for me] to see how I compare [match-up] to others.”

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For both of these instances, ~~their~~ comparisons were highly negative and could potentially harm ~~their~~ well-being. Not only can this negativity hurt the person comparing, but it can also hurt other people who are subjected to it as well. Also, the negative self-comparison is not just something ~~centralized~~ ~~limited~~ to females as our senior male athlete responded with a rather negative self-comparison. He ~~said the following in an interview~~ ~~said~~:

“I’ve skied on the cross-country ski team for four years and am the largest athlete on the team. It bothers me. We often walk around in ski suits, and some of my teammates call me ‘fat ass.’ They think they’re funny, but it’s destructive and hurts my performances and confidence.”

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The idea of self-comparison is something many believe “everyone does,” which seems to go with the cliché pop culture phrase, “everybody’s doing it.” This self-comparison “depends on the attitude you have when you do it,” according to a senior female athlete. She went on further to say that if your self-confidence is higher you have a better chance of the self-comparison not being so completely negative rather than with a negative attitude.

Although this self-comparison is seen as generally negative, this is not always the case. In our interviews we found that our junior male athlete felt that a “healthy comparison” was good for some people. His examples of good comparisons were things such as work ethic, overall health, and commitment to the team. He saw it more as “looking up to someone” rather than comparing a list of his traits to that of another person. Despite his rather positive outlook on self-comparison, he stated, “looking up to people can be negative as well and that sometimes negative comparisons are hard to avoid.” Self-comparison, either positive or negative, seems to be something rather prevalent in the work out scene in Tostrud.

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Theory: Surveillance

The setup of Tostrud Center is a demonstration of power through space and surveillance; exercisers act differently knowing they are being watched, which they are (both by desk workers who act as the subjugators and by other exercisers). Parts of Foucault's theoretical Panopticon prison, in which the prisoner is always being watched, can be seen in Tostrud: the downstairs track is the center of all vision. It is surrounded one level up by the upstairs track; those working out in the upstairs exercise room, then, can observe most of the goings on. The upstairs workout room itself is set up like a classroom, which Foucault noted gives the professor the power and subjugates the students. Therefore, while those working out on the upstairs track feel watched by the rows of machines, the machine workers could potentially feel watched by those running on the track (although other machines give protection, the effect of being watched is not as great). Those on the downstairs track feel watched by everybody but cannot in turn watch back. The downstairs weight room is tucked away behind the downstairs track, but is surrounded by three walls of windows and a fourth wall of mirrors. Therefore, everybody is watching someone and also being watched, to varying degrees. This seems to contribute largely to workout behaviors: desk workers make hierarchal observations; they ensure order by sitting and watching people, thus they are in power. Normalizing judgments may be made by anyone and passed on; a track athlete may notice a pickup basketball player getting in the way of the track athlete. The track athlete may report this to his or her coach, who will then ask the pickup basketball player to leave. This is a hierarchal relay of judgment; from this, the basketball player learns the rules. Finally, examination is experienced: a girl working out on an upstairs treadmill may observe a

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boy downstairs whom she thinks is good-looking. She may then report this to her friend on the machine next to her.

Without knowing Foucault's theories of surveillance, students do feel the effects of his speculations everywhere in Tostrud:

"I feel like everyone is watching me work out and therefore I have to work harder. I feel stupid if I can not do as many sit ups or run as fast as others."

- Junior female non-athlete

"I'm strong enough to feel comfortable lifting in the weight room, but I can still feel people watching me when I look out the window in between sets."

-Senior male athlete

"Even though I'm an athlete, I feel incredibly self-conscious while doing indoor track workouts with the team. I feel like everyone in Tostrud will notice if I'm last in my pack. The downstairs track is the focal point of Tostrud."

-Junior female athlete.

Again, the college ensures that students better themselves. The setup of Tostrud promotes surveillance, which in turn helps to internalize the "rules" which are, in this case, that St. Olaf students must work out and look good doing it. Therefore, the setup of Tostrud does create a power complex; it causes those who are working out to act differently.

Ideal Body Types at St. Olaf College:

Generally the ideal body type at St. Olaf was been described by interviewees as tall and toned for males and skinny for females, with little specific description of specific parts of the body. Another description that was often given was "fit," which allows for a broad definition of the "ideal." On interviewee described the ideal as something that is derived from the "culture of competition" at St. Olaf. This competition drives body image comparisons among the students and pushes people to "unhealthy pursuits of athletic activity:" (female faculty member). The same A-faculty member, -who is part of a

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wellness committee on campus, also touched on the idea of the “unhealthy pursuit.” She stated that while she may not observe all cases firsthand, but that she knew through her committee that anorexia was an issue on campus, “perhaps not more so than [at] other schools, but still an issue.” A certain ideal has been constructed at St. Olaf and could potentially be driven by outside forces as well as inside forces.

~~The media has a large role in constructing a body of perfection for females, as well as males. According to some interviewees, the media is creating this ideal, but they have hopes that body type issues and how we, as a society, view body type are changing. As was stated under the “Male versus Female” section of “Defining a Workout,” a faculty member from Tostrud discussed the “Barbie syndrome” and how this image was media driven. Media tends to have a lot of influence in defining and creating the cultural ideal body image that pervades many aspects of society and encroaches upon college campuses such as St. Olaf. This ideal is seen in the way people dress; new fashions mirror images seen in popular magazines. An example such as this indicates that media does indeed infiltrate our campus and these influences are not just in fashion, but other areas as well, such as language, activities, and bodies are examples.~~

Summary and Conclusions

From our findings, we can conclude that there is much more to working out than meets the eye. Students' workouts often depend on external forces: being watched, power structures, and gendered spaces affect the type, time, and frequency of activities that students choose to participate in. Furthermore, athletes and non-athletes have different reasons for working out. For athletes, exercise provides happiness, satisfaction, and

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order-. ~~Non-athletes~~ seem more affected by guilt felt for not working out and thus sometimes work out in more of a forced manner. Essentially, non-athletes: ~~Non-athletes~~ seem to be more affected-at risk of being sucked in by the St. Olaf expectation that people should be thin and in shape; ~~this too is a motivation for working out.~~

Both physical and socially invented-constructed differences between men and women cause each gender to follow different workouts and feel differently in separate parts of Tostrud. Though not intentionally, mMales control the weight room through exhibitions of physical power; this is intimidating for women, who tend to avoid the weight room for fear of being judged. Males, too, tend to exhibit weight-room power because they have knowledge of how machines work and what weight routines to do; females often feel stupid if they do not know these and often do not take the opportunity to learn. Males, on the other hand, avoid the upstairs cardio workout room, while ~~;~~ females exercise to loose weight and thus concentrate on cardio. Machines like the elliptical are perceived to be easier than track running, ; ~~;~~ therefore, males may tend to avoid them in the interest of preserving their macho identities. While both females and males are observed to do ab routines, females seem to possess more knowledge in this area: they use exercise and medicine balls in more creative ways while males seem to stick to more traditional ab routines such as crunches.

St. Olaf's culture expects students to be high achievers in all areas. This is certainly true of the working-outexercise realm: ; ~~;~~ by providing Tostrud to students, the college expects that students will in turn become self-disciplined and use it to exercise. Students will then better themselves, making the college look good in more ways than just ~~;~~ academics. This is a form of power through control: by imposing its institutional

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norms on students, the college ensures students control themselves and thus the student body is kept in check in subtle ways: students are taught to- direct energy in a positive and constructive way. Furthermore, the college encourages students to enforce self-discipline and discourages activities like drugs and drinking. This ensures a healthy student body.

Our research raises further possibilities for future projects. We could investigate gender patterns on sports teams by interviewing and observing both the male and female teams of certain sports. This would narrow our concentration to athletes only and thus eliminate certain outside factors. We could also research why students do not seem to consider ~~the using the~~ rock-climbing wall in Tostrud as part of working out, or why activities like racquetball or ~~intermurals~~intramurals were not included in respondents' definitions of working out.

By uncovering the complicated social schemes involved in students' workouts, we have exposed St. Olaf's expected norms and discovered the power they can hold over students. We do not discuss the positive aspects of exercising at Tostrud Center because this was not the focus of our research; we feel that these benefits are common knowledge and instead chose to explore the underlying social construction of working out . Shedding light on these negative behaviors could ~~This information can be used to~~ help Tostrud Center better serve students ~~ts, whether it be~~ through changing the setup to eliminate pressure caused by surveillance or eliminating gendered areas so that both genders have the opportunity to do the activities they truly want to do. In this way, Tostrud Center could become a place that does not play into such strict socially constructed gender roles.-

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